

OpenTheo

John: Chapter-by-Chapter Commentary

February 17, 2022



Alastair Roberts

CONTENTS

00:00:00 - John 1.1-28: The Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us

00:14:30 - John 1.29-51: "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

00:26:17 - John 2: The Wedding at Cana and Cleansing the Temple

00:38:31 - John 3.1-21: Nicodemus

00:49:43 - John 3.22-36: "He Must Increase, but I Must Decrease"

00:59:00 - John 4.1-26: The Samaritan Woman at the Well

01:11:55 - John 4.27-54: Healing the Official's Son

01:19:54 - John 5.1-24: Healing at the Pool

01:25:09 - John 5.25-47: The Son's Judgment

01:36:04 - John 6.1-21: Feeding the Five Thousand

01:45:20 - John 6.22-40: The Bread of Life

01:53:56 - John 6.41-71: Words of Eternal Life

02:02:18 - John 7.1-24: Jesus Goes Up to the Feast

02:08:56 - John 7.25-52: Promise of Living Water

02:17:32 - John 7.53—8.30: The Woman Caught in Adultery

02:32:11 - John 8.31-59: The Truth Will Set You Free

02:40:13 - John 9: The Healing of the Man Born Blind

02:49:13 - John 10.1-21: The Good Shepherd
02:57:53 - John 10.22-42: I and the Father are One
03:07:56 - John 11.1-44: Raising of Lazarus
03:17:40 - John 11.45-57: Plot to Kill Jesus
03:24:18 - John 12.1-19: Anointing at Bethany
03:34:34 - John 12.20-50: Triumphal Entry
03:42:37 - John 13: Washing the Disciples' Feet
03:56:32 - John 14.1-14: The Way, the Truth, and the Life
04:02:35 - John 14.15-31: Another Helper
04:09:26 - John 15.1-17: The True Vine
04:17:42 - John 15.18-27: The World Will Hate You
04:23:58 - John 16.1-15: The Spirit of Truth
04:29:35 - John 16.16-33: Sorrow to Joy
04:36:20 - John 17: Jesus' High Priestly Prayer
04:46:06 - John 18.1-27: Betrayal, Arrest, and Peter's Denial
04:53:08 - John 18.28-40: Jesus Before Pilate
04:59:00 - John 19.1-37: The Crucifixion
05:08:56 - John 19.38-42: Jesus' Burial
05:15:12 - John 20: Jesus' Resurrection
05:26:10 - John 21: Appearance at the Sea of Tiberius

If you have enjoyed my videos and podcasts, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon (https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X330?ref_=wl_share).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs->

Transcript

Each one of the Gospels recalls Genesis and the story of creation at their very outset. However, whereas Matthew particularly recalls the later story of Abraham's family, John brings us back much further, to the very beginning of creation itself. He retells the story of creation as one in which the figure of the Word is active.

For John, the one who comes in the incarnation, has been active in creation from the very beginning. His story doesn't begin with a star, it begins before any of the stars were in the heavens. It does not begin in the womb of Mary, but in the bosom of the Father.

Throughout his Gospel, John draws his hero's attention to the fact that the figure who is at the heart of the story is one we already know. He already is an actor within the entire story recounted by the Old Testament, and now a figure that was once mysterious and shadowy has stepped into the spotlight of the center stage, entering the story in a new way. The result is an invitation to re-read what we have read before, in a manner that both makes the familiar strange and illumines matters that were formerly mysterious.

In particular, it is in the personal and incarnate entry of the Word onto the stage of human history, that the chief actor, the Creator God himself, will make himself known. In addition to going back to the temporal beginning of all things, before the very dawn of creation, John also traces the story of Jesus back to the personal beginning of all things, the Creator God himself. The Word is identified with God in his eternity, pre-existing all created things.

In his order of being, he was with God, and in his very identity as God. His creative agency is also coterminous with God's own. All things, without exception, are created through him.

The theologian John Webster writes about the way that we speak of particular acts of God in relation to the triune persons, in a manner that focuses not upon dividing the act of God into separate parts performed by three distinct agents, but upon speaking of undivided acts of an undivided God, about the threefold unified agency of God being expressed through the differences of prepositions. He writes, Economic differentiation is modal, not real, and reinforces the importance of prepositional, rather than substantive differentiation, from the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. Modal differentiation does not deny personal agency, however.

It simply specifies how the divine persons act. The several persons Owen notes are undivided in their operations, acting all by the same will, the same wisdom, the same power. Every person, therefore, is the author of every work of God, because each person is God, and the divine nature is the same undivided principle of all divine operations, and

this ariseth from the unity of the person in the same essence.

Here the evangelist, the apostle John, seems to be upholding a similar point, in speaking of all things being made through the Word. The meaning of the Word, or the Logos, has long been a cause of animated scholarly discussion. Scholars have contemplated the similarities between the biblical concept of the Logos, particularly as it is expressed in the Johannine literature, and more philosophical and Hellenistic notions of the Logos that had currency at the time, for instance in the works of Philo.

Another of the questions that scholars, especially those searching within more immediately scriptural and less Hellenistic Jewish sources for John's understanding of the Logos, have pondered is the proximity of the Logos or Word as a concept to the notion of the law or wisdom, especially as the latter is occasionally spoken of as a quasi-personal agency in intertestamental literature. The Word has life in himself, a point that Jesus makes himself in his teaching later in the Gospel. He is the Lord of life, life which is also a source of light to all.

The creation in Genesis 1 began with the declaration, Let there be light. In the opening chapter of his Gospel, John connects Christ both with the creative Word and with the light that it brings forth. However, Christ is the true and the uncreated light, the light that has dawned in the fullness of time.

The metaphor of Christ as the light that dawns in the world is one that we often encounter in the New Testament, whose authors draw upon Old Testament prophecy in speaking of the long-awaited breaking of the light of the eschatological day. As the Word, Christ is the one through whom all was made. As the uncreated light and the living one, Christ is the one in whom the entirety of creation derives its existence.

It is likely that in the rest of this chapter, the evangelist will subtly allude to days of creation in succession, recalling the original creation in a way that hints at the advent of a new creation in Christ. Like the opening chapter of the book of Revelation, in addition to unveiling the glory of Christ, the opening chapter of John's Gospel introduces us to a figure who acts as a witness, John. The other three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, are commonly referred to as the Synoptic Gospels on account of the similarity of their narratives and their words.

They stand in contrast to John, which is far more distinct in its content and style. Whereas the Synoptic Gospels all refer to John as the Baptist, in the Gospel of John it is as a witness that John is introduced to us. Relatedly, John's Gospel does not give us an account of Jesus' baptism by John, even though it references some of the events that surround it.

Rather, it focuses on the words and actions by which John bore witness to Jesus, and describes, in contrast to the other Gospels, specific instances in which John directed

some of his own followers to Jesus. Bearing witness will prove to be a very important theme throughout the book of John. The witness born by John, the witness born by Jesus, the witness born by the disciples, the witness born by the Father to the Son, the witness born by the Spirit, the witness born by the book itself.

Before we are told more about the witness of John, however, more is said about the one to whom he is bearing witness, in particular about Jesus as the true light. Throughout the Gospel, presentations of Jesus as the true article, or as the truth, the archetype, or the prototype, the climax, or the ultimate instance of something, are repeated. Jesus is the true light, he is the true bread from heaven, his advent will establish the true worshippers, he is the true vine.

As the true light of the world, all existence depends upon the word. He is the living light that banishes all darkness, and perhaps represents the very dynamic principle of existence itself. To exist is to have been brought into light.

This light cannot be grasped by the darkness, it cannot be grasped in the sense of being captured and overcome, but nor can it be grasped in the sense of being understood and comprehended. The evangelist here gives the heroes of the Gospel an anticipation of what will happen in the story of the word. While he will be rejected by his own people, both as humanity more generally, and as the sons of Abraham more particularly, the darkness will neither extinguish nor recognize the light.

Not only will it fail to overcome him, tragically in its blindness, it will also fail to perceive who he is. The antithesis between light and darkness is an important one in the Johannine literature, in the writings of John. However, we must recognize that the opposition between light and darkness is not a symmetrical one, these are not equal and opposite forces.

The light by its nature banishes the darkness on its advent. Those who receive the light, who receive the word, which is identified with the act of believing in his name, are authorized as sons of God, having that status conferred upon them by the word, who as the eternal son of God can grant others to participate by grace in what he possesses in the divine being. These verses introduce the theme of rebirth, which is an important one within the Gospel.

The Gospel of John witnesses to the word becoming flesh, tabernacling among us, temple imagery. The eternal word by which all things were made enters the plane of human existence as a man, thereby manifesting the father's glory as only the son can, making the father known. The father-son union introduced here is arguably the revelatory heart of the Gospel of John.

The son is one with the father and reveals him. With his advent, all former revelation and grace of God is eclipsed by greater revelation and grace. One of the things that is

brought out most powerfully in this context is the contrast and the connection between the story of Moses and the law and the story of Jesus, between the grace that comes with the Mosaic order and the greater grace, the grace in place of grace, that comes with Christ.

If we look back in the Old Testament in Exodus chapter 33, there is an encounter between Moses and God in which Moses asked to see God's glory. On that occasion he was granted to see something of God's glory, but yet there is a deeper and a greater revelation of God's glory in Jesus Christ, who is the word made flesh. In Exodus chapter 33, God told Moses that a man could not see his face and live.

In John chapter 1 verse 18, that statement is alluded to. No one has seen God at any time, yet here is one who has seen God, one who is God himself. This is one who is in the bosom of the father.

Whereas Moses saw the back of God on Mount Sinai, here is one who makes known the face of God, one who is one with the father. Moses had a brief encounter with the back of God. Jesus Christ is the one in whom the father makes himself known.

Jesus is here described as full of grace and truth. In Exodus chapter 34 verse 6, when God declared his name to Moses, he declared that he abounds in love and faithfulness, perhaps terms related to these used here. Jesus Christ is a character that we have met in the Old Testament, in the great theophanies or divine manifestations of the past.

Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up the train of his robe filling the temple. That is Jesus Christ, as we will see later in John. Jesus declared that Abraham rejoiced to see his day and he saw him, was glad, as we see in John chapter 8. Jesus is the one that Moses saw on the mount.

Moses saw the back, but in Jesus we can see the face. The Jews inquire of the witness John, asking who he is. He is performing remarkable symbolic actions, baptizing people in the wilderness in a context of fervent messianic expectations.

How does he see himself fitting into the picture? Is he the Christ, the awaited anointed one and heir of David? Is he Elijah? Here they refer to the figure foretold in Malachi chapter 4 verses 5 and 6. Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes and he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with the decree of utter destruction. Is he the prophet like Moses foretold in Deuteronomy chapter 18 verses 18 and 19? I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers and I will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak to them all that I command him and whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name I myself will require it of him. John denies that he is any of these figures, rather he identifies himself by appealing to a prophecy of Isaiah.

He is the voice in the wilderness preparing the way for and heralding the Lord's return to Zion in salvation and judgment to fulfill the greatly awaited promises. By identifying himself as this figure John invokes the entire prophecy of Isaiah chapter 40 verses 1 to 11. Comfort, comfort my people says your God, speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God, every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain and hill be made low, the uneven ground shall become level and the rough places are plain and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. A voice says cry and I said what shall I cry, all flesh is grass and all its beauty is like the flower of the field, the grass withers the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it, surely the people are grass, the grass withers the flower fades but the word of our God will stand forever. Go on up to a high mountain O Zion, herald of good news, lift up your voice with strength O Jerusalem, herald of good news, lift it up, fear not, say to the cities of Judah, behold your God, behold the Lord God comes with might and his arm rules for him, behold his reward is with him and his recompense before him, he will tend his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young.

John's baptism is preparing the way for the action of one who is already unbeknownst to the Jews in their midst waiting to be revealed, a person who is much greater than John himself ever could be, so much greater in fact that John would not be worthy to lose his sandal strap. A question to consider, elsewhere John the Baptist is identified with Elijah, in Matthew chapter 11 verses 13 and 14 Jesus declares, for all the prophets and the Lord prophesied and told John and if you are willing to accept it he is Elijah who is to come. In Luke chapter 1 verse 17 Zachariah is told by Gabriel and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.

However in verse 21 of this chapter John denies that he is Elijah. Do you have any thoughts on why he does so? Each of the gospels in its own way begins with the ministry of John the Baptist, however perhaps above all of the others it is John's gospel that most emphasizes the witness of John the Baptist. In the other gospels we read about the baptism of Christ and the events surrounding it as the spirit descended upon him and later brought him out into the Yet within the gospel of John it is in the witness of John that this event is recalled, not with the objective narrative voice of the gospel writer but within the witness of the character of John the Baptist.

John is also the one who introduces Christ as the Lamb of God. As the Lamb of God Jesus is perhaps to be connected with the Passover lamb and the people's deliverance through

sacrifice. He is pure without defilement or spot and prepared for the sacrificial task of bearing the weight of the world's sin for which he is already marked out at this point.

John presents Jesus as the one who takes away the sin, singular, of the world. The sin of the world is something more characteristic of the world as a whole, not so much an assortment or collection of sins but the fundamental enmity that exists between the world and God. Jesus comes to deal with that.

Verse 29 declares that this occurred on the next day. As we go through John chapters 1 and 2 we will see a series of days and they invite our attention. They do not seem to connect events to a fixed date or point in time.

Rather they connect a series of events in a numbered sequence of days which move from the initial presentation of John to the wedding at Cana. Given the creation themes that are prominent from the very beginning of this chapter several commentators have speculated that they should be thought of in terms of creation days. Peter Lighthouse has suggested that verses 1 to 18 begin with the light of the world as the first day of creation.

Christ is the light of the world that comes into the world. The baptism of John is described in verses 19 to 28 which is the division of the waters above from the water beneath. Jesus' baptism in verses 29 to 34 is the emergence of dry land from the water, the dove descending like the dove descended upon the land after the flood.

Day 4 is John pointing the disciples to Jesus in verses 35 to 39. The multiplication of the disciples as the disciples bring their brothers is the fifth day where the creatures swarm and multiply in the seas in verses 40 to 42. In day 6 we have the episode with Jesus and Nathanael who is the Israelite indeed, the man in whom there is no guile.

That happens on the following day in verses 43 to 51. On the seventh day, the Sabbath, there is rest. Nothing occurs on that day and then on the third day we have the wedding of Cana in chapter 2. That is day 8, the start of a new week pattern.

This is all speculative but it seems to be a suggestion with a reasonable likelihood to me. We might also see parallels with the end of the book where Christ rests on the Sabbath day in the tomb and on the first day of new week, the third day, he is raised from the dead. All of this said, I would put more weight upon the claim that there is a creation sequence being alluded to here than I would upon any specific suggestion of whether or how that plays out in specific details.

John is sent that he might be the means by which Christ is revealed to Israel, his witness to what occurred at Christ's baptism is crucial to this. Christ is the one on whom the spirit descends and remains. That this happened in the form of a dove might recall the flood in the story of Noah.

Jesus is the new creation emerging out from the waters. Word of mouth plays a crucial role in the gathering of the first disciples. Personal invitations, summons, eyewitness testimony and recommendations are the means by which new followers are recruited to the cause.

John's mission of making straight the way of the Lord leads him to throw his weight behind Jesus' kingdom campaign. He points two of his disciples towards Jesus as the Lamb of God. In verse 35, one of these two disciples, Andrew, then proceeds to call his brother Simon.

The next day, in a strikingly authoritative action, Jesus summons Philip to follow him. In verse 43, Philip then finds Nathanael and calls him to come and see Jesus. The narrative of the calling of the first disciples involves a number of paradigmatic features.

While the account could be read just as prosaic description of concrete actions, the references within these verses to following and seeking, the invitation to come and see, to go to the place where Jesus dwells and the act of staying with him, all involve terms or concepts that are deeply resonant within Johannine theology. To abide with Christ, to come and see, to bear witness, to follow. Within this account then we can see the spiritual pattern that holds for those who become disciples of Christ, seeking and committing themselves to following him, coming to him and receiving new spiritual vision, abiding with and dwelling with and in him.

The summons to come and see is an invitation to move beyond just taking someone else's word for Jesus' identity or to regard him from a distance. One must experience him directly and personally. Such an invitation is extended in the assurance that Jesus is the real deal.

The witness of John and others concerning him will be vindicated by the test of close and extensive personal examination, taste and see that the Lord is good. Christ is everything that he is declared to be by his witnesses. It's a challenge to move beyond reliance upon word of mouth alone and to enter into a deeper acquaintance with the person of whom one has heard testimony.

While we are reading an account of historical events, John also wants us, his hearers, to recognise the resonance for our own lives. We as readers of the text or hearers of it ought not just to take the word of John or of the evangelist and of the various disciples for the identity of Christ and his goodness. Rather, heeding their testimony, we are supposed to come to Christ for ourselves, to experience him for ourselves and to discover that, as the Queen of Sheba said to Solomon, the half was not told us.

The purpose of such eyewitness testimony is seen in places like 1 John 1 1-4. Witness is made concerning the Christ in order that persons might enter into fellowship with him and with his people. In John 1 we see that those disciples who respond to Jesus' personal

invitation proceed seemingly unprompted to extend that same invitation to others.

Having himself been invited to come and see, Andrew later finds and calls his brother Simon, Philip having been found and called by Jesus to follow him, finds Nathaniel, encouraging him to suspend his scepticism long enough to encounter Jesus for himself. Within these verses, Andrew, Philip and Nathaniel all present startling and spontaneous declarations concerning Christ. He is the Messiah, in verse 41.

He is the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, in verse 45. He is the Son of God and the King of Israel, in verse 49. The scepticism of Nathaniel swiftly evaporates when he meets Jesus.

The significance of Nathaniel being seen beneath the fig tree is not immediately obvious. The fig tree could be seen as having a connection with Israel, which is elsewhere spoken of as a fig tree. Why this has such a strong effect for Nathaniel is not immediately apparent.

Perhaps Nathaniel received some sign at that time under the fig tree and Jesus' statement taken together with that served as a sort of confirmation. But at this point, we are just speculating. Nathaniel is described as an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.

Perhaps this is to be seen as a recollection of Jacob the patriarch. Jacob, the man first called Israel, was a man in whom there was arguably a lot of guile. He was the deceiver in Genesis chapter 28.

He had a dream in which he saw angels ascending and descending upon a ladder. Later when he woke up, he erected a pillar and called the name of the place Bethel, house of God, seeing the place as the gate of heaven. The ladder of Jacob is the conduit between heaven and earth.

In speaking of angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man, Jesus presents himself as the ladder of Jacob. Within that theophanic vision, he is the one who is the conduit between heaven and earth. We probably ought also to hear an allusion here to the eschatological figure of the Son of Man, who is mentioned in places such as Daniel chapter 7. This is the third time that Jesus is either explicitly or implicitly presented in theophanic terms within this chapter.

In verses 14 to 18, he is presented as the glorious revelation of God that Moses witnessed upon Mount Sinai. In verses 32 to 34, John the witness sees the spirit descending and remaining upon Jesus in another theophany. In verse 51, Jesus speaks of yet one more theophany in which Nathaniel will see the angels ascending and descending upon him.

Perhaps there is a progression to be observed here. The first theophany is of the descending word. The second theophany is of the descending spirit upon the descended

word.

And the third theophany is of the angels ascending and descending upon the descended word upon whom the spirit rests. In Christ, heaven is coming down to earth, much as we see at the end of the book of Revelation. Such a passing on of personal witness can be seen at yet another key point within the narrative of John's gospel.

It's another point where the character of Philip appears. He only appears on three other occasions in the gospel, but one of them is the critical juncture in what might be seen to be only a minor occurrence, but which leads Jesus to say that his hour has come. In chapter 12, verses 20 to 22.

Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip who was from Bethsaida in Galilee and asked him, Sir, we wish to see Jesus. Philip went and told Andrew.

Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. There is a similar pattern here as we see in chapter one. Some people are coming to see Jesus and there is a movement from one person to another by word of mouth.

The message is going out and new people are hearing. Reading such an account of trustworthy and spontaneous word of mouth, of a proclaimed truth that punctures skepticism, of a reality that does not merely withstand but rewards closer scrutiny, and of a personal encounter that excites people to pass on the news, it can all seem too good to be true, especially to those with jaded and cynical ears. We are a people worried about deceptive testimonies, about fake news, about overhyped disappointments and unfulfilled promises.

To such persons the gospel writer would extend the same simple invitation received by the first disciples, come and see. A question to consider, the testimony of scripture to Jesus of Nazareth is an important part of Philip's witness. He describes Christ as the one of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote.

To what scriptures do you think he might be referring? It is always important to pay attention to the unique ways each of the gospel writers tell their stories or relate the details that they share in common. For instance we've already seen that John the Baptist is not called John the Baptist within the book of John, rather he is the witness. Something to notice in this chapter, chapter 2 of John, is that Mary the mother of Jesus is never referred to by name in John's gospel.

She's always Jesus's mother or addressed as woman. It would be surprising indeed were Mary's name unknown to the readers of the gospel. Presumably they're quite aware of Mary and her name.

Indeed the beloved disciple who writes the gospel takes Mary into his own home, so the

omission of her name is most likely significant on account of some symbolic role that she is playing. She probably stands for something more than just a historic individual. In this episode she seems to shift from functioning more as Jesus's mother to being one of his disciples.

Jesus's response to her statement has a sort of distancing effect. While he honours her and as we will see later in the gospel takes an active concern for her provision and well-being, he makes clear by his response that his father's business must determine his course. Nevertheless he submits to her request.

The chapter begins with the third day. We've noted the presence of a sequence of days moving from the beginning of chapter 1, a sequence which many have speculated ought to be related to the days of creation. This is both the eighth of a sequence of days and the third day in a sequence within that sequence.

Perhaps this could be taken as a subtle hint of resurrection themes as the resurrection is both on the third day and on the first day of the week, the eighth day. Themes of water and purification are also prominent in John's gospel, appearing on several occasions. It occurs within this chapter, it occurs within the preceding chapter with the reference to John's baptism.

There's the discussion of being born of water and the spirit in chapter 3. There's the meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well in chapter 4 and the conversation concerning the living water. There's the man by the sheep pool in chapter 5. In chapter 6 there's the crossing of the sea of Tiberias. In chapter 7 there's Jesus' statement on the great day of the feast in connection with the pouring out of water that rivers of living water would flow out of him.

In chapter 2 we have a significant water reference as old covenant waters of purification and water pots are transformed into something new, into fine wine for a feast. The first half of the gospel of John is often referred to as the book of signs. The signs of John's gospel are more than merely miracles.

They have a symbolising purpose, revealing something about the character of Jesus and of his mission. They have a meaning beyond being powerful acts. Jesus wants people to see beyond the spectacle, to recognise the significance of what is taking place.

John's gospel has a rich literary structure and there are ways in which we might relate other episodes in the gospel to this one. For instance, this is the first of a sequence of signs, often numbered as seven. This sign could be paralleled with the final sign of the raising of Lazarus.

Both involve sabbatical themes and themes perhaps of resurrection as we've already mentioned. In terms of sabbatical themes, here we have the themes of the feast and of

new life. It could be paralleled with what is, by my reckoning, the fourth of the signs of the gospel.

The feeding of the five thousand, the provision of wine by means of instructed servants is paralleled to the provision of bread by means of instructed disciples. We might also see some parallels with the beginning of chapter 7 for instance, where members of Jesus' family request him to manifest his power more publicly, but he resists them as his hour has not yet come and yet goes ahead and acts nonetheless. The presence of six water pots has provoked a lot of symbolic interpretation.

A number of commentators seeking to deflate such speculations have made the point that this is just probably a historical reference. There just were six water pots. However, when we read scripture it's usually quite sparing on such details.

The fact that it would mention that there are six water jars suggests that there is a reason for doing so. Yet the meaning is not immediately obvious. Some have observed that there are to this point six disciples, and Jesus has already called Simon, Cephas or Peter, meaning stone.

On other occasions in the gospel, six is a number of items, which is followed by a further item. So in chapter 4 there are six husbands, or men, followed by a coming man, the Messiah. In chapter 4 there is also six hours, and then the reference to the hour that is to come.

I think the most promising solutions to this question look at the theme of water coming from the rock, living waters from the heart, rivers of living water from the belly in chapter 7, water and blood from Jesus' side. The large stone water jars may be images of human persons that will be transformed so that living water or glorified wine comes forth from This of course is nothing other than the spirit. Jesus instructs the servants to fill the water jars and then to take from that water and bring it to the master of the feast.

The master of the banquet would have been different from the host, the bridegroom and the best man. He may have been chosen by lot by the hosts or maybe even by the guests themselves. It was the duty of the bridegroom to ensure that all of the people had the wine that they needed.

The turning of the water into wine is the first sign of Jesus. It might draw our minds back to another initial sign, the turning of the waters of the Nile into blood. In both of these cases, water is transformed into something else, in both cases a red liquid.

However, there is a clear contrast to be observed. Whereas the water of the Nile was transformed into blood, something that could not be drunk, the waters at the feast of Cana are transformed into a more glorious form of drink, a drink for celebration rather than for judgment. Jesus has already been identified as the Lamb of God, presumably the

Passover Lamb, and the scene has been set for a new exodus.

However now, instead of performing great acts of decreation, tearing down the creation, Jesus' first sign heralds a glorious new creation, a place of wine, feasting and celebration. The fact that there are subtle associations between the figure of Miriam, from whom Mary gets her name, and the provision of water in the wilderness, perhaps suggests the possibility of a deep connection to be pursued here between Mary's petitioning of her son and the provision of water to the Israelites in the wilderness. The setting of the wedding feast, the bringing of new wine, and the statement of the master of the feast, all suggest that the miracle is a sign of the character of Jesus' work more generally.

Indeed, this is where it all begins. This is where we see Jesus entering into his public ministry in the Gospel of John. He is the brigrim, he replaces the water of the old covenant with the wine of the In the wedding feast of God's kingdom, the best comes later.

The notion of Jesus as the brigrim pervades the Johannine literature. Jesus is the man meeting the woman at the well. His feet are anointed at Bethany in language redolent of the Song of Songs.

He is laid to rest in a scented garden chamber, and a distraught woman looks for him, and the chamber is opened so that its spices can be borne out on the wind of the released spirit. In the book of Revelation, he is introduced as the glorious brigrim, and the book ends with the wedding supper of the Lamb. By beginning the story of Jesus' public ministry with a wedding feast, John sets us up for all of this.

It's also worth noting the way that Jesus' word is given great prominence within this sign. This is a sign done in secret. No one actually sees the water turned into wine.

We don't even know when exactly in the process it takes place. It is a sign done in secret, and the power is that of Jesus' word which is experienced when people obey it. The sign is confirmed by the master of the feast, and the conversation that occurs afterwards seems to be a significant part of the sign.

It discloses aspects of its meaning. While the Synoptic Gospels record a temple cleansing in the last week of Jesus' ministry, John records such a cleansing at the beginning. There are two main ways of taking this.

We could argue that there are two separate cleansings that In that case we might see the pattern of the leprous house in Leviticus. It is tested once and cleansed, and then the second time it is tested and condemned. Perhaps this is placed here to suggest that there are two such events, and to bring to mind the ritual for the cleansing of the leprous house.

Another possibility is that it is situated out of chronological sequence. The purpose then

would be theological framing of the account. John, unlike the other Gospels, focuses far more upon Jerusalem and upon the feasts at Jerusalem.

He doesn't give so much attention to the Galilean ministry as you'll find within the other Gospels. By placing the temple cleansing at this point, he would situate the entire narrative that follows under the shadow of the Passion Week. The cleansing of the temple is an event that in the other Gospels propels much of the plot to kill Jesus.

And so by placing it at the very outset here, he's presenting all of Jesus' ministry under that threat, while the other Gospels climax in Jerusalem. In John's Gospel, what precipitates the plot to kill Jesus is more the raising of Lazarus. It's his love for his friend, his action for his friend that precipitates the plot.

And here the temple cleansing may have been put forward so that that could come into sharper relief. That John is centred upon Jerusalem throughout might also help to introduce a movement through the temple that we can see in these chapters. John presents Christ as the Ark in chapter 1, upon which God's presence rests.

He's the lamp as the light of the world. He's the altar from which things ascend and descend between heaven and earth. In John chapter 2, he's the temple and he's the one that provides the structure for the whole thing.

And the next chapters focus upon the labour with their baptismal themes. Then there's the feeding of the five thousand and the manna discourse, which might be associated with the table of showbread. Chapters 8 and 9 bring us to the lamp within the temple.

In the high priestly prayer, we might see the altar of incense. In Christ's death, he passes through the Holy of Holies. And in chapter 20, we see the open Ark in the Holy of Holies with the angels on either side.

And so presenting the temple action later on might disrupt that theological sequence. Zeal for your house will consume me. Jesus' identity and destiny is bound up with the temple.

His very body is the temple. In the Old Testament, we see a connection between the body and the temple. The temple or the tabernacle is a blown up body.

And the body is a miniature temple. Jesus is God tabernacling among us. And he is concerned for the house of his father, that it not be made into a place of trade.

Whereas the other gospels' temple cleansing accounts focus on the temple as a den of thieves, drawing upon Jeremiah, here Zechariah chapter 14, verse 21 might be more prominent background. And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day. Christ comes to the temple and seeks to cleanse it, to set it apart for its original purpose again.

We might also be reminded of the story of Nehemiah in chapter 13 of Nehemiah, where he prevents trade that defiles holy places and holy days. Like Jesus with a sort of violent zeal. James Bajon has noted that the reference to the 46 years of the temple's construction and its being raised in three days might be one of John's several subtle allusions to the Jubilee.

46 plus 3 is 49. 7 times 7, the duration of time before the Jubilee comes. A question to consider.

The remarks of the master of the feast, that the good wine was brought last, invites the reflection of hearers as part of the meaning of the sign. What do you think is the significance of this particular statement? John chapter 3 is one of the most famous passages within the New Testament, and Jesus' teaching concerning being born again within it has been central to countless evangelistic messages. For many, the notion of being born again has come to represent the importance of conversion, of entrance into new spiritual life, of entering into a new filial relationship with God as a dearly loved son, and enjoying a transformation of the heart.

While these things are deeply important for our understanding of Christian salvation and the life of faith, in the context of the gospel itself there is a deeper and more complex theology at play, one which can unpack and considerably enrich what most people have understood being born again to mean. Within the Old Testament, concepts of birth are already being brought into relationship with concepts of resurrection. In Isaiah chapter 26, verse 17 to 19, like a pregnant woman who writhes and cries out in her pangs when she is near to giving birth, so were we because of you, O Lord.

We were pregnant, we writhed, but we have given birth to wind. We have accomplished no deliverance in the earth, and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen. Your dead shall live, their bodies shall rise.

You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy, for your Jew is a Jew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead. Elsewhere a connection is drawn between the womb and the tomb or the earth. Job chapter 1, verse 21, and he said, Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return.

The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. In Psalm 139, verse 15, My frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Going back further, we can see parallels between the womb and the earth in the curses of Genesis chapter 3, both being prostrated sources of fruit. The first man, Adam, was taken from the earth, and all subsequent men are taken from the refined human earth of their mother's wombs. The story of the exodus is told as an event of new birth.

Israel is being born from the land of Egypt. The womb of Egypt is being opened, and Israel is coming forth as God's firstborn son. Just as the Passover emphasizes the firstborn, and the law of the firstborn immediately follows in chapter 13, so Israel is being born to new life.

This is one of the reasons why stories of women struggling in birth are so prominent at the beginning of the exodus narrative. The new exodus that Jesus is going to accomplish is also a new birth, as we see in places like John chapter 16, verse 21, where Jesus speaks of the woman whose hour has come, pregnant language within the context of John's gospel, who gives birth to a man. The new birth being referred to in this context is clearly Christ's resurrection.

All of this background is important to bear in mind when reading Nicodemus' conversation with Jesus. Nicodemus is one of the leading Pharisees, but he recognizes that Jesus is a true prophet sent by God. Nicodemus' question to Jesus may not be the facetious and dismissive one that some think it might be.

Rather, it may be asking the question of how, after all of its history, Israel and the Jews could return and be reborn as a people. What might that mean or look like? Within covenant history, there are a number of cycles of wombs and births. I've already mentioned the story of the exodus.

Israel entered into the womb of Egypt, and was reborn in a new form. Israel has died in the event of exile. When they returned, there was another sort of rebirth.

Likewise, in Christ's death and resurrection, there will be a further event of rebirth that occurs. As in the case of the exodus from Egypt, the people that passed through Christ's death and resurrection will emerge as new and transformed people. Being born of water and the spirit could be two ways of speaking of the same thing.

Perhaps the water is a metaphor for the spirit. Alternatively, historically, many have seen it as a reference to Christian baptism, where people are baptized with water and receive the Holy Spirit. Another possibility is that being born of water refers to the baptism of John, and being born of the spirit refers to the baptism that Jesus brings at Pentecost.

We might find some clue to the meaning of this expression in 1 John 5, verses 6-8. This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by the water only, but by the water and the blood. And the spirit is the one who testifies, because the spirit is the truth.

For there are three that testify, the spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree. There the reference seems to be to Jesus' baptism and his death. Christ comes not merely through his anointing with the spirit and declaration of sonship in his baptism in the Jordan, but also through his laying down of his life at Calvary.

In a similar manner, perhaps, entrance into the New Age occurs through the baptism of

John and Jesus' baptism of his church by the spirit at Pentecost. The contrast between flesh and spirit is one that is found in various different places in Scripture. In Isaiah 31, verse 3, for instance, it is the contrast between the weakness of mortal flesh and the strength of God's spirit.

Later in John 6, verse 63, Jesus distinguishes between the flesh and the spirit. The spirit is the source of life, whereas the flesh lacks potency. The contrast between the flesh and the spirit is, of course, most pronounced and developed in the teaching of the Apostle Paul.

The point that Jesus is making here concerns the relationship between origin and character. The need for a birth from above, or a new birth, is because our mortal, weak, and sinful nature, the flesh, is utterly unsuited for the kingdom of God. To enter that kingdom, we need a new source of our existence appropriate to it.

Interestingly, this is only one of two occasions in the Gospel of John where Jesus speaks of the kingdom, a concept that is pervasive in the synoptic Gospels. Jesus says, you must be born again. The you here is plural.

Nicodemus is the teacher of Israel, and it is Israel as a nation that must be resurrected. While individual persons participate in this resurrection, it's important to appreciate that the new birth Jesus is referring to is an event in covenant history, not just a private experience in the human soul. In chapter 8, verse 14, Jesus speaks concerning himself in a manner that recalls verse 8 of this chapter.

Jesus answered, even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. Jesus is the true man of the spirit. To be born of the spirit is to enter into his life.

Because people do not understand the origin of the spirit, they do not understand people who have the character of the spirit. They act in ways and according to motives that they cannot understand. Jesus is the first to be born again, the first to return to the womb of the earth and be raised again as the firstborn of the dead.

Jesus is the one who opens the womb of the tomb so that we also might one day be reborn from the womb of the tomb. Nicodemus struggles to understand any of this. Although he is one of the leading teachers of the Jews, he still doesn't grasp or receive what Jesus is saying.

Jesus hasn't even been telling him about heavenly realities, of which he is qualified to speak as one who has come from above himself. If even earthly truths are beyond the apprehension of this leading teacher of Israel, it is a sign of the insufficiency of the flesh. Even the wisest and most educated of persons in the flesh is unable to grasp the things

of the spirit.

In verse 14, Jesus relates his death to the events of Numbers chapter 21, an episode during the wilderness period of the Exodus. Afflicted with deadly serpents on account of their sin, the Israelites were delivered as the Lord instructed Moses to raise up a bronze serpent. In verses 8 to 10 of that chapter, And the Lord said to Moses, Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten when he sees it shall live.

So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole, and if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. Moses raised up the bronze serpent in order that the Israelites who were bitten by fiery serpents on account of their rebellion could look at the bronze serpent and be healed. Jesus talks about his death in a similar way.

In John's gospel, Jesus' cross plays a similar role to the serpent lifted up. In the Septuagint translation of the Numbers account, the serpent is raised up as a sign. Jesus is also raised up as a sign.

As people look to him in faith, they will be healed. We are also here seeing the way that the cross itself is regarded as part of Christ's elevation, rather than merely in terms of descent. In contrast to the Synoptic Gospels, the cross in John's gospel is already part of Jesus' glorification, already part of his ascension.

He is being raised up as a sign to the peoples. In the narrative of John's gospel, there is a progressive movement upward, up to Jerusalem, up to the cross, up from the grave, and up to heaven. More generally, the vertical polarity, the relationship between above and below, heaven and earth, is very pronounced within this chapter.

It connects with the spirit-flesh polarity in various other ways. John doesn't merely compare Jesus to the elevated bronze serpent. He is rather the serpent which Moses lifted up in the wilderness.

In addition to the comparison then between Jesus and the bronze serpent, there is also an implicit reiteration of the relationship between Moses and Jesus. Here Moses, who bore witness to Christ's glory on Mount Sinai, also typologically raised him up as a symbol to the people, that they might find healing through him. Perhaps the mention of the wilderness has significance here as well.

The wilderness, according to Isaiah chapter 40, was supposed to be the staging ground for the new exodus, as we've already seen in the case of John the Witness, who described himself as a voice crying in the wilderness. We could also think of Isaiah's references to God raising up a standard as part of the new exodus. The Lord is going to raise up a banner, as it were, and all the people will follow and flock to it.

This might be part of the background and view here. God is going to raise up this rallying and healing banner for the new exodus, the banner being the cross of Christ. Christians

have long treated the cross as a symbol or banner that we follow or gather under.

Jesus is the personal expression of the love of God, the source of salvation to all who will believe in him. He comes to bring deliverance and life, but his coming also provokes judgment. While that is not the intent of his coming, it's one of the secondary effects.

He is the light that exposes people's true character as the wicked who are committed to their evil deeds shrink away from him, rejecting the life that he offers. A question to consider, why do you think that John, in contrast to the other gospels, mentions the kingdom of God so rarely? At the conclusion of John chapter 3, we return to the witness of John the Baptist. There is perhaps a contrast to be drawn between John's clear and powerful witness and Nicodemus, a teacher of the Jews, who nonetheless failed to perceive who Jesus was and what Israel needed.

John here also reveals amazing divinely revealed insight into who Jesus is and his significance. There are several points here where we can see the threads of chapter 1 being picked up again, providing a broader introduction to the ministry of Jesus, tying things together between chapters 1 and 3, bookending the beginning of Jesus' ministry. At this point, Jesus and his disciples are operating in the Judean countryside, whereas the synoptic gospels focus more upon Jesus' ministry in the north in Galilee.

In John's gospel, the central gravity of the narrative throughout is situated in Jerusalem. Similarly, in the synoptics, we don't read Jesus and his disciples performing any baptisms prior to Pentecost. Jesus' disciples are here baptising, in association with his kingdom movement.

As we discover at the beginning of chapter 4, Jesus is having considerable success at this point, with many followers joining him and being baptised. However, as the evangelist mentions there, Jesus himself does not baptise, but rather his disciples do. Jesus then has a baptismal movement like John, yet he is not personally baptising.

He is the minister of a greater baptism that has yet to come, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and it is important that nothing be confused with that. We might wonder what the meaning of the baptism that Jesus' disciples are administering at this point is. Earlier, John the Witness declared that he was sent to baptise, to reveal the coming one to Israel.

However, his baptism seems to have broader meaning than this, as we see in this passage where he and his disciples discuss rituals of purification with the Jew. Beyond the central task of manifesting Christ himself, John is preparing a people for Christ's appearance. The baptism performed by Jesus' disciples at this juncture likely has a similar purpose.

It is not yet the sort of baptism that would follow Pentecost, but it cleanses people and connects them with the Jesus movement. Given the large number of baptisms that he is

performing with his disciples, John needed a place with plenty of water. However, we don't know exactly where Enon was.

The Gospel writer makes a parenthetical remark at this point that John the Baptist had not yet been thrown into prison, a detail about which he never says anything further in the Gospel, as it would distract him from the story that he is telling. However, this might be one of several details in the Gospel that suggest that John was writing for people he presumed were familiar with another Gospel, or perhaps some other non-canonical accounts of Jesus, whether written accounts or oral testimony. John was not writing in a vacuum.

While his claims have been criticised in some quarters, Richard Borkin, for instance, has argued that John presumed a familiarity with the synoptic tradition of Mark of his readers. It is important to bear in mind that early Christians would generally have been exposed to more than one Gospel tradition. Luke, for instance, can refer to many having attempted to write accounts of the ministry of Christ, an exposure to a plurality of eyewitness accounts.

If John was able to presume such an audience for his Gospel, his Gospel would not need to be a solitary and self-standing work. Rather, it could leave out many episodes of Jesus' story and downplay various aspects of his ministry and teaching, without fear of leaving his audience uninformed concerning them. More than any of the other Gospels, John reveals the overlap between the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus.

In chapter 1, John's witness to Jesus is front and centre of his ministry, in a manner far more pronounced than in the synoptics. Jesus' first followers are former disciples of John, who were pointed in his direction by John. In this chapter, we see further overlap between John and Jesus' ministry, as both of their groups are carrying out similar baptism ministries simultaneously and establishing followings.

However, Jesus' following has started to eclipse John's. John's disciples have discussions about purification with the Jew. It's important to remember that baptism was a form of purification rite, arising in a context where many such rites were practised.

The rite of baptism was not introduced whole cloth by John, in a situation where no similar practice existed before. We find lots of washings in the Old Testament, perhaps most notably the washing received by the priests as part of the ritual of their initiation into their service. Various other ritual washings were practised by Jewish communities during this period, and the meaning of John's practice would not have been utterly bizarre to his contemporaries.

Rather, it would have been seen as a more radical form of practices that were familiar in other contexts, making it possible for John and his disciples to have debates about purification with other people of their time. It should further be noted here that the

language of Jew, or the Jews, is used at many points within John's Gospel, often with a very negative connotation. This language is not referring to people who are just Jews in the more generic sense that we might typically use it.

It usually seems to refer more specifically to leaders of the people, the leading groups associated with Judea and Jerusalem. It's not used of people in Galilee in quite the same way. We might think about the way people in the US might talk about the folk in DC.

When talking about the folk in DC, it's usually obvious that people are not speaking in a manner inclusive of people in a poor neighbourhood in Washington. They're talking about the people in power. Likewise, much of the language that's used in reference to the Jews in John's Gospel is used in that sort of narrow sense.

In this period of overlap between the two ministries, John speaks more directly to the question of succession, of how his ministry would decrease and Jesus' increase. He uses the illustration of the bridegroom and the friend of the bridegroom. This should draw our minds back to the beginning of Jesus' ministry and the sign at the wedding of Cana.

Also, as the friend of the bridegroom, one of John's tasks would have been to serve as a witness to the marriage and to speak on behalf of the bridegroom at certain points. John especially emphasises the joy that he feels, joy of course being the appropriate response and emotion for a wedding. John's Gospel will later foreground that theme of joy in the context of the resurrection.

John's purpose is not his own elevation, but witness to Jesus. Consequently, he is not in the least threatened by Jesus' ministry eclipsing his own. Indeed, his purpose was always to reveal the Christ, to direct people towards him and to pass on the baton of his ministry to the Christ.

Hearing of the increase of Jesus' ministry and his profile is a cause of great joy to him for this reason. His own ministry is having its desired effect. The chapter ends with a section that many have seen as reverting to the words of the Gospel writer.

You can see this in many translations for instance. On the other hand, it may continue the words of John the Baptist. Rather than John's words ending with, he must increase but I must decrease, John's words may run to the end of the chapter.

John had previously borne witness to the one coming after him back in chapter 1. Now he or the Gospel writer speak of the coming one as the one who comes from above. The similarities between this section and Jesus' statements to Nicodemus earlier in the chapter are not difficult to recognise. Both have a strong vertical polarity, a contrast between above and below.

Both speak of the contrast between earthly things and heavenly things. Both talk about the receiving of testimony. The final statement here also recalls Jesus' own statements

earlier, back in verses 16-18.

By recalling these earlier statements at the end of the chapter, it bookends the whole and perhaps invites us to draw stronger connections between the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus and that between John and the Jew. These verses present an incredibly high account of who Christ is. He comes from above.

He is a first-hand witness of the things of God and of heaven. He utters the very words of God. He has the Spirit without measure.

He is loved by the Father and has received all things from him. Our response to him is the difference between condemnation and eternal life. It is difficult to imagine a higher Christology than this.

It also connects Jesus more firmly with the earlier themes of the conversation with Nicodemus, in underlining his heavenly origin and his enjoyment of the Spirit without measure. He is the man of the Spirit. He is the one equipped to baptise people with the Spirit so that they might enjoy the Kingdom of God.

A question to consider, what is the difference between the baptism performed by Jesus' disciples at this point and the baptisms that they would perform after Pentecost? There are depths to the stories that John's Gospel tells, depths that may only be recognised by the more observant and patient of its readers. The story of the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4 is an example of such a story. To recognise the depths of such stories, it is important to pay close attention to the ways in which they are told, to their shape, to their key themes, to familiar features or to peculiar details.

For instance, the story of a man meeting a woman at a well is one that we find on several occasions elsewhere in Scripture, especially in the Pentateuch. It's the story of Abraham's servant meeting Rebecca, or Jacob meeting Rachel, or Moses meeting the daughters of Jethro. This is what Robert Alter has called a type scene.

When we see a woman and a man meeting at a well in the Bible, we should almost always be able to hear the wedding bells in the distance. Jesus' encounter with the woman here is charged with all of this biblical memory and all of the marital themes that we have in the stories of Moses or Jacob or Abraham's servant and Isaac. We should also recognise the way that themes continue here from preceding chapters.

There's the theme of water coming up again. There's the theme of eternal life. The marital themes might recall the wedding at Cana and also John the Baptist's statement about himself as the friend of the bridegroom.

Jesus' knowledge of human hearts is also revealed here, as is mentioned at the end of chapter 2. Note that, as in the case of Jesus' mother Mary, John does not name the woman of Samaria. She is simply a woman, or the woman. Jesus has significant

encounters or interactions with his mother at the wedding of Cana and at the cross, with the woman of Samaria, and with Mary Magdalene, all at charged moments or locations, a wedding, a well, his death, and in a garden.

He addresses them all as woman, suggesting that each stands for something greater than a mere individual. There is a further woman in chapter 16 verse 21, a woman who gives birth to a man when her hour has come. The coming hour is also an important theme within this chapter.

In each of these particular historical women, we are also encountering a sort of archetypal woman, a woman who we could see as representing the faithful people of God. The events of this chapter are set as Jesus has left Judea and is heading back to Galilee. On the way, he passes through Samaria, through a village called Sychar, which is not far from where Shechem was, where Jacob had possessed some land.

Jesus is leaving Judea, as the Pharisees have gotten wind of the fact that his movement is exceeding that of John the Baptist. Nowhere else outside of John chapter 3 and 4 do we see Jesus' earthly ministry presented as a baptising ministry. It is not clear whether this was just a feature of it during this overlap period with the ministry of John the Baptist, or whether this was a continuing practice of Jesus' followers.

The figure of Jacob is foregrounded within this chapter. The field that Jacob gave to Joseph, Jacob's well, the woman's question about whether Jesus is greater than Jacob who dug the well and drank from it with his sons and livestock. Jesus is perhaps being presented as the true Jacob.

He is the one who is going to open up a greater well, the well of the spirit. Note also it's about the sixth hour. That detail might seem somewhat extraneous in the context.

However there is a reference to an hour that is coming in verse 23, the seventh hour, and there is a reference to the seventh hour at the end of this chapter. Later in John's gospel we have another sixth hour at the time of Christ's crucifixion, a context in which Jesus also expresses his thirst and his need for a drink. Perhaps there is some connection to be drawn between these two accounts.

Talking about the coming hour in the sixth hour might suggest that the seventh hour is the one awaited, the seventh hour is the one that brings completeness. In addition to a coming hour being spoken of in the context of a sixth hour, we also have a coming man being spoken of in the context of six previous men. Note the woman has had five husbands and is currently with a man who is not her husband, six men.

However they go on to discuss the coming Messiah who is the seventh man. Jesus, by implication, is the true husband. Warren Gage, in his discussion of the relationship between the book of John and the book of Revelation, has noted the parallel between, in

this chapter, the five husbands, the one she is now with, and the man awaited, and in the case of Babylon the great, the fact that there are five kings who have fallen, there is one who is, and the other who has not yet come.

The woman in Revelation chapter 17 is also sitting on many waters, just as the woman here is sitting at the well. Developing this parallel further, Gage argues that we can see, in the relationship between the women at the end of Revelation, the mystery Babylon the great, and the spotless bride of the Lamb, a connection with the woman of Samaria, who is connected in some ways with both figures, representing the way in which the unfaithful woman could be transformed into the spotless bride. The woman is greatly surprised when Jesus asks for a drink.

The statement of verse 9, that Jews do not have dealings with Samaritans, could refer more generally to the fact that Jews, for purity reasons, do not share vessels with Samaritans. However, its meaning is likely more general than that. Jesus' response to her question remarks upon the fact that, if she knew who he was, she would be asking him for a drink.

This naturally puzzles her. She can see that he has no vessel to draw with, and the well is a deep one. In expressing her confusion at his statement, she brings in the character of Jacob, who in the Samaritans' understanding was the one who gave them that well in the first place.

A comparison and contrast between Jacob or Israel and Christ is being set up as a result. Christ, of course, is greater than Father Jacob. His promise is of a drink that will overcome all thirst, and will become within that person a source of life, a spring, springing up to eternal life.

Jesus makes a similar statement to this later on, in chapter 7, verse 37-39. On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

Now this he said about the spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. We should consider parallels between this conversation and with Nicodemus in the preceding chapter. As elsewhere in his gospel, John places a lot of emphasis upon Jesus dealing with particular individual persons, not just upon his teaching to larger crowds.

J. Ramsey Michaels writes about this particular episode, While the parallels with Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus are conspicuous, there is one major difference. Instead of telling the Samaritan woman again and again what is impossible, as with Nicodemus in chapter 3, verses 3, 5 and 12, he freely offers the spirit and eternal life to whoever drinks of the water that I will give him. For the first time he speaks openly as God's

messenger, offering salvation to this woman and to all who hear or read his words.

At several points in the gospel of John, Jesus speaks in ways or concerning matters that would not be understood until later on. He speaks of the gift of the spirit, of his death, and other matters in ways that lend themselves to deep misunderstanding on the part of his hearers. The woman here clearly does not understand what Jesus means and responds in a way that presumes that he is referring to physical water.

Jesus answers her by opening up a different line of conversation. He inquires about her husband. Her answer that she has no husband, while technically true, is misleading.

It covers up the reality of her situation. It is possible that she, drawing water alone, is a socially marginalized woman on account of her history. Jesus reveals that he knows the truth of her history and her current situation.

She has had five husbands and the man that she is currently with is not her husband. That this truth that she had attempted to hide, a truth that might have rendered her a moral outcast in her community, was known by this strange Jewish teacher with whom she was conversing, might well have struck her with a sense of despair, reminding her that she could never escape the reputation that clung to her. This stranger, though completely unknown to her, has a sort of power over her.

He knows her darkest secrets. However, Jesus employs this power in the most startling way. He addresses her as a worshipper and proceeds to render her a witness to him.

When she later speaks concerning him to her people, she will say, Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done. Jesus' knowledge of her exercises a liberating rather than an enslaving effect. Jesus' knowledge of the secrets of the hearts of others and their practices is a recurring theme in the fourth gospel.

In chapter 1 verses 47 to 48 he reveals that he knows Nathaniel and where he has been even before they meet. In chapter 2 verses 24 to 25 we are told that Jesus knew all men and did not need to be told what was in them. He demonstrates knowledge of people's undeclared sins in chapter 5 verse 14 and 8 verse 11.

At various points in the gospel he shows that he knows what is in the heart of Judas in chapter 6 verses 70 to 72 and 13 verses 18 to 30. In the previous chapter in his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus spoke of himself as the light that had come into the world, the light in which the deeds of people were exposed. Jesus' power to expose is not employed in order to condemn but that the world might be saved through him as Jesus brings the secrets of such people into his light rather than exploiting them as a means of control.

He breaks their thrall and sets people free. Some commentators have seen a subtle allusion to the rite of Numbers chapter 5 in this exchange. The rite of jealousy described

in Numbers chapter 5 was a test by which divine exposure of an adulterous woman was involved.

The woman charged with adultery was given a drink of holy water made bitter with the words of a curse scraped into it. If the woman were guilty God would expose her sin through the effect that the drink had upon her body. In John chapter 4 the Samaritan woman requests a drink of living water from Jesus unwittingly perhaps initiating the process of the ritual.

Jesus immediately exposes the compromising secrets of her past yet no curse follows. Rather the water offered gives eternal life and washes away all of her sins. It is easy to conceive of God's knowledge of our secret sins by analogy with our government's powers of surveillance and exposure.

Yet in the hands of God the God-like knowledge to which our governments aspire serves less as a means of instilling fear and exerting control than as a means of release from the forces that bind us. Instead of the limited assurance afforded by the conditionality of the claim if you have nothing to hide you have nothing to fear we are granted an unconditional and free offer of comprehensive pardon the dark and enslaving power of all of our secrets dissolving in the liberty of his light. Recognizing that Jesus is a prophet the woman asks him concerning true worship where is it to be offered in Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim where the Samaritans worship.

Until 128 BC when it was destroyed by John Hyrcanus the Samaritans had their own temple on Mount Gerizim. Jesus speaks of a coming time in which worship will be offered in a different way no longer in a single geographically central sanctuary to which all must gather but in a different manner which he will later describe as in spirit and in truth. Throughout John's gospel reference is made to true things and to the truth the true vine the true light etc.

In Christ the genuine article has arrived the epitome the culmination of all of the things anticipated in the Old Testament. The true worshipers will worship the father in the spirit and in the truth in Christ Jesus speaks of a new form of worship that will come whose location is not that mountain of Gerizim or Jerusalem but in the true temple of the spirit the body of Christ. Worship in spirit and truth is not just referring to really meaningful and heartfelt worship is a reference to a new manner of worshipping God no longer geographically bound to the temple at Jerusalem but occurring in the environment of the spirit.

This new form of worship arrives through Christ's death resurrection in Pentecost and exists because he is the true tabernacle and temple of God. Responding to Jesus' statements about worship the woman says that she knows that the Messiah is coming and that when he comes he will explain everything. Jesus answers her by declaring directly that he is the Messiah that is awaited.

He is the coming man. A question to consider what are some of the ways in which the gift of the spirit could be compared to the placing of a well or a spring within us? Where else do we find related images to this in scripture? In verse 27 of chapter 4 of John we take up again the narrative of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman and here his disciples return and they're surprised to see him in conversation with this woman. We've already seen a number of the ways in which Jesus seems to be contravening some of the conventions that would have governed the relationship between Jews and Samaritans and between men and women as well.

The Samaritan woman is alone seemingly in the middle of the day getting water and here a Jewish man is asking to drink of some of her water. That would seem first of all to be going against certain principles of purity and also to be maybe stepping across the bounds of propriety that here is a man talking to a woman in a public space without any other people around. Their conversation itself would seem to trespass some bounds.

Jesus asks her about more intimate things about her relationship with her husband and the other men in her life and the conversation is also taking place within this type scene that is associated with marriage and so there are many ways in which the picture seems odd and the disciples come back and they don't directly ask Jesus but it's clear that they have a sense of something out of the ordinary. The unusual character of what is taking place however should be attended to. There are ways in which we can think of the Samaritan woman as maybe being like Mary Magdalene later on who is sent with a mission to tell the disciples about the resurrected Christ.

In John 4 the Samaritan woman is sent to call her husband and ends up going back into the town and saying to the people come see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ? In both cases a woman brings the news of Christ to another larger group of people. The trespassing of boundaries in both cases I would suggest is related to the movement towards unity.

The desire is that the Samaritan woman and the people of the town would be made part of the group of disciples. In the same way the marital themes suggest that the woman is not just an outside woman but like Mary in the garden is someone who represents the bride, someone who will become united with Christ and his body of people and so the outside inside and the trespassing of boundaries is part of the importance of this text. The disciples ask Jesus whether he has had anything to eat and they invite him to take some food but yet Jesus says that his food is to do the will of him who sent him and to accomplish his work.

Maybe we should see some reference back to the story of the temptation in the wilderness here. John does not record the temptation of Christ in the wilderness as the synoptics do but at this point and then in a few moments later in this text there are allusions back to that context at least within the Gospel of Luke. Jesus talks about the

harvest and the way that there are four months and then the harvest comes and yet they should lift up their eyes and see that the fields are already white for harvest.

At this moment in time they're seeing a Samaritan village that is receiving Christ and yet the Samaritan mission proper won't begin until after Jesus' death and resurrection and Pentecost. While John the Baptist and the prophets that preceded him sowed seed in tears and spent great labours and suffering to sow that seed, in the case of Christ and his mission we're seeing fruitfulness from the very outset and so even though it might seem as if you'll have to wait for many many years to see the effects of the seed it is already being shown and in the case of the Samaritan conversion we're seeing this take place. Many of the Samaritans believe him because of the women's testimony and then as they spend time with him they believe him on the account of his word itself.

At this point Jesus returns to his primary base of operations in Galilee and he has mentioned in passing that he has testified that a prophet has no honour in his own hometown which is something that is said in Luke chapter 4 in his sermon at Nazareth. So he comes to Galilee, he's welcomed by the Galileans who have seen all that he's done in the feast and then he goes to Cana, the same place that he made water wine and he performs a second sign. As we go through the gospel we'll see that there are at least seven signs that Jesus performs, seven maybe being a significant number associated with creation and fullness and these sorts of things but this is the second sign and there are a number of details that might be interesting about this.

First of all Jesus notes that unless they see signs and wonders they will not believe they're looking for some dramatic display of power and yet when Jesus actually gives a sign it takes the form of something very understated. Jesus does not give some dramatic pyrotechnic work of wonder rather he gives a word, go your son will live. He doesn't even go to the man's house, he doesn't even perform some great act of wizardry, he just gives the man the instruction and the man believes the word and goes his way and then as he returns his servants meet him and tell him that his son is recovering.

Now it's worth noting that in the case of this sign as in the case of the sign of the turning of the water into wine attention is given to the conversation that occurs afterwards that is part of the sign. He's asked the hour, he asked the hour when the servant began to get better and the answer is given at the seventh hour. Now we've already seen that Jesus meets with the woman at the well in the sixth hour and then declares that an hour is coming and now we the seventh hour.

I suspect that we're supposed to see this as part of the sign. The seventh hour is pointing forward to what Christ himself will accomplish that in the hour that is coming he will come to death and he will rise again and so the healing of this son that is at the point of death is an anticipation of Christ's resurrection from the dead in his hour that's to come and the father knows that this is a confirmation of Jesus' action much as the servants

who draw the water that has become wine know that Jesus has performed this action even though the master of the ceremonies at the feast does not know that is the case and this is the second sign that Jesus does when he has come from Judea to Galilee. As in the case of the first it's a sign that remains largely secret apart from the person who believes.

The disciples and the servants at the feast know that Jesus has performed this act and in this case here it's the official who believes and his household who believe his testimony and so the emphasis is not upon the spectacular sign but it's upon hearing obeying and believing the word of Christ that is where the power is to be found and these signs and the conversations that follow reveal something about the vision of faith that is held forth in John as the paradigm that is to be followed not just in Jesus' earthly ministry but by all who would seek to believe him in the future. A question to consider throughout the book of John we have paradigmatic disciples we have paradigmatic witnesses and a number of examples of people who bear the news of Christ to other people. What in particular can we learn from the example of the Samaritan woman as a witness to Christ? In John 5 Jesus once again goes up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews.

While at the feast Jesus encounters an infirm man by the sheep gate near a pool while it is admitted in certain translations of the bible some translations refer to an angel that would come down stir the waters and those who went in could be healed of their illnesses. So Jesus is coming to a situation where there is this man who's waiting for healing who has been hoping for healing at this pool with some special powers and yet has not received the healing that he's hoped for. No one is able to help him to get into the pool when the water is stirred and as soon as he tries to get in someone steps down before him and Jesus directly instructs him get up take up your bed and walk.

Why might the pool be significant? Well to this point in the gospel of John there have been several mentions of water and cleansing and other themes like that. In chapter one you have John's baptism in chapter two you have the water turned into wine from the waters of purification the pots and then in chapter three you have new birth of water and spirit and John's baptism again in chapter four you have Jesus and his disciples baptizing and then the meeting in the well and the offer of living waters and now in chapter five you have a healing pool. It seems that Jesus is the one who brings new waters new waters to drink new waters of cleansing new waters of healing.

The people are gathered near the sheep gate and they're waiting for this stirring of the waters and it might be akin to the wind of the spirit in Genesis chapter 1 verse 2 or the wind at the flood or the wind at the Red Sea and the setting is an evocative one if you think about it. There are infirm sheep at a pool struggling to get to the water so that they'll be healed and able to enter into the city. Moses was the great shepherd of Israel but Jesus is the one who comes to meet these people at the sheep gate the sheep that need to be let in that need to be healed.

The man has had an infirmity for 38 years and this is an important number if we go back to Deuteronomy chapter 2 verse 14 we see that Israel wandered for 38 years after their failure to enter into the land and the lameness of the man may have even entailed some degree of exclusion from the precincts of the temple as we see in 2nd Samuel chapter 5 verse 8 and the healing of the man is a sign of giving that languishing flock of God entrance into the promised land. Jesus is a new Joshua his name is the same name as Joshua and he gives rest to the man who takes up his bed his instrument of rest on the Sabbath as a sign and later enters into the temple. Jesus is on account of this accused of breaking the Sabbath when actually he was fulfilling its meaning.

We need to consider when Jesus is performing these acts on the Sabbath he's not merely thinking in terms of oh here's an exception to the rule rather he's saying this was the meaning of Sabbath all along to give rest to man and in this act of healing I am giving rest to the man fulfilling the meaning of Sabbath not undermining it and so rather than seeing Jesus teaching concerning the Sabbath as presenting us with a series of exceptions the importance of the teaching on the Sabbath is that Jesus is revealing the primary intent of that commandment all the way along. Jesus works are like his father's and he completes the works of his father he continues and he completes the work of creation his claims in this chapter on this front are startling he enjoys judgment the power to raise the dead life in himself and divine works resurrection is already underway within his action he's bringing things into play he's starting the work of this new creation fulfilling the Sabbath and anticipating the great renewal of all things. A question to ask within the gospel of John we see a number of different signs this is the third sign so we've had the turning of the water into wine the healing of the nobleman's son and now this is the third sign there are three signs that follow on from this and I believe that there may be a parallel between the signs one two and three and then four five and six what might be the parallel between chapter five and chapter nine and how might reading these two accounts alongside each other help us to understand what's going on.

A second question the healed man in this chapter is given attention not merely as a sign of Jesus power but as a paradigmatic disciple as we read the story of chapter five alongside chapter nine we can see similarities and contrasts how might these help us to understand the character of the man in chapter five and also what John thinks of as discipleship what does he see is the fate of disciples for instance relative to the Jews. The second half of John chapter five continues the discourse that followed the healing of the infirm man at the sheep pool on the sabbath. Jesus had just spoken about the relationship between the work of the father and his work and he develops his points further here specifically in relation to the eschatological acts of giving life to the dead and judging all.

Some of the statements that Jesus makes concerning himself in this passage are truly astonishing in their strength. In the verses that immediately preceded our passage Jesus had declared that those who hurt him and believed had passed from death to life and

would not enter into judgment. He elaborates that point here making it in a more eschatological form the greater weighted eschatological works of God resurrection and judgment are being and will be affected through the son.

Once again Jesus speaks of an hour that is coming a recurring motif in the gospel of John this coming hour will be one in which the dead are raised. Here the means of resurrection is hearing the voice of the son of God and living. We might think the raising of Lazarus in chapter 11 verse 43 brought forth from his grave as Jesus cried with a loud voice Lazarus come out.

The resurrection that Jesus describes at this point is one that is already occurring in his ministry. It is taking place as a new people are being formed through the hearing of his word as he described in the preceding verse. Truly truly I say to you whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.

He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life. Such a faithful response to the word of Jesus might seem to be worthy of celebration yet speaking of it in terms of resurrection might seem excessive. However although it might not seem to be remarkable or dramatic it is anticipatory of final resurrection.

Elsewhere in ways reminiscent of Ezekiel prophesying to the dry bones in Ezekiel chapter 37 we see that Jesus is forming a renewed Israel around himself in the course of his ministry. How people responded to the voice of the son of man as he spoke in his earthly ministry would determine how they would stand in the final resurrection and judgment. In the work of the spirit through the words of Jesus the event of resurrection is already mysteriously taking place.

People are passing from death to life and eternal fates are being determined. The power of Jesus' voice to raise people to new life is a manifestation of the fact that the son has life in himself. Elsewhere in the gospel Jesus speaks of giving living water or of the rivers of water of the spirit flowing forth from him.

In John chapter 3 verses 34 to 35 we were told by John the Baptist that the father has given all things into the hands of the son and that he had the spirit without measure. As the man of the spirit Jesus has life in himself and can give it to others. He does this through his words which he later describes in chapter 6 verse 63 as words of spirit and life.

In addition to the power of life the father has given the son the authority of judgment. It is through the son as the son of man that the father will judge the world. Jesus is possibly here alluding to Daniel chapter 7 where the son of man in a prophecy to be fulfilled in the years that followed would be elevated to power by the ancient of days receiving the kingdom formally controlled by the beasts.

Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 to 14. I saw in the night visions and behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man and he came to the ancient of days or was presented before him and to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

The raising to eternal life that was occurring then through the words of Jesus the man of the spirit anticipated the later resurrection another hour that was to come. That later hour while distinct from the coming hour Jesus spoke of that was in the process of beginning in his ministry is not only similar to but also inseparably related to it. As Jesus would later illustrate to an extent in the raising of Lazarus that later hour would involve the calling forth of the dead from their tombs to the general resurrection.

People would be divided according to their works those who are done good to the resurrection of life and those who are done evil to the resurrection of judgment. Such a division and judgment according to works is a division of people according to their fruits a very common theme in the new testament. Of course Jesus is not teaching that the works themselves are what have brought about people's passage from death to life.

The movement from death to life is accomplished through the power of his words giving life to the dead as they are received by faith. The works are the effects of the new life that he has given that will naturally follow this. Good fruits help us to recognize the good trees but it is the good tree that produces good fruit rather than the good fruit that produces the good tree.

The good fruit rather makes the good tree manifest and brings it to its fullest expression. The intimate and inseparable bond between the father and the son is seen in the fact that the son never acts independently. Whatever the son does he does as an expression of the will of the father who sent him.

Although he had spoken of the son in the third person now Jesus speaks clearly of himself in the first person. Although it was already clear now it is absolutely evident that he is the son of whom he is speaking. The son to whom all judgment is delivered now answers his accusers by presenting witnesses.

If he were simply to make such claims of himself on the strength of his own witness they would not stand legally as to be established matters require multiple witnesses. However there are witnesses beyond Jesus himself that he can bring forth. First of all there's John the Baptist.

John bore witness to the truth and the testimony that John the Baptist bears is a true one. Many of the people had recognized the authority of John as a prophet and the witness of John to Jesus especially in his baptism is prominent in each of the gospels. In the final week of Jesus' ministry he deftly deploys the witness of John against opponents

in Matthew chapter 21 verses 23 to 27.

And when he entered the temple the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching and said by what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority? Jesus answered them I also will ask you one question and if you tell me the answer then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John from where did it come from heaven or from man? And they disgusted among themselves saying if we say from heaven he will say to us why then did you not believe him but if we say from man we are afraid of the crowd for they all hold that John was a prophet. So they answered Jesus we do not know and he said to them neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Jesus knew that his opponents could not easily dismiss John and John had borne a clear and powerful witness to him. Beyond this however Jesus' very acts testified to his character and to the fact that he was sent by God. We have already seen Jesus perform three signs in this gospel besides the many miracles and great works that he was doing.

The people had seen the infirm man that he had just healed. How would Jesus enjoy such power and display such remarkable deeds of healing and restoration were he not sent by God? Those works were evidence that he was doing the work of his father and that his father was with him. Beyond even these though the father himself bore witness to the son.

They had not seen God at any time nor heard his voice yet the father was being made known through the son as chapter 1 verse 18 declared. Jesus' opponents studied the scriptures believing that eternal life was to be found in them. In this belief they were correct but because Jesus himself is found in them the scriptures themselves bear witness to him.

The refusal of the religious authorities to come to Jesus was evidence that they were not receiving the scriptures testimony. The testimony of the very words that they prided themselves in. Tragically in refusing the scriptures testimony to Jesus and not receiving his words they were forfeiting the life that he offered.

What matters is not human praise or glory. Jesus does not consider such glory or honor worthy of account. Indeed he would go on to the greatest place of human shame stripped dishonored and hanging on the cross ridiculed by all.

What really matters is the glory and testimony offered by the father. On the other hand his accusers were preoccupied with the glory that other people offered. They would not accept the son when he came in the name of the father but they would readily accept a proud human being who came on his own authority.

Their entire approach to honor and respect made them incapable of receiving God's gift

and testimony. In a tragic twist they would discover that the very figure in whom they placed their confidence and hope, Moses, would be the very person who accused them. Jesus himself would not need to accuse them because Moses testified to Jesus.

Jesus is likely alluding to Moses' statements concerning the prophet to come. This prophecy was already alluded to earlier in chapter 1 verse 21 in the conversation with John the Baptist who had denied that he was that figure. Deuteronomy chapter 18 verses 15 to 19.

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you from your brothers. It is to him you shall listen just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire anymore lest I die. And the Lord said to me they are right in what they have spoken.

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers and I will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak to them all that I command him and whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name I myself will require it of him. Jesus was the prophet like Moses. If they believed Moses they would naturally believe Jesus.

If they did not believe Moses they would be unable to receive Jesus. Jesus' witness and Moses' witness go hand in hand. Their rejection of Moses and the prophet he foretold meant that the prophecy concerning those who rejected that prophet would be fulfilled in their case.

A question to consider. Jesus claims that his accusers do not have the word of God abiding in them in verse 38 nor do they have the love of God within them in verse 42. What might these two claims imply for those who do receive Jesus? At the beginning of John chapter 6 we read of Jesus' fourth and fifth signs.

The first of these is the feeding of the 5,000. The second the walking upon the waters. The feeding of the 5,000 is a story found in each of the four gospels.

As such it's one of a few that finds its way into each of the accounts. Reading stories found in multiple gospels especially one found in both the synoptics and John we should note the differences in the ways that they are told and situated within the larger frames of the gospels. The different framing of such stories can help us to see different facets of them.

While they can usually be easily harmonized sometimes there are ways in which certain details of the stories are thrown into sharper relief. For instance in John's account here the story begins with a crossing of the Sea of Galilee or the Sea of Tiberias. Jesus is followed by a large multitude, a crowd that have seen the signs that he's been doing.

He goes out to a mountain and there he sits down with his disciples and all of this is around the time of the Passover, the Feast of the Jews. By this point all of the alarm bells that alert us to typology should be ringing loudly in our heads. Around the time of the Passover, crossing over the sea, followed by a great multitude, going into the wilderness, going up a mountain and then feeding people with bread.

This is the story of the Exodus. It's an Exodus pattern that's all taking place at the time of the Passover. When seeking to provide for the crowd Jesus first of all asks Philip where to buy bread.

This is the only one of the gospels that records Philip being asked this question and it makes sense because Philip comes from the area of Bethsaida in which this miracle was performed. Such details can give us a greater sense of the historicity of the biblical text. Philip of course cannot provide food but he presents the scale of the problem.

Even 200 denarii of bread would not be enough for each person to get a little. Jesus needs to feed such a great number of people with his disciples and there's no immediate source or means by which they're to do so. At this point Andrew, Simon Peter's brother brings forward a boy with five barley loaves and two fish.

One can imagine that this is done almost with some embarrassment. What use is one boy's packed lunch for such a multitude? Jesus instructs his disciples to get the people to sit down and it is observed at this point there is much grass in that place. It's an interesting and strange detail to mention.

I suggest that this is a detail that makes sense when we read further on in the gospel. It will help us to understand why this is mentioned here. I think it's because Jesus talks about leading people out so that they might find good pasture as the good shepherd that the much grass is mentioned here.

Like Moses first led his flock to Mount Horeb where he met with the Lord in the burning bush and then led the flock of the people as the shepherd of Israel. So the Lord leads the people out as a shepherd into the wilderness and now he's going to provide them with the food that they need. The men are instructed to sit down.

There are about 5,000 of them in number. It's interesting that it's just the men that are counted. You'd think if you're feeding people you'd count the men, the women and the children.

But yet it's just the men. The numbering of the men alone might be associated with the counting of a military. When Israel was being numbered in the wilderness they were numbered by the men of fighting age.

When Israel left Egypt they went out in ranks of five or fifty entering into the promised land in the same way. Counting the people in such a manner and dividing them into

groups as we see in the other Gospels is a sort of military arranging of the company. We see something similar in the story of chapter 18 of Exodus as Moses according to the advice of Jethro divides the people into various groups under the leadership of elders.

The feeding of the people with the manna is mentioned only a couple of chapters before this so perhaps there's a joining together of these two events within the account of the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 will also lead to a discourse concerning manna. The division of the people is also under the leadership of his disciples.

Jesus' blessing and breaking the bread and distributing it to his disciples who distribute it to the multitude is a good picture of what will happen later on in the story of the church. In taking the loaves, giving thanks and distributing them to those who are seated what we can see is a playing out of the pattern of the Eucharist or the pattern of the We do not have an institution of the Lord's Supper within John's Gospel but what we do have are a number of supper themes particularly within this chapter. I've already mentioned the possibility of a panel structure for the seven signs of John's Gospel with the first, second and third signs paralleled with the fourth, fifth and sixth signs.

If the first sign is paralleled with the fourth sign then we have a parallel between the turning of the water into wine and the provision of bread at this point which would certainly be a suggestive parallel. Jesus is providing both wine and bread. Once everyone has eaten his fill, Jesus instructs the disciples to gather up the leftover fragments.

They gather them up and fill 12 baskets with the fragments from the five barley loaves. Interestingly each one of the Gospel accounts mention the fact that there are 12 baskets of fragments gathered up. This is clearly an important part of the story and Jesus talks to his disciples about it afterwards.

The number 12 in addition to being a number associated with Israel corresponds with the numbers of the disciples themselves. Each one of them has a basket corresponding with them. Seeing this great sign the people proclaim him to be the prophet who has come into the world.

Once again there are themes of the Exodus. The prophet is the one like Moses. Moses spoke of a prophet to come who would be like him and now here is a man doing all of these Exodus type deeds.

Recognising this figure like Moses the people want to make him into a king yet they fundamentally misunderstand the sort of mission that Jesus is undertaking. Should he submit to them their agenda for his mission would be completely at odds with the mission given to him by his father. Yet of course there are ways in which Jesus's action is one of a king.

Here for instance we might recall David on the run from King Saul coming to a Himalaya

the priest at Nob and requesting food for him and his servants. He gives a surprisingly specific number. Now then what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread or whatever is here.

In this story Jesus the son of David is given five barley loaves which is what they have on hand. Perhaps the people themselves recognise some echo of this story in the actions of Christ. Seeking to evade the crowd Jesus goes off alone to the mountain.

The disciples however go into a boat around the same time of evening and start out towards Capernaum. Jesus had not yet come to them and the sea becomes rough and a strong wind is blowing. We might think about the wind over the water of the original deep or the wind in the crossing of the Red Sea.

The disciples then see Jesus coming to them on the sea. As he nears the boat they're frightened. Once again this is a sign.

What might the sign be? In some respects we might see this as an anticipation of the resurrection. In the other gospels we have some sort of anticipation in the way that Jesus sleeps in the boat during the storm. Outside there's an earthquake.

All of these things are greatly troubling the disciples and then Jesus rises up and brings peace and calm. That's the event of the resurrection presented in the symbol. Here I think we're seeing something similar but in a less clear form.

Jesus is the one who brings peace when they are in trouble in the boat. He's the one who presents himself. It is I. Be not afraid.

This statement it is I or I am is a statement of his divinity in part and so they take him into the boat and immediately they're at the land to which they were going. I believe that this is a story that anticipates other events that will happen later on. It's also a statement for the church.

The church is in many respects like a boat that's gone out to sea. When we think about the disciples that Jesus calls in the New Testament the most prominent among them are fishermen. In the Old Testament things are dominated by shepherds.

In the New Testament it's dominated by fishermen. The church is a body that has gone out to the sea of the Gentiles and in the storms and the unsettled situation of that Gentile world God still is in control. We see this in the story of the shipwreck at the end of Acts for instance.

Just as we see in the story of Jonah which is concerned about a mission to the Gentiles. So in the New Testament there are stories of shipwrecks, storms at sea, struggles at sea. These are stories that have to do I believe with a Gentile mission.

The church which is originally a part of the land has been set forth upon the sea and I think this is partly what the sign of this passage is supposed to represent. We can see in the feeding of the five thousand a mosaic theme, a theme of ecstasy, things that might remind us of the Lord's relationship with Israel. Here however we see the Lord's power over the waters.

Perhaps this is representing the extension of the mission to Gentiles. A question to consider. If you were to ask one of the people in this chapter why they were thinking of making Jesus king by force, how do you think they would have answered you? Following the feeding of the five thousand in John chapter 6, the multitude followed Jesus to the other side of the sea.

His feeding of the five thousand had caused a stir. This was a time of messianic fervor and Jesus was a man who seemed marked out to be the leader of the people. The crowd, many of whom probably lived in poverty, thought that following this wonder worker around, a man who was able to multiply loaves and fish, would be a way to enjoy food and security.

This man was clearly destined to be a king or something. If they joined his mission as soon as possible they might receive some of the benefits, perhaps the power and the influence that might arise from it. Jesus challenges them on this front.

Although they've eaten their fill of the loaves and the fish, they did not see the sign. They just saw the material benefit of eating the loaves and fish. They never really perceived what was being communicated through the miracle.

The sign is not just the great act of power. He tells them not to labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, the food which the Son of Man will give. This might again recall the conversation with the woman at the well back in chapter 4, where Jesus speaks about living water that is to be distinguished from the physical water in the well.

The person who drinks of the water in the well will thirst again, but the person who drinks of the water that Jesus will give, the water of the Spirit, will never thirst again. The food that Jesus promises here is food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give. The Father has set his seal upon the Son of Man, perhaps referring to the Spirit, marking him out as his anointed servant.

We should here recall Moses' conflicts with the wilderness generation, who looked back with fondness upon their time in Egypt when they ate their fill of bread. In Deuteronomy chapter 8 verse 3, the Lord through Moses told the Israelites that he let them hunger and fed them with manna, so that they would learn that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Like the wilderness generation before them, the multitude here are focused upon the physical food.

They don't perceive the sign, nor the lesson in faith that the Lord is teaching them. The people respond by asking what they should do to do the works of God. This might be a question of the kind, what must we do to inherit eternal life? The question emphasises the commandments of God in their plurality, and also the works of God as those that are required by him.

Jesus responds by redefining the key terms in the question. Instead of the works of God as the works required by God, there is the work of God, the singular work of God. And the work in question is not just a work that people are doing for God, it is, while people are doing this work, a work wrought by God in them.

Jesus' answer also makes clear that what the Lord requires of them is not primarily a diverse assortment of good deeds, but it's a singular work focused upon believing in the one that he has sent, in Jesus himself as the Son of Man. That act of belief, loyalty and commitment is the one integrating work that holds together everything else. Responding to this claim, the people now challenge him to produce a sign, perhaps strange as he's already multiplied the loaves in their presence, what else is he expected to do? They focus on the example of Moses in particular, our fathers ate manna in the wilderness, as it is written he gave them bread from heaven to eat.

Okay, you're the prophet like Moses, the prophet who was supposed to come into the world. Moses, the former prophet, gave us manna in the wilderness, you should do something similar. Jesus' response to them is an unpacking of their statement and an unpacking of words concerning the manna from Exodus and the Psalms, pushing them to recognise something more going on.

They attributed the bread given from heaven to Moses, but it was not actually Moses who gave that bread, but God gave the bread from heaven. And that bread is not the true bread, the true bread from heaven is the one that the Father sends down, the Son. He is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

Already in the book of John we've seen things described as true, there's the true vine, there's the true light, there's the true worshippers that will be established. Christ is presented as the one who brings the reality that was always anticipated, the reality that the signs pointed forward to. He is the substance, the reality, the one that the signs foreshadowed.

The manna was always something that anticipated the greater bread that would come from heaven. The manna was bread from heaven, but the true bread from heaven is Jesus Christ himself. He comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

Now Jesus is within this context working off the background of reflection upon the character of wisdom. Wisdom comes down from heaven. Wisdom is associated with bread and food.

We might think about wisdom's feast in Proverbs chapter 9. She invites people to taste of her bread and wine. Jesus might be playing upon that, along with the tradition of reflection upon wisdom in intertestamental literature. Christ's claim that the one who comes to him shall not hunger and who believes in him shall never thirst might recall the conversation with the Samaritan woman.

However, the people that he is speaking to here do not believe him. There's a failure on their part to perceive what's taking place. Consequently, Jesus takes up the story of the manna that they reference and twists it to show that far more is going on in that story.

That story was never merely about an earthly leader, Moses, providing material food for a people as a sign that he was anointed by God. It was a sign that anticipated by God's action a greater gift, a greater manna that would come in the future. And that manna is seen in Christ.

He is the fulfillment of wisdom, the one who has come down from heaven. He's also the fulfillment of the law. The law was also described in a way associated with bread.

Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. The law, the words that proceed from the mouth of God, are seen as something that is like bread that we can eat, that gives strength and sustenance and even delight. We can live by such bread.

Jesus' response to his interlocutors here is one that takes their words about the manna and unpacks and reveals a far more glorious picture that was always anticipating something greater that is now in effect. Already in this chapter we've seen allusions to an Exodus pattern. It's played out in the crossing of the Sea of Tiberias, in the leading of the people, a great multitude through the wilderness, in sitting down on a mountain to teach, dividing the people into groups and then miraculously feeding them.

However the pattern of Exodus at work in Jesus' ministry is not just a repetition of the former Exodus. It's an escalation. There's a movement towards something anticipated by the first Exodus that exceeds it.

This is the true bread from heaven. Christ is the one who is not merely repeating what Moses did in the wilderness. He is bringing the reality that was always looked forward to.

This passage is clearly reminiscent of other points in the Gospel where Jesus presents himself as food and drink. He is the one who provides wine at the wedding feast. He's the one who promises water that will mean that those who drink it will never thirst again.

And the illustration of the manna brings another aspect of Christ to the foreground. Like the manna, Christ comes down from heaven. He has come from the Father.

He is the one who is sent on a mission. He has an existence that precedes his earthly

life. He comes down from above and as he does so he brings the life of the Father down to earth.

That heavenly origin of Christ, although it is something that we do see in the synoptics, is far clearer in the Gospel of John. This is one of the strongest declarations of Christ's source from above and also of the place to which he will return. He has been sent on a mission by the Father, a mission to give life.

The Father, as we see in verse 39, commits people into the charge of the Son and the Son preserves them and leads them to eternal life. The Son will not lose anyone who has been committed to his charge. In the wording of verse 40 we might also have a recollection of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus where he compares himself to the serpent that was raised by Moses in the wilderness.

Those who looked at the bronze serpent were delivered. In a like manner, those who look on the Son of Man and believe in him will have eternal life. They will receive the life of the Spirit, anticipating and serving as a down payment of final resurrection.

And on that great last day they too will be raised up. A question to consider, Jesus here speaks of looking on the Son and believing in him as a statement of what faith is and involves. In the Gospel of John, and even in this very chapter, faith and what it involves are described in several different ways.

What other examples can you think of and how might these give us a fuller understanding of what faith is? Jesus here continues his discourse with the Jews following the feeding of the 5,000 and his representation of himself as the manna. The Jews merely know Jesus according to the flesh. They see him as the son of Mary and Joseph and can't truly conceive of who he is.

Again it's important to remember here that the Jews in this passage, as elsewhere in John, are typically the Judean leaders. It's not the descendants of Abraham more generally, it's not the people of the land, it's the Jewish leaders, the leaders of the Judean people. Not necessarily the people in Galilee but the people at the heart of the nation around Jerusalem.

John doesn't directly reference the virgin birth but I imagine that many of the readers of John would have been familiar with the other Gospel accounts and this would have brought it to mind. The Jews do not know Jesus' ultimate origin and so they cannot accept the fact that he has come down from heaven. The language of I have come is found in the other Gospels as well.

We see it in Matthew chapter 5 for instance in parts of Mark and the language is the language that we see used of angels, of angelic messengers that are sent by God to bring a particular message to the people who are on a particular mission. It's language

that suggests a pre-existence in heaven before the earthly mission. Jesus uses such language on a number of occasions in John's Gospel, highlighting the fact that his earthly life was not the beginning of his mission, was not the beginning of his existence and identity, something that is underlined from the very beginning of the Gospel.

The Jews in response to this grumble, like the children of Israel in the wilderness, Israel grumbled before receiving the manna but they grumble at the offer of that to which the sign of the manna pointed. Jesus speaks of the father drawing people to himself much as the Old Testament prophets speak of God drawing Israel to himself in the wilderness or after the exile, that he's going to restore this people and in an act of love he draws his bride to himself in the wilderness. Jesus connects that drawing of the father with the prophetic statements concerning the restored people of God whom God would teach, enlighten and graciously draw to himself and this has often come up in debates about free will and predestination but in scripture and particularly in John's Gospel these things aren't seen to be in conflict.

You can maybe think of it in terms of love. Love both liberates and binds the will. When you are in love there's nothing that you felt more willing about but yet at the same time that will is so forceful and directed that you feel bound by it and in the same way as God reveals his glory and the truth of Christ to people, they are drawn to him not as a matter of external compulsion but of internal will that they wish to come to him because their eyes have been opened to see who he is.

Jesus presents himself as the great prophet, the great teacher from God foretold by Moses and the work of the father through his ministry is bringing the prophecies of God teaching the people, the prophecies that we find concerning the new covenant in places like Jeremiah chapter 31, he's bringing these things to pass. Jesus is giving his flesh like manna for the life of the world and this occurs in the gift of his body at the cross. He speaks in the most startling language eating his flesh and drinking his blood in a way that would have provoked both the taboo of cannibalism and the consumption of blood which Israel was forbidden to do.

Some suggest a connection with Passover themes. Jesus is the Passover lamb and he offers the flesh of the Passover lamb to eat and as Israel spoke of the blood of grapes being drunk at Passover so his blood would be enjoyed as a form of participation in the benefits of his sacrifice. Elsewhere we see similar language of eating bread and drinking wine in places like Proverbs chapter 9 as wisdom lays her feasts and gives herself as food to people.

There are allusions to sacramental themes throughout this passage. You can see at the very beginning the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus breaks the bread, gives thanks, he distributes it.

It's language that would bring to mind the celebration of the Eucharist. You can think

also about the manna bread that has come down from heaven. The bread of God that's the language used of the sacrifices in the Old Testament.

The priests are the ones who offer the bread of their God. The tree of life language eating and living forever. The fact that Jesus becomes flesh matters greatly.

He gives his body for the life of the world. It's the actual physical material sacrifice of his body on the cross that is the means of his self-donation. John doesn't have an account of the institution of the supper.

The language here focuses particularly upon Christ's death as the moment in which these things are donated and in connection with which these things will be enjoyed. Earlier on he talked about Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness and in the same way Christ will be lifted up so that all that look to him will be saved. Now Christ again is presenting his gift of himself in his death as the means by which people will have life.

And here the language is not so much looking as the language of eating and drinking, of participating in his sacrifice. Here I think John is drawing upon sacramental themes and I believe he wants us to connect this with the celebration of the Eucharist but in a way that expresses the fact that the Eucharist is always about the reality of Christ's death. The gift of his body in that.

It's not the mere physical eating that is the important thing. It's the gift of Christ's life in his sacrifice. Jesus' identity is the one who comes down from heaven and this will be proven as he returns that.

We are supposed to subsist on Christ's flesh, eating it continually. This is the way that we abide in him. Now that I believe is something that is in the symbol of the Eucharist this is actually participated in.

But the spirit is the one who gives life not the flesh. Christ's words are the gift of life. This isn't about some sort of magic and the danger of trust in the flesh or religion and these sorts of things are things that John is very alert to and Jesus as he teaches within John's gospel highlights.

So when we're thinking about the Eucharist I believe it's important to see it as a form of Christ's gift of his body. A means by which we participate in his body and his blood but we must do so in a way that foregrounds not a fleshly act of eating but the work of the spirit and the work of the word. And this is something that I believe that the Protestant tradition has been very concerned to do.

Not to empty the Eucharist of its reality that this is a true participation in Christ's body and blood but to do so in a way that heightens the emphasis upon the spirit as the one by which these things are donated and enjoyed and that Christ's word is that which makes the sacrament effective. It's not some sort of magic. Jesus ends by speaking

about Judas as a devil and Peter is a faithful disciple.

Peter is the one who recognises that Jesus' words are the words of eternal life. There's no one else to go to. This is the means by which you will have salvation.

This is the means by which you will enter into the life that is the life of the age to come. One final question. John's gospel emphasises that Moses is a witness to Christ, the greater prophet that was to come.

The Jews supposed allegiance to Moses yet rejection of Christ is deeply ironic for this reason. Can you think of other places in the gospel where Moses is presented as a witness to Christ? The context of the events of John chapter 7 is provided by the feast of tabernacles or booths. We'll see later on in some of the events and some of Jesus' statements that this background is important for understanding what he's doing.

At this point Jesus is generally operating in the context of Galilee where he is facing opposition and rejection as we see in this and the previous chapter but in Judea the Jews are trying to kill him. Again it's worth remembering that the Jews are the Judeans and the Judean leaders in particular and so the contrast between the Galileans and the Judeans plays out in this chapter and elsewhere. He's facing challenge within his own family as well.

Jesus' mission is surrounded by family and relatives, his mother, characters like James and John who seem to be his cousins. As we compare some of the details between the gospels this would seem to be the case. James the son of Alphaeus is quite likely Jesus' cousin.

John the Baptist is a relative. The brothers of Jesus also become important in the early church so this was a mission where he's surrounded by family members and opposition from family members and disbelief by family members and this provides part of the precipitating events for this chapter. They're not necessarily directly opposed to him but they don't believe in him or understand the nature of his mission or the father's timing.

The attempt to make him a king in the previous chapter is a typical failure to perceive the true nature of Jesus' calling. John's gospel has a number of episodes that present the greater themes of Christ's ministry in embryo and this is one of them. There's a surface message, a story of Jesus going down to the feast and speaking at the feast but then there's a deeper significance.

There's broader themes of openness and secrecy playing in this chapter, knowledge and lack of knowledge, origins and failure to perceive origins. Notice how many of Jesus' statements in the gospel and particularly perhaps in this chapter are cryptic requiring later revelation or events for their understanding. In the gospel of John as in the other gospels there is a theme of a messianic secret.

Jesus hides his identity and reveals it only cryptically. The true character of his calling and his kingship will be revealed in time but it will occur through the cross and the resurrection and prior to those points Jesus avoids a false revelation which would suggest that he is just associated with mere human earthly power. There are parallels perhaps to be observed with John chapter 2. Family members requesting signs, Jesus saying that his hour hasn't yet come, Jesus going on to perform the requested things secretly rather than more openly as was originally requested.

There are of course contrasts. Jesus' mother is never described as failing to believe in him as his brothers are at this point. The fact that Jesus says that he is not going up to the feast or not yet going up to the feast in verse 8 according to some translations has provoked a number of questions.

This seems to be if not an explicit lie an attempt to mislead. Jesus invites misconstrual of his meaning and purpose throughout the gospel and perhaps it's worth thinking about the way that the messianic secret works in terms of themes of deception. Jesus does not give his full identity out.

Earlier on in the gospel in chapter 2 Jesus does not fully commit himself to people because he knows what's in man and at this sort of point Jesus is engaged in a veiling of his identity, a veiling of his intentions, a veiling of his destination. Why does Jesus do this? How can we justify these actions? Well in part I think it is worth recognising that there are people trying to control Jesus' mission, trying to control his vocation. People who are trying to make him king by force for instance and his brothers have their own purpose and intention.

They wish for Jesus to reveal himself openly and seek a particular type of power and his commitment to his father's mission involves a refusal to commit himself to them, a refusal to give himself into their hands and to their purposes and so Jesus' deception or misleading at this point is legitimate. It's an attempt to prevent people from taking charge of his vocation, from stealing his vocation from the father. He owes his father his loyalty not his human brothers.

Jesus' identity at this point is clearly a matter of significant debate among the people and among the Jewish leaders. We can see all these divisions arising among the Jews on account of Jesus' identity. His teaching stands out and as he speaks to the people it's clear that he has not learnt this from a human teacher.

He claims he has learnt it from his father, the father, not from other teachers or from any earthly father such as Joseph. He ends by referring to the healing of the man on the sabbath in chapter 5. This is the work that they really seem to be opposing him for the last time he was in Jerusalem and he talks about the way in which a small part of the body can be removed in circumcision and that can take precedence over the refusal to work on the sabbath and yet he heals a man's whole body and yet they oppose him for

it. When Christ talks about the sabbath here and in the other gospels Christ challenges the teaching of the Jews and often it's presented as if Jesus is identifying exceptions to the rule of the sabbath.

But Jesus seems to be going further than that. Jesus is presenting the true intent of the sabbath. That the sabbath is made for man and to make a man whole on the sabbath is not merely a valid or legitimate exception to the law of the sabbath.

It's a fulfilment of it. This is the intent that God had that man would be restored and made whole by the sabbath and so healing on the sabbath is not just a valid exception but a true fulfilment of what God's sabbath means, what God's coming kingdom means, the restoration of humanity, the establishment of humanity in God's grace. One question.

Where do you see John's greater themes of legal witness and authority surfacing in this passage? In the second half of John chapter 7 the question of Jesus' origins reappears. Jesus has been teaching in the temple and the crowd are surprised because they think that Jesus is a wanted man. The authorities had wanted to get their hands on Jesus after his healing of the infirm man on the sabbath in chapter 5. After that healing he had connected his own work with that of the father in a way that made him equal with God and turned their desire to lay hands on him into a desire to put him to death.

Confused by the fact that Jesus is teaching in public the people start to speculate that Jesus may in fact be the Messiah and the authorities know it. Yet there is a prevalent belief, the source of which is unclear, that the person who is the Christ will be of unknown origins. The crowd however knows where Jesus is from.

He's a Galilean. Perhaps surprisingly, though he easily might do so, Jesus does not dispute this. On one level they do know his origin and the fact that he is from Nazareth is not inconsistent with the fact that he is also the Messiah.

In Matthew chapter 1 verse 23 the fact that Jesus is a Nazarene is seen as a fulfillment of prophetic statements. Of course there were other prophetic statements saying that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem. Unbeknownst to the crowd this was also true of Christ.

Ironically this made what they thought was evidence against the claim that Jesus was the Christ evidence for that claim. Of course neither Nazareth nor Bethlehem were the ultimate origin of Christ. His ultimate origin truly was a place they did not and could not know.

Without disputing the fact that they knew Jesus' geographical origin he challenges their sense of his origin by speaking about his personal origin, about the one who had sent him. While they may on one level know his geographic origin, what they do not know is

the far more important personal origin, the father who had sent him into the world. In John 6 people had failed to recognize Jesus' ultimate origin, focusing rather upon his earthly connections and his family relations.

Verse 30 might perhaps be seen as a heading for what follows, the attempts to arrest him and their failure. Throughout John's gospel there are several references to the coming hour of Christ and the fact that at certain points his hour had not yet come. Until that hour came none of the attempts to bring Jesus down would be successful.

While there were differences among the crowd, many in the crowd at least on some level believed in Christ, reckoning that Jesus had performed enough signs to mark him out to be the Messiah. The chief priests and the Pharisees concerned by such reports sought to lay hands upon him. In verse 33 following Jesus seemed to address them in front of the crowd.

The presence of the crowd presumably protected Christ from being captured. As we see elsewhere in the gospels and in the book of Acts the religious leaders were afraid of the crowds. Ideally they wanted to separate Jesus from the crowd and take him when he was alone.

Jesus speaks to them in a cryptic way concerning his coming departure. They think that maybe he's going to be going to the dispersion among the Gentiles, the Jews that were scattered within the various nations around the Mediterranean. Although the hero of the gospel knows that Jesus is referring to his death and resurrection and ascension, the religious leaders were puzzled by Jesus' statement, not knowing what he could be referring to.

They aren't able to recognize that he will be returning to his father in the ascension, an event that will serve to confirm his true origin. Jesus is provoking divisions among the general population and among their leaders. Some believe that he is the prophet or the Christ and others that he has a demon.

There is a pattern that plays out twice in this chapter, first in verses 14 to 36 and then again in verses 37 to 52, beginning with Jesus teaching in the temple, people speculating about his identity and then a failed attempt to arrest him. In the first instance it's the middle of the Feast of Booths and in the second it's the last great day of the feast. The last great day of the feast may be the seventh or the eighth day.

The Feast of Booths was a seven-day celebration followed by an eighth day with a holy convocation. Ramsey Michaels argues that it must be the eighth day, whereas many commentators connecting what Jesus says here with the water drawing ceremony from the pool of Siloam believe that it must be the seventh day. Within these verses we see another instance of the continuing water symbolism within the Gospel of John.

We've seen it in chapter one with the baptism of John the Baptist, in chapter two with the water turned into wine at the wedding feast, in chapter three with the conversation with Nicodemus and the baptism of John again, in chapter four with the conversation with the woman at the well and then in chapter five with the healing of the man by the sheep pool. Here once again there is mention of living water, water flowing out of the heart. As I've noted many have connected this with the water drawing ritual of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Water would be drawn from the pool of Siloam and then brought to the temple and poured out. This ceremony was associated with the expected rains. It was also a time of great rejoicing.

One of the Jewish leaders only a few decades after this was said to have done a headstand and to have juggled eight lighted torches as part of this celebration. On this occasion Jesus makes a great promise of water to those who are thirsty, recalling his conversation with the woman at the well in chapter four. We might also think of invitations such as Isaiah chapter 55 verse 1. Come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters and he who has no money come buy and eat.

Come buy wine and milk without money and without price. We might also see something of a development here. In chapter 4 verse 14 there's a fountain of water springing up and now in verse 38 of chapter 7 rivers of living water are flowing out.

The rivers of living water depending on how we translate this proceed either from the heart of the believer or from the heart of Christ. I believe ultimately it's referring to Christ but these things also apply to the believer who has Christ within them and his spirit. Later blood mixed with water will come forth from Christ pious side.

Christ is akin to the garden of Eden which has a river that divides into four rivers in Genesis chapter 2 verse 10. We might also recall the water flowing out of Ezekiel's temple in chapter 47 of his prophecy. Water also comes from the rock in Exodus chapter 17 in the story of the exodus.

In Zechariah chapter 14 verses 8 and 9, a passage associated with the feast of booths, we are told that living waters will flow from Jerusalem. The people do not truly understand what Jesus is speaking about. The hearer of the gospel is informed that he's referring to the Those who believed in him would receive the spirit but the spirit had not yet been given because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Throughout the gospel Jesus is presented as the man of the spirit. People do not know where the spirit comes from or where it goes nor do they know where Jesus comes from and where he will go. He has received the spirit without measure.

He will later baptize with the Holy Spirit. While we see the activity of the Holy Spirit in

the Old Testament, the ascension and glorification of Christ would bring about an epochal change in the mode of the spirit's operations. Moses had given the people water from the rock in the wilderness and some of the people respond to Jesus' statement by speculating that he is the prophet, the prophet like Moses that Moses himself foretold in the book of Deuteronomy.

However, once again the question of Jesus' origins causes problems. The fact that Jesus is from Galilee does not fit with claims that he is the The Messiah should come from the city of David and so the people are divided on the question of Jesus' identity. The officers who have been charged by the chief priests and Pharisees to lay hands on Christ came back empty-handed.

Questioned by the Jewish authorities they end up bearing witness to Christ's uniqueness. No one ever spoke like this man. Annoyed by this response the Pharisees ask the officers whether they themselves have been deceived by Jesus and they start to wonder whether there are dissenters even in their own ranks.

Of course the ignorant and untrained crowd can't be trusted to judge rightly on these matters. Nicodemus who had privately spoken to Jesus earlier in John chapter 3 questions whether they are following proper procedure. If they are to be just judges they need to hear the man out before they judge concerning him.

However, the minds of the body of the Pharisees have already been settled on the matter. Jesus is neither the Messiah nor any prophet neither would come from Galilee. Even for raising such a mild question Nicodemus' own sympathies are cast under suspicion.

A question to consider. Jesus' seemingly known yet unknown origins are an important theme in this chapter. How does this relate to the character of Jesus' mission more generally? John chapter 7 verse 53 to chapter 8 verse 11 is not present in our earliest texts and only becomes a standard part of the gospel from around 900 AD.

Consequently it is bracketed out in most translations as inauthentic and most commentators set their commentary upon it apart from the rest of their commentary on the text that surrounds it. However the story was treated as a genuine part of the gospel by figures such as Ambrose and Augustine. Jerome writing around 415 observed that the account is found in many Greek and Latin editions of the gospel.

Augustine believed that the text had been removed from certain texts by men of weak faith who had feared that it might undermine the seventh commandment for some of its hearers. Despite such claims and the attempts of some to identify Johanine themes within it the evidence overwhelmingly weighs against this passage belonging to the original text of the gospel of John. Nevertheless the questions of whether this is an authentic part of the text of John's gospel or more broadly an authentic text of Johanine

origin, albeit not part of his gospel account, should be distinguished from the question of whether it represents an authentic account of Jesus's ministry.

At the outset we should recognise that there is nothing about the account that seems to ring false as a historical account of Jesus. It is however a text that seems to have more in common with Lucan themes and style than with Johannean themes and style. Indeed some texts placed it after Luke chapter 21 verse 38 in the final week of Jesus's ministry.

While it doesn't seem to belong there textually it would be a far more natural home for the text in certain respects. It would be surrounded by other confrontations with the scribes and pharisees, other attempts to trap Jesus in his words. While this is the only time in the gospel of John where we find a reference to the scribes.

More typically John just speaks of the Jews. Likewise the attention to the movement between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives is far more characteristic of the account of Luke. This is the only reference to the Mount of Olives in John.

The passage itself is not a complete unit as Ramsey Michaels notes. It opens with people departing for their own houses, implying that it came from the middle of a larger narrative. This raises the exciting possibility that it is a fragment of an unknown gospel account that has come down to us through its adoption into the text of John.

As John himself writes at the end of his gospel, there were numerous things that Jesus did that he did not record. In all likelihood there were hundreds of eyewitness oral accounts and even textual witnesses to Jesus's ministry that never came down to us. In support of the possibility that it belongs to a different gospel tradition Raymond Brown notes Eusebius's reference to Papias's recounting the story of a woman accused of sins before Jesus, which Papias claimed belonged to the gospel according to the Hebrews.

Papias wrote around the turn of the second century, so if this were the account of the woman caught in adultery, his would be an extremely early witness. He also observes the clear reference to the account in the Syrian *Didauchia Apostolorum*, typically dated to the third century, where it is spoken of as a widely known account, perhaps providing evidence that it had already circulated extensively in Syria, maybe even by the end of the second century AD. This still leaves us with the question of how it came to occupy its present position in the Gospel of John.

In the surrounding material, Jesus is teaching in the Temple in Jerusalem, so it does share a setting in common. Further, the themes of judgment in chapters 7 and 8 seem to fit the story of the woman caught in adultery thematically. In John chapter 7 verses 50 to 51, the scene immediately preceding it, we read, Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, Does our Lord judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does? The question of admissible evidence is an important one in the wider context too, in chapter 8 verses 13 to 18 for instance.

Later in chapter 8 verse 46, which one of you convicts me of sin? The question of the canonicity of this passage will depend upon the criteria of canonicity that we follow, practically speaking, as it is part of most English Bibles and also part of the Latin Vulgate. For many Christians, the text either is regarded as canonical or at least functions as quasi-canonical. If this is an authentic Gospel witness that has, by God's providence, come down to us, treating it as quasi-canonical may not be inappropriate.

However, as with other such passages, we should beware of resting any doctrine too heavily upon this passage by itself. We should bracket it from the material that surrounds it too, and also be alert to the ways in which, if such bracketing is not handled carefully, it interrupts the flow of John's own account. Looking at the passage itself, the scribes and the Pharisees, as elsewhere, but especially as in the Passion Week, seem to be trying to trap Jesus in his words, either getting him to claim an authority that will go against the rule of the Romans, who may recently have stripped the Sanhedrin of the right to impose capital punishment, or to compromise the law of Moses, which allowed for such a sentence.

If the Romans had recently removed the right of imposing capital punishment from the Sanhedrin, then the intention of the scribes and Pharisees here would be much more understandable, and would be similar to that of the question of paying taxes to Caesar. They wanted to trap Jesus by getting him to declare himself on a volatile political issue of the day. Many Christians have understood this story as representing Jesus' challenge to the death penalty more generally.

There is also a very popular conception that it is an illustration of the way that we should refrain from judging other people's sins. However, both of these approaches to the passage are far off target in their interpretations. Jesus' challenge to the scribes and the Pharisees here is not that the death penalty is wrong per se, as many people have read the passage.

Such a challenge would hardly have been persuasive to them, and would likely have served their purposes in entrapping him. But that the death penalty could only be unjustly exercised under the circumstances, nor is it denying the appropriateness of judgment. To argue that would be to prove far too much, denying the legitimacy of judicial actions more generally.

Within the Old Testament, the person who cast a stone was making a self-maladictory judgment, declaring that if they were guilty of false or unjust witness, the same judgment would come back upon them. The command of the law was that the witnesses should be the first to cast stones in such an execution. In Deuteronomy chapter 17 verse 7, the hand of the witnesses shall be the first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people, so you shall purge the evil from your midst.

Also Deuteronomy chapter 19 verses 16 to 19, if a malicious witness arises to accuse a

person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days. The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother, so you shall purge the evil from your midst. Jesus challenged the accusers of the woman, needs to be understood against such a background.

By foregrounding the act of casting the first stone, Jesus was stripping the accusers of the shelter of the crowd, and calling the supposed witnesses to be prepared to take a personal responsibility for their actions, and culpability if they were giving some sort of unjust testimony. The first stone, as René Girard argues, provides the model for every subsequent stone. The first stone is the hardest to cast, and each successive stone becomes progressively easier, as the one who casts it imitates those casting stones before him.

The situation had all of the signs of entrapment. The woman was supposedly caught in the very act, red-handed, yet no man was taken. Whatever the guilt or innocence of the woman, none of her accusers had any standing upon which to judge in her case.

Oliver O'Donovan writes, In the story of Jesus and the woman taken in adultery, which has shaped so much of Christian jurisprudence, Jesus does not challenge the generic categories in which the judges describe the act, nor does he challenge the application of those categories to the accused woman. But he demands that another dimension of description should be included, the ambiguous relation in which those who accuse others of adultery stand to the adulterers. And so he challenges the discrimination they have made.

Were that community to carry out the death penalty on that woman, the line between innocence and guilt would have been drawn wrongly. The compromised character of the witnesses may be on account of their involvement in the entrapment. Alternatively, but less likely, it might be a result of their own guilt in similar matters.

In Luke chapter 16 verses 14 to 18, Jesus challenges the Pharisees for their sexual license and love of money. Perhaps that is part of the background in view here. The accusers gradually depart, the oldest first, leaving only Jesus and the woman remaining.

Where there were no witnesses in the case of adultery, a different judgment applied, the test of jealousy, given in Numbers chapter 5. The test of jealousy puts the judgment in such cases in the hands of God himself. Perhaps we should see Jesus' actions here as a symbolic performance of the test of jealousy. In particular, it might help to explain Jesus' strange act of writing upon the ground.

The test of jealousy involved dust from the tabernacle floor and a handwritten set of curses. Both of these were placed into water that the woman had to drink. Jesus is

writing for quite some time, enough time for the accusers to have to persist in asking their question on several occasions, and for them all to depart after his challenge in response.

The writing is probably not incidental to the narrative here, and seeing this as a sort of symbolic inaction of the test of jealousy might help to explain what is happening. The effect of the test of jealousy was to reveal secrets through the deliverance of divine judgment. At the climax of the ritual of jealousy, God would judge in the case of a woman who was accused of adultery.

Here, however, it is Jesus who declares the woman's release from the sentence. Perhaps we are to see a subtle allusion to Jesus' divine identity here, as he exercises the prerogative of God in judgment. Jesus brings hidden sins to light, and knows the hearts of people, as we have seen on several occasions already in the Gospel.

However, he has not come to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. Here he is not merely playing the role of the priest in the ritual, but the role of God himself. His judgment concerning the woman is an unjudgment, it is characterized by grace.

He does not deny the fact that she has sinned, but he calls her not to sin anymore, and releases her. This episode, we must be clear, is an interruption in the original text of John, which should run directly from chapter 7 verse 52 to chapter 8 verse 12. One of the main effects of removing the intervening text is that the conversation seems to occur on the same occasion as the previous one.

Verses 12 and following continue many of the themes of the preceding chapter, questions of Jesus' origin and destination, of admissible testimony, of the standards of judgment, of the people seeking him and not finding him, and of Jesus' relationship with the Father. The discussion of Jesus' witness here is also closely paralleled with statements in chapter 5 verses 31 to 39. If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true.

There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth, not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.

But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John, for the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me, his voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search

the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness about me.

Jesus' claim that he is the light of the world anticipates a theme that will be taken up in the chapter that follows. It also recalls statements of chapters 1 and 3 about Jesus as the light coming into the world, revealing the character of people's deeds in the process. The Pharisees challenged Jesus, claiming that he is bearing witness about himself, witness that would be legally inadmissible.

Jesus' response is initially puzzling, seeming to be in conflict with statements that he makes elsewhere. Does he judge, or doesn't he? Does he bear witness about himself, or does he not? His point here is the same as in chapter 5 verses 31 and following. Jesus' testimony is not just his own word, but the word of the Father.

Likewise, Jesus' judgments are not his own private judgments, but rather the judgments of the Father. He does not testify alone, but the Father testifies through him and about him. The Father's word stands behind all of his words and backs them up.

However, Jesus' opponents neither know him nor the Father who sent him. The opponents speculate that Jesus' statement that he is going away and they won't find him when they seek him and will die in their sins might be a reference to Jesus' intention to commit suicide. Of course, it will be through Jesus' death and his going to the cross that he will forge this way that they cannot come on.

However, Jesus' identity continues to be presented in an extremely cryptic manner at this point. The fuller revelation of his identity will come when they have lifted up the Son of Man, referring to the event of the cross. That would precipitate the manifestation of who Christ really is.

As he is lifted up on the cross in the resurrection and to the Father's right hand in the ascension, his true identity and authority would finally be manifested. A question to consider. Reflecting upon the ways in which Jesus identifies himself with the Father in this and other parts of John, how can we see an early Christology and Trinitarian theology starting to take shape? As in the Gospel of Luke and the Pauline epistles, the question of the identity of the true sons of Abraham is prominent within the Gospel of John and nowhere more so than in the second half of chapter 8. Jesus' argument about slaves and sons in the house of Abraham anticipates Paul's allegory of Hagar and Sarah in Galatians chapter 4 for instance.

Jesus addresses the Pharisees as those who were akin to slaves in the house of Abraham. One day they would be removed. He also describes them as the children of the devil here.

They are seed of the serpent or a brood of vipers. The question of who a person's true

father is, the question that dominates this passage, is answered in the one that they take after. The closely related question of whether one is a slave or a son is also revealed by people's actions.

By their fruits you will know them. The person who makes a practice of sin is a slave to sin. We might again observe similarities between Jesus' arguments in this passage and various arguments in John's first epistle in places such as 1 John 5 1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of Him.

Or in chapter 3 verses 6 to 10. No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has either seen Him or known Him.

Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as He is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in Him, and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil.

Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. Likewise we find common themes of abiding in Jesus and His word. Looking through the Johannine literature, the Gospel of John, the epistles of John, and the book of Revelation, we can see numerous points of contact and close resemblance.

The description of Jesus' interlocutors in verse 31, as the Jews who had believed Him, is surprising if they are the same persons as are trying to kill Him in verse 40. The reference to the Jews who believed in Him connects this discourse with verse 30's reference to many who believed in Him. However, perhaps the they of verse 33 refers to a different or a broader group, one that includes the religious officials who oppose Him.

Alternatively, other commentators have suggested that factions among Jesus' own followers or within the later church might be in view here. As elsewhere in the Gospel, Jesus speaks in ways that are misunderstood by the people to whom He is speaking. When He speaks of freedom, they think of freedom from slavery as a people.

Their insistence that they, as the offspring of Abraham, have never been enslaved to anyone, seems to be at odds with the experience of Israel in Egypt and Babylon, if not also the Jews' current situation under Roman rule. However, they seem to have in view their pride in being sons of Abraham and believe that the nation, even when under foreign rule, was internally free and destined for freedom. Jesus clearly has in view a different sort of freedom than the Jews to whom He is speaking.

The real slavery that should concern them is not bondage to a foreign nation, but bondage to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household, while the son does. Jesus, as the son, is able to bring people into the freedom characteristic of sonship.

When the Jews insist that their father is Abraham, Jesus underlines the contrast between them and Abraham, the man that they wrongly claim to be their father. They are trying to kill Jesus, even though He told them the truth, completely out of keeping with the behaviour of Abraham, who had welcomed the messengers who came to him. Their violent hatred and murderous intent towards Jesus is characteristic of their father the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning.

The intent of the devil is to kill and destroy, to take and to diminish life wherever it is. Being only a creature himself, he can never create, only destroy. In particular, humanity created in the image of God is something he will always seek to attack.

The devil, in addition to being a murderer from the beginning, is also a liar and the father of lies, who speaks lies out of his own character. We might of course recall the temptation of Eve in the garden and the deceptions of the serpent on that occasion. Jesus is tracing a line back from actions through character to origins.

Those who practice sin are in bondage to sin and are the children of the devil himself. While the Jews may insist that they are the children of Abraham, their behaviour belies their claims. Jesus presents a powerful indictment against the Jews here.

If they truly were of God, they would receive the words of the man that God sent. They haven't made any demonstrable charge against Jesus. Instead, they reject him, not merely despite his telling the truth, but because he does so.

Somewhat surprisingly, the Jews answer him by saying that he is a Samaritan and he has a demon. Presumably, these two charges go together. Earlier, in chapter 7 verse 20, people were speculating that Christ had a demon.

The connection between his being a Samaritan and having a demon perhaps suggests that they believe that the worship of the Samaritans is a worship of demons. It's possible that they are insinuating here that Jesus is the bastard son of a Samaritan. When it came to the question of being heirs and descendants of the patriarchs, the Samaritans were in competition and opposition to the Jews.

The Samaritans challenged the Jews' claim to be exclusive descendants of Abraham. However, the Samaritans had earlier received Jesus and so their charge against Christ sets up an unfavourable contrast between them and the Samaritans who received him. Christ had earlier spoken about the fact that those who received his word definitively passed from death to life.

When he makes a similar claim here, the Jews regard this as proof positive that he is possessed by a demon. Abraham and the prophets have already died. Is Christ suggesting that he is greater than them? Of course, Jesus is the greatest son of Abraham.

He is the true heir. He goes on to declare that Abraham, their supposed father, rejoiced to see his day and he saw it and was glad. Perhaps he here has in mind the encounter that Abraham had with the angel of the Lord in Genesis chapters 18 and 22.

In John's Gospel there are several occasions where appearances of God to his people in the Old Testament are regarded as anticipations of the coming of Christ. Christ is the glorious vision of the Lord that Isaiah saw in the temple in chapter 6. Christ is the great I am. He is the one who appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai.

He is connected with the vision of the ladder given to Jacob at Bethel. The one who had been active throughout Israel's history is now unveiled and made flesh, walking among us, revealing his true identity as Jesus. The crowd wonder why he is making these claims.

He is not yet 50 years of age and yet he is claiming to have seen Abraham. It seems strange that they would choose the figure 50 given that Jesus is only around 30 years of age. Perhaps this should be seen as one of John's Gospel's allusions to Jubilee themes.

Jesus' remarkable claim in response, truly truly I say to you before Abraham was, I am, is one in which he identifies himself with God, applying the name for God, I am, to himself. He is not just claiming some sort of angelic status or some sort of pre-existence or the power of some lower deity. He is identifying himself with God himself.

God has come and visited his people. In its current form, beginning with the Nun Johnine text of the woman caught in adultery, John chapter 8 begins and ends with failed stoning attempts. Once again they are unsuccessful in taking Jesus' life because his hour has not yet come.

A question to consider, reading this chapter alongside Romans chapter 4, how does the Apostle Paul expand upon the logic of Jesus' argument here in addressing the question of believing Gentiles within the family of Abraham? In John chapter 9 we have the sixth of the signs that Jesus performs in his ministry in the Gospel of John. The first half of the Gospel of John has been described as the book of signs. It's a book in which we see a series of significant events and actions that Jesus performs that help us to understand who he is and the character of his mission.

The point of a sign is not just the demonstration of power or the pyrotechnics of a great miracle or healing or exorcism. A sign helps us to understand something more about the character of Jesus' mission and identity. In the turning of the water into wine in the wedding feast at Cana, Jesus demonstrates something about who he is as the

bridegroom.

A number of the signs in the Gospel of John provoke conversation afterwards. The turning of the water into wine provokes a conversation between the master of the feast and the bridegroom. The healing of the royal official's son provokes a conversation between the royal official and his servants.

The healing of the infirm man at the sheep pool provokes a conversation about the Sabbath and the work of Christ. The multiplication of the loaves and fish leads to Jesus' discourse concerning the manna and the bread from heaven. Within the Gospel of John I believe that there are seven signs as part of the book of signs.

The first is the turning of the water into wine. The second the healing of the rich nobleman's son. The third the healing of the infirm man at the sheep pool.

The fourth the multiplication of the loaves and fish. The fifth Jesus' walking on the water. The sixth the healing of the blind man in this chapter.

And the seventh the raising of Lazarus. I think it's possible that these signs might be related together in a panel structure with the first, second and third mapping onto the fourth, fifth and sixth with the seventh as a climactic sign. If this were the case the turning of the water into wine would naturally correspond with the multiplication of the loaves and fish.

The healing of the rich nobleman's son would correspond with the walking on the water and the healing of the infirm man by the sheep pool would correspond with the healing of the blind man in this chapter. Both healings involve a healing pool, take place on the Sabbath and give rise to a conversation concerning work upon the Sabbath. If we are connecting this with the sixth day of creation as the sixth sign we might also observe a parallel with the creation of man on the sixth day.

Here is a man being created anew as a new creation. We should recognize some already familiar themes from the Gospel of John at the beginning of this chapter. Jesus as he did in John chapter 8 verse 12 refers to himself as the light of the world.

In chapter 1 verse 9 he is described as the true light which gives light to everyone coming into the world. The question about whether the man was born blind on account of his own sin or on account of his parents sin also emphasizes the theme of birth which has been an important one to this point particularly in chapter 3 but also in chapter 8 concerning the question of the true heirs and children of Abraham. Jesus responds to his disciples query by saying it was not that this man sinned or his parents but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

Ramsey Michaels suggests that we might see in the background of this statement John chapter 3 verse 21 but whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be

clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God. If this were the case then the works of God that are displayed in him are not the works of Christ in the miracle but the true character of the man who is working the works of God. Once again we might think of John chapter 6 verses 28 to 29.

Then they said to him what must we do to be doing the works of God? Jesus answered them this is the work of God that you believe in him whom he has sent. This is precisely what the man born blind goes on to do. Reading the sign in the light of these themes it will help us to understand that it is a demonstration of what it means that Christ is the light of the world.

It will also unpack what it means to respond to Christ in the right way. Surprisingly there are two different stages to Jesus healing. He spits on the ground, makes mud with the saliva, anoints the man's eyes with the mud and then as a secondary stage instructs him to go to wash in the pool of Siloam.

He washes and comes back seeing. The hearer of the account should register the strangeness of this. Why doesn't Jesus just immediately heal him of his blindness? Why does it take two stages? Recognizing that this was a sign can help us to understand why economy of action is not the most important thing.

Christ's goal here is not merely to heal the man of his blindness but also to reveal something about the truth of his mission and the character of a proper response to him. Once again here we see the importance of Jesus' words. Jesus performs his signs not primarily through great acts of power but through giving instructions that are obeyed.

He instructs the servants to draw from some of the water and give it to the master of the feast. He instructs the royal official to go home. He instructs the infirm man by the sheep pool to pick up his bed and walk.

He instructs his disciples to distribute the loaves. And here he instructs the man born blind to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. In all of these cases the miracle occurs as people obey Christ, as they accept his word.

The power of the sign is the power of Jesus' word. But as people believe Jesus' words these signs are fulfilled for them. Jesus performs a strange action on this blind man and then instructs him to do a strange thing to go and wash in the pool of Siloam.

However the man obeys Jesus' word and as a result he is healed. We might recall the story of Naaman the Syrian who questions the instruction to go and wash in the Jordan. He wonders why he can't wash in one of the greater rivers of his own land.

The parallel with chapter 5 should also be looked at in more detail. The most obvious similarity is that they both involve healing on the Sabbath that provokes controversy with the Jews. In both cases a man who has had his disability for an exceedingly long

period of time is healed.

In both cases a healing pool is part of the story. Throughout the Gospel of John we see a specific focus upon Jesus' engagement with individuals. In the synoptic Gospels a lot more attention is given to his public teaching.

However Jesus' interactions with specific individuals in the Gospel of John invite us to recognize paradigmatic encounters of the individual with Christ. In chapter 3 we have in Nicodemus a leader of the Jews, a member of the Sanhedrin, a man of the highest religious standing and greatly respected among his people. He meets with Jesus secretly by night.

In the next chapter Jesus meets with a woman in the very middle of the day and this woman is at the other extreme of the social hierarchy. She's a member of the heretical Samaritans. She's someone who likely carries a lot of social shame.

The two men of chapters 5 and 9 are both healed by Jesus, cross-examined by the religious authorities and then encountered again by Jesus. In the first case the man after meeting with Christ for the second time goes back to the Jews. In the second case the man responds by believing in Jesus.

The entangled themes of light and blindness are playing throughout this passage. We have the physical sight of the man that is restored. We also have his spiritual sight that is revealed as we go through the whole of the chapter.

He's not just able to see with his physical eyes. He's able to perceive something of Jesus' true identity. There's a spiritual sight that he enjoys and the conflict that he has with the Jewish leaders is characterized by irony and humor.

There is something of a playfulness to it where he can't be recognized at first and people are speculating about his true identity. To this point in the gospel we've seen numerous examples of Jesus himself being subject to failures of recognition and here the healed blind man starts to receive the same sort of speculation about his identity. The mud made with saliva might recall the creating of humanity out of clay in the original story of man's creation.

A man is being newly created and then he is sent to the pool to wash. Christians have long perceived in this an image of baptism. It is also another example in the gospel of a sign that occurs in Jesus' absence.

His word is powerful even when he is not physically present. The blind man is a paradigmatic believer. He's someone who's brought to a new awareness.

Jesus performs a work of new creation upon him, sends him to be washed, to be baptized and after that the text focuses upon his membership of the synagogue and the religious

community. He will be cast out of the synagogue but will become part of the community that surrounds Christ. This of course is a pattern that is familiar for many Christians down through the ages.

Christ performs a work of healing in their lives. They are baptized, they enter a new community but they are cast out of old ones. However as they are faithful in their testimony to Christ before men, Christ will be present to and with them.

A question to consider. Can you identify the ways in which this chapter uses humor, sarcasm and irony to express its point? How do these help to reveal something about the character of faith in contrast to unbelief? When reading John chapter 10 it's important that we do not detach it from that which precedes it. It is still a response to the Pharisees and the leaders of the Jews after the healing of the blind man.

In casting the formerly blind man out of the synagogue the Jews were claiming authority over the flock of God acting as false shepherds and this is the background for the conversation that Jesus has describing himself as the shepherd and the door to the sheep. And some of the themes being explored here are ecclesiological themes, themes that relate to the church as the flock of Christ. The imagery of sheep and shepherding comes to the surface here but it's not the only time within the gospel that we see this.

In chapter 1 we see it as Jesus is the lamb. In chapter 21 where Jesus tells Peter to feed his sheep and here he is the shepherd and the door to the sheep. The biblical background to shepherd imagery is immensely important.

Israel descended from shepherds. If you think about characters like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, these were all shepherds. Joseph was a shepherd.

The great leaders of the Moses and David were shepherds both literally and symbolically. Moses led the people out with his shepherd's rod and David was the great shepherd of the house of Israel. In passages like Ezekiel 34 and Jeremiah 23 verses 1 to 4 the unfaithful shepherds, the unfaithful rulers of Israel were condemned.

Elsewhere we see God himself being described as the great shepherd of his people in places like Psalm 23. In this chapter Jesus alludes to verses such as Micah chapter 2 verses 12 to 13. I will surely assemble all of you O Jacob.

I will gather the remnant of Israel. I will set them together like a sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture, a noisy multitude of men. He who opens the breach goes up before them.

They break through and pass the gate going out by it. Their king passes on before them, the Lord at their head. God's flock is gathered together and led out by the gate.

Christ calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. Now this might be seen as an

image of the exodus. Remember that the exodus is described as the leading of a flock out of Egypt with the rod of the shepherd Moses.

That imagery is used in places like Isaiah chapter 63 verses 11 to 12, Psalm 77 verse 20 and elsewhere. There's a striking of the false shepherd of Pharaoh. This sort of shepherd imagery might also help us to understand other episodes within the gospel.

In chapters 5 and 6 for instance. In chapter 5 Jesus meets a lame man near the sheep gate bringing him back into the temple fold of Israel. Jesus here describes himself as the true door for the sheep.

In chapter 6 Jesus leads a large multitude out like a flock across the sea and provides them with food. There's a strange detail in chapter 6 verse 10. There was much grass in the place.

Now why point that out? In chapter 10 verse 9 we see a suggestion of an answer. He will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. Who is the doorkeeper or the watchman? In verse 3 it's probably the faithful leader of the people in contrast to the Jewish leaders and the Pharisees.

The biblical imagery of the shepherd as we've seen already is fairly deeply rooted within the text but the shepherd is a rough and violent figure often. Not especially like our vision of shepherds. When we hear about shepherds we might think about idyllic scenes, bucolic landscapes in the lakeland in England or we might think about these very tame pastoral settings.

But yet that's not what we find in scripture. The shepherd is often a figure who struggles with wolves, with wild beasts, with thieves and bandits and with the perils of the wilderness. He's associated with death and conflict and difficulty.

We need to measure our concepts of pastoral ministry against biblical models. If we think about the pastoral ministry we're often thinking about that very domestic idyllic scene and the way that the shepherd is just this gentle, kind, tender figure. And there's certainly that aspect of tenderness and gentleness with the flock.

But the shepherd also has to be a conflictual character able to drive off wolves, protect the flock, give safe and good pasture. Someone who's able to suffer hardship and die for the sake of the flock. The flock is in dangerous territory and we need tough and dedicated leaders.

Now there's an allusion to Numbers chapter 27 verses 15 to 17 here. In that place Joshua is established as the leader of the people in replacement of Moses and there's a reference to coming in and going out there. Moses spoke to the Lord saying, Let the Lord the God of the spirits of all flesh appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them who shall lead them out and bring them in that

the congregation of the Lord may not be a sheep that have no shepherd.

Christ refers to the people of Israel as like sheep without a shepherd on a number of occasions and he is the true shepherd. Jesus' use of the terminology I am at this point also relates his identity to that of God. He is not just the great Davidic leader, he is God himself come to deliver his people.

One of the primary points of this section is to highlight the intimate relationship between sheep and shepherd. The sheep have been given into Christ's hand by his father. He calls them all by name.

They know and respond to his voice. You can maybe think of Mary Magdalene in chapter 20 verse 16. It is when Jesus calls her by name that she recognizes his voice.

In chapter 5 verse 25 there's another example of a parallel. The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. Lazarus is a further example.

Even the grave cannot prevent the sheep from hearing their shepherd's voice and the true shepherd is someone who will lay down his life for the sheep. Unlike the hired hand, we can think about the Jewish leaders, we can think about the Pharisees. These are not going to lay down their lives for the people but the true shepherd will.

Jesus here speaks also of forming a larger flock. A flock that involves other sheep from elsewhere. Jesus brings in the Samaritans, he will bring in Gentile sheep, he'll form one new flock of both Jews and Gentiles.

And the church is very much in view in this imagery. Remember again that the background of this is someone who has been cast out of the synagogue. Someone who's a paradigmatic believer or disciple.

Someone who has been delivered by Christ, given new sight, brought through the healing waters and made part of a new people. He's cast out of the old people but now he's going to be part of a new flock and Christ is forming this new flock around himself at this time. It's profoundly encouraging to reflect upon the fact that the Father commits us as his sheep into the hands of his Son, the true shepherd, and no predator can snatch us from his protection nor from that of the Father.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. This is the image that is presented in this chapter. That Christ is the true leader of his people but not just this grand shepherd operating on a great scale but one who has an intimate love and knowledge and commitment to his sheep.

One who will lay down his life for his sheep. One who has that intimate connection that his sheep know his voice and he can address each one of them by name. This is a deep and intimate connection not just the connection that we might associate with a king or a

lordly ruler over a great nation but one who has an intimate connection with those who are his own.

A question to reflect upon. Jesus makes a startling statement in verse 17 and the logic of it is worth reflecting upon and thinking about. I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

What is the logic of that statement and how does it better help us to understand the death and the resurrection of Christ? The second half of John chapter 10 is set in the Feast of Dedication. Chapter 7 verse 1 to chapter 10 verse 18 was set during the Feast of Tabernacles and so this is a shift to about two or three months later. Nevertheless we see something of a continuation of the conversation and the conflict that was going on between Jesus and his Jewish opponents at the earlier feast.

The Feast of Dedication or Hanukkah was a seven day festival that celebrated the national deliverance under the Maccabees. That had occurred in 164 BC after the temple that had been defiled by Antiochus IV Epiphanes was restored to proper worship three years to the day after that worship was halted. That Jesus celebrates this feast suggests that it is appropriate to set up new feasts and celebrations and that there are times when we can celebrate new deliverances of God in history in a fitting and appropriate manner.

Jesus is walking in the temple in the culminate of Solomon. He's probably not just looking around rather he is there as it is a place of public discourse and dispute. It's an appropriate place for him to teach.

Once again Jesus is challenged concerning his authority, mission and identity. The question that the Jews ask is literally how long will you take away our life? In the present context this plays upon Jesus' own statements in verse 17 and 18. The meaning of this peculiar and rare expression is probably as it's translated in most English Bibles.

How long will you keep us in suspense? Nevertheless the actual wording of it given the context is worthy of note. They want a straightforward assertion of Jesus' claimed messianic identity from him. While Jesus has spoken cryptically to them on several occasions in ways that would suggest that he is making messianic claims for himself.

He gives them no such clear claim as he gives to the Samaritan woman in chapter 4 verse 29. They clearly want to use this information against Christ but Jesus has already given them revelation that if they receive it by faith would give them true insight into his identity and mission. As he says, the works that I do in my father's name bear witness about me.

Back in chapter 5 in verses 17 to 20 after his healing of the infirm man by the sheep pool Jesus had said to them, my father is working until now and I am working. This was why

the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him because not only was he breaking the Sabbath but he was even calling God his own father making himself equal with God. So Jesus said to them, truly truly I say to you the son can do nothing of his own accord but only what he sees the father doing.

For whatever the father does that the son does likewise. For the father loves the son and shows him all that he himself is doing and greater works than these will he show him so that you may marvel. As Jesus acts in his father's name and by his father's authority he demonstrates that he's the true son of God, the messianic figure that according to the Davidic covenant would be like a son to God and God would be like his father.

Of course Christ is the son of God in a fuller deeper sense than just being a Davidic king. However if they want to know that he is the Christ witnessing him acting with the authority of the father would be a pretty sure way of recognizing it. The wording of verse 26 might surprise us.

We probably think that the wording should be you are not among my sheep because you do not believe. However the wording suggests that it's not the belief that makes one a member of the flock but rather that the response of belief or unbelief manifests whether you are one of the flock or not. Those whom the father has given into the hand of the son will reveal that fact in their display of faith in response to his voice.

As Jesus expresses it in chapter 6 verse 37 all that the father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. The return to the imagery of the sheep recalls the earlier part of this chapter which we should bear in mind belongs to a discourse that occurred a few months earlier. Once again as in chapter 5 and elsewhere it's the voice of Christ that is singled out here.

The voice of Christ is that which gives life. It's the voice of Christ that the sheep recognize and respond to. Christ protects and guards his flock from all predators and leads them to their inheritance of eternal life.

No one is able to snatch them out of his hand. Ramsey Michaels notes that verse 29 literally reads my father that which he has given me is greater than all things and no one can seize it out of the hand of the father. This is typically translated or understood as a reference to the father being greater than all and hence no one is able to snatch the flock out of his hand.

However we should observe that the wording of this statement as Michaels notes puts the emphasis upon the father and also that it is far from clear that that which is being referred to as greater than all is the father. It might well be what he has given into the hand of the son. Michaels argues for such an interpretation.

The gift that the father has given, the gift of the flock to Christ is that which is greater

than all things as it comes from the father himself. And the point of verse 29 is to parallel the action of Christ in verse 28 showing that the father and the son are engaged in the same activity. This demonstrates that the father and the son are one.

After his statement in chapter 8 verse 58 before Abraham was I am the Jews had picked up stones to stone him. Now they once more seek to stone him. Jesus wants them to tell him for which work exactly they are stoning him.

He has been doing the works of the father throughout. They rightly perceive however that he is making himself equal with God. Jesus response to this is a difficult one to understand.

It is essentially arguing from the lesser to the greater. But it works in a less than straightforward way and not every step in the reasoning is spelled out for us. The statement that Jesus refers to is from Psalm 82.

God has taken his place in the divine counsel. In the midst of the gods he holds judgment. How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Give justice to the weak and the fatherless.

Maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy. Deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

They have neither knowledge nor understanding. They walk about in darkness. All the foundations of the earth are shaken.

I said you are gods, sons of the most high, all of you. Nevertheless like men you shall die and fall like any prince. Arise oh God, judge the earth for you shall inherit all the nations.

This psalm speaks about the divine counsel. In the divine counsel the Lord was surrounded by angels and heavenly beings but also by certain human rulers and by prophetic messengers. Although they were human beings as prophetic recipients of the word of God they were described as gods.

We might think as an example of this of Moses being described as like a god to Pharaoh and also as like a god to Aaron. As a nation and particularly as rulers Israel enjoyed something of this identity. They were set up like gods to the nations around, delivering the judgments of God and speaking in his name.

Israel was described as the Lord's firstborn son and consequently could speak as his representative and was some of his authority. If the people to whom the word of God came as his prophetic messengers could be referred to as gods, how much more the word of God himself who has come to human beings. This is the one time in the Gospel of John that Jesus speaks about the word of God in this manner and we must remember in chapter one that he has been described as the word that was with God and the word

that was God.

He is not just a recipient of the word like these people who are called gods. He is the word itself. The term that he is called is not the most important thing.

What really matters is the substance and that substance is revealed in the fact that the Father works his works through Christ. Whatever they believe or don't believe about Jesus' own statements concerning himself, they should believe the works of the Father that are being wrought through him. By them, as Jesus has argued earlier, the Father is bearing testimony to Jesus' identity and in them it becomes clear that the Father and the Son are one.

The Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son. Once again they seek to lay hands on him, this time to arrest him. Once again he escapes from their hands.

We know this is because his hour had not yet come. This explanation for their failure is given in chapter 7 verse 30. At this point Jesus crossed the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at the beginning.

We know from chapter 1 verse 28 that this site was Bethany. This reminder of the opening scenes of the gospel serves to bookend the intervening material. It also provides an actual point where we see an end of a phase of Jesus' ministry and we might be encouraged to consider its import.

One of the ways that the opening of the gospel of John is referred to here is in many people's confirmation of the testimony of John concerning Christ. John did no sign but everything that John said about this man was true. The people are recognizing the connection between John's ministry and Jesus' ministry and we're seeing that John's witness has been successful and effective in many people's cases.

The people were recognizing in Jesus what John the Baptist had been pointing to. A question to consider, I have suggested that at this point we have a natural juncture at which to look back to the beginning of the gospel and to think about the ground that we have covered since then before we move on to the next phase. In this recollection of the ministry of John and his testimony and having considered the testimony of Jesus that has followed, what initial judgments do you believe that the gospel writer wants us to arrive at? The raising of Lazarus in John chapter 11 is a pivotal event within the gospel.

It completes the cycle of seven signs that compose the book of signs which is the first half of John's gospel. It is also an event that sets in motion many of the things that will occur in the second half of the book, the book of glory, concerned with Christ's death and resurrection. It might even be regarded as the fulcrum upon which the book turns.

It is also important to consider some of the themes that are in play within it as we've seen in other episodes within the first half of the book of John. Figures within the book

can serve as archetypes or paradigms for understanding larger groups of people. The man born blind in chapter 9 for instance is a paradigmatic disciple.

Lazarus, a man who is loved by Christ and raised by his voice might be another example of a paradigmatic figure. In its introduction of Lazarus the chapter does not immediately tell us that he was the brother of Mary and Martha, rather it is said that he comes from their village of Bethany. The hearer of the gospel is presumed to know who Mary and Martha are already.

This might be an instance of John assuming knowledge of one of the synoptic gospels of his readers. In verse 2 we are told about the action of Mary that will occur in the chapter that follows. In reading the beginning of this chapter we should probably also pay attention to the order of days.

There is a first day that Jesus is told about the sickness of Lazarus, then there's a two-day waiting period and then there's four days that he has been in the tomb. This might suggest a seven-day pattern corresponding with the one that we see in chapters 1 and 2 of the gospel. In verse 4 Jesus declares that the illness will not lead to death.

We might assume that this means that Lazarus will not die. However Lazarus goes on to die which suggests that Jesus' words have failed. As we will later see the sickness does not ultimately lead to death, it leads through death however.

The illness is rather there to be a means by which Jesus is glorified. The raising of Lazarus will set a ball rolling that ultimately leads to Christ's crucifixion and to his own resurrection. It is also the most climactic sign, the event in which Jesus reveals his identity as the resurrection and the life.

As Jesus is glorified through the raising of Lazarus and as the raising of Lazarus sets things in motion for the culmination of Jesus' own mission and life, the stories of Jesus and Lazarus become entangled together in important ways. When Jesus finally determines to go to Judea on the third day his disciples are hesitant. They know that the Jews have been seeking to take Jesus' life and Thomas the Twin, presumably speaking for the other disciples, expresses his sense of foreboding.

Jesus speaks in a cryptic way about Lazarus having fallen asleep and his going to awake him. In verse 9 he talks about the importance of walking in the day when a person might see the light of this world. Jesus had formerly spoken of himself as the light of the world in chapter 9. Lazarus has fallen asleep, a state associated with the night, but now the light of the world is going to visit his situation and bring with him the dawn of Lazarus' resurrection.

Jesus' delay and absence from the scene is an important part of the story. In verse 15 we see it is one of the reasons why the sign will be more effective, leading people to

believe. Later on it will also be this detail that the two sisters highlight in their conversation with him.

When reading scripture we can often see literary structures and parallels that can help us to understand deeper meanings. In John chapter 11 Jesus' two encounters, his encounter with Martha and his encounter with Mary, are paralleled with each other and contrasted also. Both of them present Jesus with a similar challenge.

Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died. The similarity invites us to reflect both upon the likeness and also the differences between the two encounters. The difference that really stands out is what Martha says after that statement.

But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you. The later encounter with Mary does not include that element. Indeed Mary's association with the Jews at this point suggests some element of unbelief on her part.

There is a sort of contrast between the faith that Martha exhibits and the limited faith that Mary exhibits. In the Gospel of Luke we have a far more negative portrayal of Martha. She's the sister who is busy with the work of the house and fails to pay attention to the one who was visiting, Christ himself, whereas Mary was the one who sat at Jesus' feet.

Once again here we see Mary associated with Jesus' feet. She throws herself at his feet and later on in the chapter that follows she anoints his feet. And so there's a particular attachment that Mary has to Christ, a very personal attachment.

Yet perhaps it's more easily wounded as a result of that. She feels maybe that her love for Jesus has been wounded or betrayed by his failure to come when he was called. Martha does not seem to be quite so wounded by Jesus' absence.

She's still able to exhibit a sense of faith and hope even in this situation of tragedy. Even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you. Perhaps taking the synoptic portrayals of these two sisters and the portrayal of them in the Gospel of John together, we can recognize rounded personalities that have differing strengths and weaknesses.

Considering that John's Gospel is written so that we might believe and that in believing we might have life, John might want us to reflect upon these two paradigmatic responses to a sense of Christ's absence in tragedy. Jesus' delay is not out of an absence of love. Indeed in the Gospel Jesus' relationship with Lazarus is defined by love and in this episode Jesus enters into the emotions associated with the tragedy of human loss and the pain inflicted by the enemy of death.

That Jesus does not always turn up when people first need him is a spur to a dogged and persistent faith. Rather than doubting his character or his love, those who have faith are

supposed to persevere in the darkness, confident in his character that he will act in their situation. When Jesus declares to Martha that her brother will rise, she believes that he's referring only to some event in the distant future.

Jesus elicits and encourages her resurrection faith but he wants to take this faith even further. The statement of verse 25 is one of the strongest and most important in the Gospel. This is another one of the I am statements, a statement of divine identity.

However Jesus is also here presenting himself as resurrection and life come in person. We should think back when reading this chapter to chapter 5 verses 24 to 29. There Jesus stated, In this chapter Jesus gives a demonstration of the power of his word, the power that he possesses as one who has life in himself, and the way in which his voice is that which will raise the dead.

Resurrection is not a generic theological truth. It's not just a truth about some event that will befall people in the future. It's a personal reality present in Jesus Christ.

He is resurrection personified. He is the one who has life within himself. He is the one whose word will raise the dead and give life to those in the tomb.

When Jesus comes into this situation, he comes bringing life and the fullness of life with him. Jesus encourages Martha's faith in the resurrection by looking to him as the resurrection and the life, confident in his love for her brother Lazarus. Hearing the unbelief of the Jews and the cruel statements that they make, doubting his supposed love for Lazarus, Jesus is filled with indignation and with sorrow.

Seeing the place where his friend has been put to rest, he weeps, removing all doubt in the witnesses of his love for the deceased Lazarus. Jesus had assured Martha that if she believed she would see the glory of God. Yet she doubts, wondering about the odor if the tomb has opened up.

Jesus doesn't rebuke her for her weak faith. He encourages her to trust him and assures her that as she trusts him, she would see the glory of God. Throughout the gospel to this point, the connection between the work of Christ and the work of the Father has been highlighted.

Jesus does the works of the Father. He does them with the authorization of the Father. And here he publicly prays to the Father in order to demonstrate the authorization the Father has given to him.

He does not pray that the Father would raise Lazarus. But he thanks the Father that he has heard him and that he always hears him. Just as Jesus had said that the dead would hear the voice of the Son of God and those who heard would live, Jesus speaks the voice that gives life to Lazarus, summoning him to come out of the tomb.

Christ gives an anticipation of the general resurrection here. Once again, as with a number of the signs, Jesus' absence and then the power of his word are prominent themes within this story. It is the word of Christ that is the means of salvation and deliverance.

Christ speaks into that situation and those people who hear his word receive life. A question to consider. Jesus' first sign, the changing of the water into wine at the wedding of Cana, and this final sign involve a response to the request of a woman who loves him, first seemingly rebuffed or not answered, and then answered in response to a persistent faith.

What are some of the lessons that we can learn about faith and its relationship with prayer in this chapter? The conclusion of John chapter 11 is a key turning point within the narrative of the Gospel. Jesus has just raised Lazarus from the dead and many of the Jews who had gone to mourn with Mary and Martha had seen this and come back believing in him. Others went and told the Pharisees.

This was a cause of great concern. As Jesus was gathering a following, it was a threat to the authorities and their rule of the people. As Jesus' works become more and more remarkable and undeniable, he becomes a much greater threat.

Jesus had already caused a stir in Jerusalem at a number of feasts and they would not be surprised if he caused another stir in the Passover that was coming up. The gathering council may not be an official meeting of the entire Sanhedrin. However, whether it's an official assembly or not, many of the members of the Sanhedrin are gathering together to deliberate about what to do with this man Jesus.

In the following chapter in verses 10 to 11, they ended up planning to kill Lazarus as well. So the chief priest made plans to put Lazarus to death as well because on account of him, many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus. In verse 17 of that chapter, the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness.

The leaders went on to complain that the whole world was going after Jesus. The raising of Lazarus was such a remarkable miracle that it was very hard for people to avoid Jesus' glory. It had been manifest and the manifestation of that glory set in motion the events that would lead to his death.

In the Synoptic Gospels, the plot to kill Jesus is seen to arise more from the conflicts and antagonisms of Holy Week. However, in John's Gospel, there have already been several attempts to take Jesus' life. After the raising of Lazarus though, those plans become more formalized and determined.

The fact that the galvanization of the plots to take Jesus' life occurs after the raising of

Lazarus, perhaps can be understood in the light of Jesus' statements in chapter 15. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. The Pharisees and chief priests are concerned that if they don't deal with him immediately, they are going to be in real trouble.

Not merely because they will lose their religious influence over the people, but also because in losing that influence, the people will become more restive and there will be a threat of rebellion against the Romans. If this were to take place, they fear that the Romans would come and take away their place, the temple, and their nation. They would lose both their sanctuary and their national status.

The thing that animates them to crucify Jesus, of course, is something that happens to the nation about 40 years later. Although they tried to escape it in part through the crucifixion of Jesus, is ultimately this that will lead to them losing their place and nation. In the Gospels, we discover just how much they were enthralled to the Romans when in response to the announcement that Jesus is the king of the Jews, they declared that they have no king but Caesar.

Their concern to hang on to their nationhood and the temple at all costs actually led them to forfeit everything else. They ended up losing the very things that they should have guarded most jealously. For the sake of political expediency, they rejected the Messiah that was sent to them.

The statement that Caiaphas was high priest that year has led some commentators to suggest that John was ignorant of Jewish custom. High priests were generally high priests for life, not just for a period of a single year. However, it is far more natural to read this as a statement that Caiaphas' high priesthood happened to contain within it that most significant of years.

There is no reason to read this as suggesting that he was high priest only for that year. Caiaphas' reasons by political expediency, the threat of Jesus' growing influence, should be answered by putting him to death. By this means he would be an effective scapegoat.

If they speedily put him to death, the whole nation could be spared. Far better to take his life as soon as possible and save the nation than to allow his movement to gather further momentum and jeopardize the entire people. There is a profound irony in what Caiaphas says.

Although he is the ringleader of the conspirators, in the very words in which he lays out the plot, he unwittingly describes the salvation that Christ will bring about. For John, this is not just accidental irony. He sees the hand of the Holy Spirit as Caiaphas' high priest, causing him to utter a statement that means more than he understands.

The deliverance that Christ will offer to the nation is from an enemy far more pervasive

and powerful than the Romans, from Satan and from the power of sin itself. In John's theology, Jesus does in fact die for the nation of Israel. The faithful people of Israel are gathered together as a flock under him as the Good Shepherd.

And not just the faithful people of Israel, but also the children of God who are scattered abroad, so that they might become one flock under one shepherd. Perhaps John intends a contrast between the Pharisees and the chief priests gathering together of the council, and Jesus gathering together of the children of God. While they had previously sought to put him to death, now they start to make more determined and purposeful plans.

Theirs will not merely be a spur-of-the-moment attempt at a stoning, but is a cunning plot to take his life at the most carefully considered time. Knowing that they seek to take his life, Jesus no longer walks openly among them. He leaves the area and goes to the region near the wilderness, to a place called Ephraim.

There he stays in a place where he is out of the way. We don't know for exactly how long this stay was. It could have been for a few months.

However, the Passover will be the next natural time when he would be in Jerusalem. And when the Passover comes and people are heading towards Jerusalem, they naturally speculate about whether Jesus will be there for the feast, as he has been on previous occasions. Ramsey-Michaels notes that the reference to the region or the country in verse 55 might not refer to the country more generally, but to the region where Jesus has been staying.

The people of that out-of-the-way region knew that Jesus was among them, and they were curious, knowing that he was hiding, about whether he would be in Jerusalem at the time of the feast. While Jesus' life had been in danger in going to Jerusalem before, in chapter 7 for instance, now the authorities were far more determined to capture him. They were actively looking for informants to tell them about his whereabouts.

A question to consider. In our systematic theologies, we can often speak about the character of the death of Christ and what he achieved through his atonement. Within the Gospels, however, what we are given is primarily a narrative of Christ's death.

These narratives don't come in the form of atonement doctrines for the most part. Rather, we have to deduce some sort of understanding of what Jesus' death achieves from the actual story. What can we learn from this chapter, and the way that Jesus' death is described in relationship to Lazarus, and then also in relationship to the nation of Israel and the children of God throughout all of the world? In John chapter 12, the Passover has nearly arrived, and Jesus goes to Bethany, where there's a meal celebrated in his honour.

He's hosted by Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, whom he raised in the preceding

chapter. As at the end of Luke chapter 10, Martha is serving Jesus, the honoured guest, while Mary is found at his feet. On this occasion, however, she's not listening to him teach.

She's performing this dramatic symbolic act upon him, pouring out precious ointment upon him, and drying his feet with her hair. We find an account of a similar event in each of the synoptic Gospels. In Matthew chapter 26, verses 6 to 13, in Mark chapter 14, verses 3 to 9, and in Luke chapter 7, verses 36 to 50.

The accounts in Matthew and Mark are particularly similar to the account of John. All occur at Bethany in the run-up to the Passover. Matthew and Mark both mention an alabaster flask.

Mark and John both record the fact that the ointment could have been sold for 300 denarii, and the fact that the ointment was pure nard. Matthew, Mark and John all relate it to the coming burial of Jesus. Matthew, Mark and John all mention an objection to her actions, but John alone attributes the objection to Judas in particular.

Matthew and Mark both relate the event to Judas' betrayal, which immediately follows it. The woman in Luke's account is a sinful woman, and the issue is not the costliness of the ointment, but the fact that the woman was a sinner, and Jesus, although he was supposedly a prophet, allowed this sinful woman to come near him and to perform this act upon him. Luke's account occurs in the house of Simon the Pharisee.

It's likely an event that occurs much earlier in Galilee, rather than in Bethany in the days immediately prior to the last Passover. It provides the occasion for a parable about forgiveness. Luke's account seems to refer then to a different event, earlier in the ministry of Jesus.

There are some similarities, but the differences are quite pronounced. Matthew, Mark and John's accounts, however, clearly relate to the same event. But there are problems.

Matthew and Mark's accounts seem to be dated two days before the Passover. John's account, by contrast, appears to occur six days prior to the Passover. To harmonize these accounts, we could argue that one or more of the accounts are placed out of chronological sequence.

Perhaps Matthew and Mark's account is out of sequence, designed to connect the occasion of Judas' decision to betray Jesus with the plotting of the Jewish leaders that surrounds both of their accounts. Alternatively, we could argue that John's account has an unclear chronological sequence. Jesus came to Bethany six days before the Passover, but stayed there over the days prior to the crucifixion.

While the meal occurred after the triumphal entry, John chooses to mention it at this point, in connection with Jesus' arrival in Bethany. Perhaps in order to create a clearer

narrative progression from the raising of Lazarus, which Mary's action looks back to, and the movement towards Jesus' own death as he enters Jerusalem. Particularly important in the sequence of John's Gospel is the way that the action of Mary here anticipates Jesus' own act of washing his disciples' feet in the following chapter.

There are other differences between John's account and the accounts in Matthew and Mark. Neither Matthew nor Mark mention that the woman who performed the action was Mary. Reading both of their accounts, we might think that the woman was just a random person at the feast, not the hostess.

That noted, however, Mary and Martha are not characters in Matthew or Mark, but only in Luke and John. Matthew and Mark also focus upon the woman's action in pouring the ointment on Jesus' head, not mentioning his feet. For John, though, the action focuses upon his feet, and unlike the others, involves wiping his feet with her hair.

In this regard, it has a strong similarity with the action of the woman in Luke chapter 7, who wept, wet Jesus' feet with her tears, wiped them with the hair of her head, kissed his feet, and anointed them then with the ointment. At least on the surface of things, Mary's action here in John seemingly makes less sense, as she seems to be wiping off the ointment with which she is anointing the feet. The differences between these accounts can be harmonized.

It's easy to imagine Mary anointing Jesus' head and anointing his feet too as a secondary action, anointing him from head to toe. The chronological tensions between the accounts could also be resolved in a number of different ways. However, this still leaves us with the challenge of accounting for why the gospel accounts of such incidents would have so many tensions between them, and why their different accounts would give hearers rather different impressions of what actually took place, impressions that are also rather at odds with the way that we might harmonize them.

Here I think it is very important to recognize that while the gospel writers were recording actual historical events, and their accounts can be harmonized, their accounts are doing much more than simply telling the readers what happened in blow-by-blow, eyewitness descriptions. Rather, each of the accounts have theological purposes, and the literary structure and setting and the framework of these different texts are designed to highlight theological connections. In the description of the wiping of Jesus' feet while he is sitting at table, with expensive nard for instance, the attentive hearer who knows the Hebrew scriptures might observe an allusion back to Song of Solomon 1.12. While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance.

This allusion would present Jesus as the king and the bridegroom of his people, themes that are important elsewhere in the Gospel of John. The fact that Mary is identified here, and the action that she performs is associated with Jesus' feet rather than his head, might also draw to mind the way that Mary is associated more generally with Jesus' feet.

In the preceding chapter, she falls at Jesus' feet weeping after he visits following the death of Lazarus.

In Luke chapter 10, she is learning at Jesus' feet, and now she is anointing Jesus' feet. The person who knows the story of Luke chapter 7 and the sinful woman who weeps and washes Jesus' feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair, and then anointing the feet with oil, might recognize that Mary is now performing this action in two different stages. In chapter 11, she wept at his feet, and now she is anointing his feet.

The way that the event is presented also creates a connection between the death and the raising of Lazarus, and Jesus' coming death and burial. In her action, Mary is expressing her deep gratitude for Jesus' raising of her brother Lazarus. She is also anticipating Jesus' own death and coming burial.

Why focus on the feet in particular? We've already observed the connection between Mary and the feet of Jesus. Beyond this, in the chapter that follows, Jesus washes his own disciples' feet and wipes them with a towel. If, as in Matthew and Mark's Gospel, the action of the woman only focused upon anointing Jesus' head, and his feet were absent from the picture, no strong connection would be formed between the woman's anointing of Jesus' feet and Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet.

However, by focusing upon what Mary does to Jesus' feet, John can invite reflection upon the parallels between what Mary does and what Jesus does. We might also contrast the fear of the stench of the body of the dead Lazarus in the preceding chapter and the glorious smell of the anointed body of Jesus in this one. The stench of Lazarus' dead body is now replaced with the fragrant oil that's placed over a living person, but a living person in anticipation of his death.

The house is described as having been filled with the fragrance. We might see a possible reference to places like Isaiah chapter 6 verse 4, where the smoke of the incense fills the temple. Alternatively, we might think the way that the spirit of the Lord, represented by the cloud, fills the temple.

Mary of Bethany, in both Luke's Gospel and in John's, seems to have a very strong connection with Jesus' presence. In the preceding chapter, she came across as a woman who felt some sort of betrayal at Jesus' absence and distance at the time of her loss. Now, however, she expresses her gratitude with this remarkable act performed upon his body, expressing the immense value that she places upon his presence.

Her extravagant act is contrasted with Judas' betrayal and wickedness. Judas' love and fixation upon money contrasts with the extravagant gift of someone who truly recognizes a value beyond price. The oil in question would have cost an immense amount of money, more than many women would have inherited.

This was a remarkable act to perform. Jesus sees it as a preparation for his death, but it also has overtones of a coronation. It's an anointing, and in the resurrection, these two themes can be reconciled.

In John's Gospel, Jesus' movement towards death and burial is not just a movement down, it's a movement towards being glorified. In the rest of the chapter, there are various references to Jesus being glorified by the Father. At this point, it is not just Jesus who is drawing the attention of the crowds, but Lazarus too.

It is a remarkable thing to see a man who has been raised from the dead, and the Jews are concerned to stop the attention that Lazarus is drawing towards Jesus. Their attempt to kill a man who has been raised from the dead shows the way that they are siding with death. Resurrection itself is a threat to their power, and the power of death is part of the means by which they sustain their rule.

Here we also see the way that the servant becomes like the master. The disciple Lazarus, as he manifests something of the power and the life of Christ, is persecuted on account of Jesus. The next day, Jesus is surrounded by a great crowd that take branches from palm trees and go out to meet him, shouting Hosanna, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.

This is a great welcome to the city, as a returning king or a military deliverer. We might even see this as an image of God returning to his people. John points the attention of the heroes of the gospel to the prophecy of Zechariah at this point.

In Zechariah 9, verse 9, Fear not, daughter of Zion, behold your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt. The other gospel accounts give a lot of attention to the finding of the donkeys. Here, however, there is more attention to the witness of the crowd, the way that they declare Jesus to be the King of Israel, the one who has come in the name of the Lord.

He is the Messiah, and the crowd are described as bearing witness to him. Witness language is very prominent and important throughout the gospel of John, so it is not surprising that it should be highlighted at this point. A question to consider, beyond the fact that Judas was a thief who wanted the money for himself, why might his argument that the ointment should have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor be an inappropriate one to make? John chapter 12, verse 20, tells us of some Greeks who had come to worship at the Feast of Passover.

The exact identity of these Greeks is not entirely clear. Perhaps they were part of the diaspora, or perhaps they were actual Gentiles. I think it's most likely that they were actual Gentiles.

These men come to Philip from Bethsaida and Galilee and tell him that they want to see

Jesus. Why do they come to Philip? Philip has a Greek name. He comes from a region, Bethsaida and Galilee, where there is a lot more interaction between Jews and Gentiles.

Someone who perhaps was more distant from the elites, and as a result would be more approachable. Philip then goes and tells Andrew, and Andrew and Philip go and tell Jesus. And this movement, when they're going, spreading news, going from one to another, and moving towards Jesus, is reminiscent perhaps of what we see at the end of chapter 1, although working in a different direction.

The movement here is towards Jesus, rather than going out to tell others about him. Greeks are being drawn to Jesus. And this is a sign that the hour has come that Jesus should be glorified.

Jesus' death is presented in almost natural terms here, as a grain dying and rising to produce much fruit. The way that the death and resurrection of Christ are connected within the Gospel of John is often interesting and surprising. It's presented as a sort of birth event, following after pangs.

It's presented as a grain of wheat falling into the ground and then coming up to new life with fruit. It's presented as Christ laying down his life, as he has authority to take it back up again. So the death is in order for the resurrection.

And here, the arrival of the Greeks seems to serve as a sign that Christ's hour has come. When the nations start to arrive, he must be lifted up. And I, if I'm lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to myself.

This is a fulfilment of prophecies typically related to the temple or to the mountain of God. For instance, in Isaiah chapter 2, verses 1 to 4, the word that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be lifted up above the hills and all the nations shall flow to it. And many people shall come and say, come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.

For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations and he shall decide disputes for many peoples. And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. The Greeks are then in anticipation of what's to come, a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. There's no mention of a voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism or on the Mount of Transfiguration in John, but there is a voice from heaven here.

The voice declares that the Father will glorify his name and has already glorified it. The

theme of glory, again, is an important one within this chapter. Jesus speaks of his death and resurrection as his glorification.

And there is a sort of double entendre in the statement that he is going to be lifted up. He's lifted up on the cross, but he's also lifted up in authority and rule. And that connection between the death of Christ and his exaltation is particularly distinct within the Gospel of John.

You do not see that to quite the same extent in the other Gospels, where there's a movement down and then up, whereas in John, the lifting up occurs at the cross itself. Christ speaks about himself also as the light, a light that will be among them for just a little while longer, and they should walk while they have the light rather than in darkness. Having Jesus with them at this point, it's important that they believe in response to him.

And Jesus goes on to speak about the failure of people to respond in reflecting upon the prophecy of Isaiah, Lord who has believed what he has heard from us and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed. This is a verse from the great chapter 53, a chapter which is often used to reflect upon Christ from the Old Testament. He then brings them back to perhaps one of the most classic texts within Jesus' ministry, within Isaiah, referring to Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 6 and the fact that people have their eyes blinded, hearts hardened, they cannot see with their eyes or understand with their heart.

The Gospel of John tells us that Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. Now, whose glory? Spoke of whom? It's referring to Christ. What is the glory that he saw? Well, in chapter 6, it's the Lord high and lifted up.

It's the Lord whose glory fills the temple. Even in this chapter where the theme of glory is quite prominent, to connect the glory of Christ with that glorious theophany is a remarkable thing. What is being said here is that Jesus is the one that Isaiah saw high and lifted up.

In some ways, in the Old Testament, we see Christ as a silhouette, a figure who is presented in these great theophanies. We can see Ezekiel's vision in chapter 1 or the vision of Moses in chapter 33 and 34 of Exodus, or this event that John recalls in Isaiah chapter 6. What John and the other Gospel writers are saying then is that Jesus is this one, the one whom you did not necessarily know in the Old Testament, the one in whom the glory of God was seen, now has come in person. We know his name.

We have interacted with him directly and this is the one whose glory is declared. But the authorities fail to believe in him and even when they do believe, as some do here, they do not confess it because they're afraid of the Pharisees and being cast out of the synagogue. And again, the theme of glory comes up.

They love the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. Perhaps there's some double entendre here as well. The glory that comes from God is Jesus Christ and it's also the honour that comes from God.

Jesus challenges people at this point and shows them the way that he is the dividing line by which things will be judged. He has come into the world as light so that people can be freed from the darkness and enter into the light. But yet, if people do not obey his word, he's not going to be the one that judges them.

Rather, he occasions the judgment. He is the one whose word will judge them on the last day. They have seen the light.

They have been exposed to the truth and yet if they have rejected that, they have no excuse left. The fact that some would prefer not being excluded from the synagogues by the Pharisees over being honoured by Christ on the last day is a terrifying and sobering exposure of just how misplaced our priorities often are. A question to reflect upon.

In chapter 12, John continues to explore key themes that pervade his gospel. Light, glory, judgment, authority, witness, commandment, and other such themes that can be found throughout the book. Now would be a good time to reflect upon some of the ways in which these themes have been developed to this point.

To try and draw together some of the threads from the various chapters that we have read and to think about some of the deeper thrust of these themes as they've been played out. John chapter 13 is a very important chapter helping us to understand the meaning of Christ's death. We should begin by noticing the similarities between chapter 12 verses 1 to 8 and chapter 13 verses 1 to 11.

There's a meal before the Passover. There's washing feet. There's a reference to coming death.

In the synoptic gospels, Jesus performs an action symbolizing his death in his institution of the Lord's Supper. Here, Jesus performs a different symbolic action with a similar purpose. We might ask why John omits any reference to the institution of the supper.

Why does his chronology seem to place the last supper before the celebration of the Passover? Perhaps because John wishes to present Jesus as the Passover lamb. We see this in chapter 1 verses 29 and 36, also in chapter 19 verse 36. Luke is all about meals and eating, but John has focused upon water and washing.

It's not entirely surprising then that the symbol of Christ's death here is a washing action rather than a meal. Also, as I've noted on other occasions, John could probably presume that the majority of his hearers were familiar with at least one of the synoptics. He would not need to repeat something that they were already familiar with.

Of course, they would be familiar not only with the story, but also with the instituted practice of the Lord's Supper that they were presumably practicing in their communities. Verse 1 to 3 present us with a situation within which all of the key details have been aligned, and the scene is fully set for what takes place next. Jesus knows that his hour has come.

This was heralded in the preceding chapter with the reference to the Greeks coming. This was a sign that his hour had arrived. He's going to depart out of the world to the Father.

He's loved his own who are in the world, loving them to the end. And during the supper, the devil puts into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray him. And he knows that the Father has given all things into his hands, that he has come from God, and that he is going to God.

All of the pieces are now in place, and Jesus gets up, takes the towel, washes his disciples' feet, and dries them with the towel. The deliberate manner in which the action is entered into underlines its significance. The more that Jesus is exalted, the more that he sows to serve his people.

The very first thing that Jesus does when he knows that the Father has given all things into his hands, is to take those hands and use them to wash his disciples' feet. The costliness of the liquid was stressed in chapter 12 verse 3, when Mary anointed Jesus' feet with the nard in a way that anticipates this event. Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet is achieved with a far more costly liquid, with his own blood.

The foot washing ultimately points to what Jesus is going to do in his death. It is a symbol of Jesus' love for his disciples. He loved them to the end, the end referring to his death.

He removes his garments, as they will be removed at his crucifixion, wrapping himself in the linen towel, as he will be wrapped in linen cloths at his burial. He lays down his life in order to take it up again, and here he lays aside his garments in order to take them up again. The disciples are reclining to eat, and their feet would have been outside of the sphere of conversation or fellowship, a realm that Jesus enters, in order to minister to them.

Once again the disciples would only fully understand the meaning of Jesus' action at a later point, when they saw what he did in the cross and resurrection. The washing is absolutely essential. Without Jesus' act of service, we would have no part in him, and Peter's objection is in some ways parallel to Judas' objection in the preceding chapter.

Judas objected to the costliness of the liquid that was poured upon the feet, and presented this argument that seemed very pious on the surface, that it should be given to the poor. Peter's objection is an objection to the symbolic action displaying the

necessary work of Christ. Why should my master, the one who is so much greater than me, engage in this action for me? Judas is headed for betrayal, Peter is headed for denial.

Both of their forms of resistance are resisting something that needs to be done. What should we make of verse 10, where Jesus says that the one who is bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean? Perhaps it should be taken as a reference to baptism and all that that stands for. The feet are the part of the body that come into direct contact with the judgment bearing dust.

The foot washing is more akin, perhaps, to the forgiveness of sins over the course of the Christian life, as we continually return to our first washing. It isn't just a symbol of Christ's death, though. It's also a model to follow.

This is the form that our life should take together with others. It's the way that we should follow the example of Christ, in setting aside our supposed priority and putting others before ourselves. Jesus quotes Psalm 49, verse 1, speaking of Judas.

The psalm itself has interesting resonances. Perhaps the opening statement of it, Blessed is the one who considers the poor, might remind us of Judas' false concern for the poor in the preceding chapter. The psalm then speaks of enemies, saying of David that he is lying down, never to rise up, in the verse prior to the one that Jesus quotes.

David praised God that he would raise him up, in verse 10 of the psalm, the verse after the one that Jesus quotes. All of these themes seem to be fulfilled in Christ's death and resurrection. In the final hours prior to Jesus' capture, we are told that Jesus was troubled in his spirit.

A similar expression was used a chapter earlier, in chapter 12, verse 27. Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. The coming of the long-awaited hour is a theme that runs throughout the Gospel of John.

The hour is the hour of Christ's suffering and his death. It's also paradoxically the hour of his glorification. Nevertheless, it's a time of great anguish, and the troubling of spirit that Jesus experiences here is similar to that described in the synoptic Gospels in the context of Gethsemane.

Jesus makes a solemn statement about the fact that one of the twelve will betray him. The disciples, uncertain about what he might mean, inquire among themselves. The psalm in Peter inquires of the disciple closest to Jesus, the disciple whom Jesus loves, reclining in Jesus' bosom.

This description of the beloved disciple, the author of the Gospel of John, is one that should remind us of chapter 1 verse 18, where the word is described as being in the

bosom of the Father. In both cases, we see that a witness is qualified for their witness-bearing by virtue of their intimate relationship with the one to whom they bear witness. Chapter 13 verse 2 declared that Satan had put the plan to betray Christ into the heart of Judas, and now in verse 27, he entered into Judas personally.

This occurred after Jesus gave Judas the morsel. In Romans chapter 12 verse 20, Paul uses a related verb to the noun that John uses here for morsel to describe the way that we should give something to a hungry enemy to eat. As Matthew Colvin has observed in writing about this, Jesus gives a morsel to his enemy at this point.

After he has given that morsel, Satan enters into Judas and Judas goes out. There is a symbolic power to this exchange, beyond the fact that it reveals Jesus' knowledge of his betrayer. This is a final act of grace of Jesus towards Judas.

It's a final opportunity for Judas to draw back from the brink. The words that follow are incredibly powerful and illustrate something of the ability of the gospel writers to establish the emotional tone and theological force of a scene with the greatest economy of details. And it was night.

Throughout the scripture, mention of the rising or the setting of the sun are seldom purely incidental. We might think of the rising of the sun as Jacob limps away from the fort of the Jabbok, or the rising of the sun after the crossing of the Red Sea and the waters coming back over the Egyptians. We might think of the sun setting upon Sodom as the angels meet Lot at the gate.

In the gospel of John, the period of darkness that begins here lasts until the discovery of the resurrection in chapter 20, where the light of a new day dawns. The gospel of John explores themes of darkness and light throughout. Jesus is the light that has entered into the world.

In John chapter 9 verses 4 to 5, we have an example of such speech. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work.

As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. The sun of righteousness is now going to be eclipsed in death before rising again on Easter morning. Judas goes out into the darkness of the night, while the rest of the company remains in the light of Jesus' presence.

In giving the morsel to Judas and instructing him to do what he is about to do quickly, Jesus actively consents to and precipitates the events that will lead up to his capture and his crucifixion. The giving of the morsel and the departure of Judas is something of a watershed. A chapter earlier, a similar watershed moment occurred as the Greeks came to see Jesus.

Jesus then spoke that the time had come for the Son of Man to be glorified. In verse 27

to 32 of that chapter, he has spoken further about that coming glorification. In verses 31 to 32 of chapter 13, this glorification is in the process of happening.

References to the Son of Man are not as common in the book of John as they are in the synoptics. They are also largely clustered in the first half of the book. When Jesus does speak about the Son of Man, he is mostly speaking about the Son of Man being lifted up or glorified.

This probably looks back to Daniel chapter 7, where the Son of Man comes to receive the kingdom from the ancient of days on the clouds of heaven. The glorification is spoken of as something that has already occurred, but also as something that will occur in some sense. It has definitively taken place, but in another sense it still waits to be outworked.

Jesus here refers back to the conversation that he had with the Jews in chapter 7 verses 33 to 36, where he has spoken about his departure. There he had said that he would only be with them a little longer, that he was going to the one who had sent him, and that they would not be able to find him. Jesus makes a similar statement to his own disciples here.

He follows this by teaching them what he calls a new commandment. A commandment that they love each other as Jesus has loved them. There is perhaps a paradoxical character to this.

On the one hand, such a commandment to love does not seem to say anything that we do not encounter in the Old Testament itself. On the other hand, however, it is described as a new commandment. The paradoxical character of this commandment is even more clearly seen in 1st John chapter 2 verses 7 to 8. Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning.

The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. We see something similar in 2nd John verses 5 and 6. And now I ask you, dear lady, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning, that we love one another.

And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. We find a related statement in John chapter 15 verses 9 to 10.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

How ought we to understand the newness of this commandment? It seems to me that it

is especially important that this love is demonstrated by Jesus himself. We love as he has loved us. The former commandment to love, which summed up and fulfilled the law, could summarize the commandments, but it had not been concretely realized in history.

In the way that the commandment to love is realized in the person of Jesus and in his sacrifice, in the new covenant, love is not just the overriding principle of proper behavior in relationship to God and neighbor. Love is witnessed in the person of Jesus Christ and in his redemptive action, and the love that is witnessed is the love of God himself. As we receive the love of God in Christ, we should express that love to others as we love them as he has loved us.

Love then is not just an ethical principle. It is a fact and reality of history known in the person and the work of Jesus Christ. As we live out of this reality, we are fulfilling the new commandment in which all of the old commandments are fulfilled and brought to their proper telos in the new covenant, writing the law of God upon the hearts of a people that now embody love.

Earlier in this chapter, Jesus played out the sacrificial action that he would perform on the cross in washing his disciples' feet and drying them. That is the example that we should follow, and it will be the means by which people know that we are his disciples. It should mark us out, rendering us recognizable as the true disciples of Christ.

Picking up on Jesus' statement in verse 33, Simon Peter asks him where he is going, and then asks why he cannot follow him. At this point in time, he is already prepared to die for him. In response, Jesus foretells Peter's threefold denial of him.

The crowing of the rooster perhaps related to Peter's own boastfulness. It would serve as a fitting sign that alerted Peter to the fulfillment of this prophecy. As we see within this chapter, Jesus is neither blindsided by Jesus' betrayal, nor by Peter's denial.

He predicts both of them. He is the master of what is taking place, not the mere victim of events or of fate. This helps us in part to understand the paradox of the way in which Jesus' death in the Gospel of John can also be seen as Jesus' act by which he is raised up, an event of glorification.

A question to consider, Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial at the end of this chapter might recall the earlier exchange with Peter in chapter 13 of John, where Peter initially refused to have Jesus wash his feet. How did these conversations between Jesus and Peter help us better to understand the significance of the cross and how the disciples stand relative to it? Discussing Jesus' farewell discourse in the Gospel of John, Frederick Dale Brunner suggests that we find a father sermon, a son sermon, and then a spirit sermon. In this part, Jesus reveals the way to the father, the truth of the father, and the life from the father.

The big question that hangs over John chapter 14 and the chapters that follow is that of how the disciples would relate to Jesus after he had gone, and the question of how Jesus would in some form come to his disciples after that point. Of course, Jesus would come again to his disciples in the resurrection. He would come again to his disciples in the gift of the spirit.

He would come again to his disciples in his presence at particular moments and particular acts, and then he would come to his disciples in a climactic manner on the great day of the Lord. But at this point, the disciples are unsettled. They've been told that Peter is going to deny Jesus.

They have some inkling, perhaps, that Judas is about to betray him, and they know that something is going to happen to Jesus in the coming day. All of this is weighing upon them. Jesus speaks to them in that condition, Do not let your hearts be troubled.

The charge that he gives here is one that contrasts with his own internal state. He is very troubled in his spirit at this point. The charge that he gives them is one that recalls the sort of charge that Moses gave to Joshua.

Joshua was called to be strong and courageous, not to lose heart, to be confident as he went forward. Like the departing leader Moses, Jesus addresses his disciples on his departure. He is concerned for his disciples at this point, calling them to believe in God and to believe also in him.

The connection that he establishes between faith in the Father and faith in himself at this point is significant. Perhaps it reminds us of the statement we find in the story of the Exodus in chapter 14 verse 31, where the people believe in God and in Moses following the Red Sea crossing. Jesus goes on to talk about the fact that there are many rooms in his Father's house.

Where is the Father's house? Perhaps the best way to think of it is as the temple of Jesus' own body. This is less a dwelling place than it is an indwelling place. Jesus will take his disciples to himself.

Many understand this as a reference to heaven and the eternal state. This may be part of the picture. However, I think there is a much more immediate fulfillment than this.

I don't believe that the place that Jesus is preparing is heaven per se, rather the place is his body, the church. As we will see in the book of Revelation, the church is prepared in heaven, but it is prepared on earth too. In order to prepare this place, Jesus must die, rise again, ascend into heaven, and give the spirit to form the church, bringing us into God's presence.

This interpretation can be strengthened by other references to God's dwelling in this chapter, especially in verse 23. Jesus and the Father will make their home with the

believer, making the believer a room in the new temple that Christ is preparing. On the last day, the new Jerusalem will descend from heaven, as we see in Revelation chapter 21 verse 2. Jesus declares that he is the only way to the Father here.

He is the one who comes from the bosom of the Father, and he is the one who will lead his people into the presence of the Father. He speaks of himself as the way, the truth, and the life. He is the truth throughout the Gospel of John.

Throughout, he has been describing himself as the true version of things. He is the true light coming into the world. He is the true bread from heaven.

He is the true vine. And he is not just the true this or that or the other. He is the truth.

He is also the one who has life in himself. He is the source of eternal life. He is unique in all of these aspects.

There is no other person like him, and there is no other way to the Father save them through him. He is the image of the Father. He is the only begotten son.

He declares that if you've seen him, you have seen the Father. The Father is known in Jesus. Jesus does the Father's work.

He acts with the Father's authority. He speaks the Father's words. And the Father is in him.

If you want to know the Father, you will know the Father in Jesus. And Jesus is the way. On several occasions in the Old Testament, there are contrasts between different ways.

The way that leads to life, and the way that leads to death. The way of wisdom, and the way of folly. The early church came to be known as the way.

Jesus is the way into God's very presence. He is, as the author of Hebrews states, the new and living way into heaven itself. The movement that Jesus will make in his death, resurrection, and ascension will blaze the trail and lead the way by which his people can have access to God.

By which they can approach the Father. Jesus declares to his disciples that whatever they ask in his name, he will do for them. For the Father's glory.

They will act as representatives of Jesus' personal rule. They will act as authorized agents continuing his work. As they do so, he promises that they'll perform greater works than he has done.

They are continuing his work in the power of his spirit. It is because he goes away, ascends to God's presence, and receives the fullness of the authority of the Spirit which he gives to his church, that they will perform these greater works. As we proceed

through this chapter, and those that follow, we'll see a lot more said about Jesus' disciples, and how they should relate to him after his death, resurrection, and ascension, and Pentecost.

This is all preparing them for what is about to come. Jesus is speaking to them in their doubts, struggles, difficulties, fears, and anxieties, giving them the confidence and the comfort that they need to go forward. A question to consider.

Working through these chapters, we can see that there is a progression in Jesus' argument. An argument that is presenting a response to a very immediate problem. The problem of the fear of the disciples and their anxiety.

However, it speaks to something far beyond this. Speaking to the continuing life of the church, and what it means to relate to a savior who has seemingly left the scene. What are some of the ways in which Jesus' teaching here, and John's framing of his gospel narrative more generally, equip us to live when Christ seems to be absent? The second half of John chapter 14 continues the theme of Jesus' coming.

Jesus is responding to the anxiety of his disciples, as he has told them that he is going away. But he's also addressing the reality of the church afterwards. The fact that we do not have Christ physically present with us.

How is it that we can relate to a Christ who seems absent from us? And so he speaks of a fourfold coming. You can think about his coming in the resurrection, his coming at Pentecost, his coming in specific acts of power and presence within the history of the church, and then his coming on the final day to take his people to himself. Jesus speaks about all of these as ways in which he's going to be with and near to his disciples, even after he has physically left and gone to his father.

In verse 16 and 17, he speaks about the gift of the spirit, that the gift of the spirit will be a way in which he gives his presence to his disciples. As the spirit is given, the spirit will be one who calls alongside, literally, or someone who's a helper or a friend or a comforter or an encourager or an advocate. All of these could be interpretations of the term that is used here.

The spirit of truth. The truth is associated with the witness that is spoken of throughout the book of John. Christ bears witness.

John the Baptist bears witness. And now the spirit of truth will bear witness. The truth will not be received by the world.

The spirit will not be received by the world. It does not see and it does not know the spirit. Earlier on we've been told that the wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.

And so it is with everyone born of the spirit. The spirit and those born of it will not truly be recognized by the world. But yet the disciples know the spirit.

He dwells with them at that moment. He dwells with them in Christ. And later on, as a result of Pentecost, he will be in them, empowering them and also giving them a sense of Christ's presence.

Christ assures them that he will not leave them as orphans. He himself will come to them. They're going to experience his absence in a very keen way in a few days time as he is in the tomb and they feel bereft of him.

They have no hope. And yet he will return to them. And although the world will not see him, they will see him.

And because he lives, they will live. Because of his resurrection, they will be resurrected. And in that day, they will know that Christ is in the father.

They'll have an assurance of Christ's relationship with the Lord and the giver of life. And they will also be assured in that moment of their relationship with Christ. Not just that Christ is the true image of the father, the word of the father, but also that they and we are connected with him.

In verse 15, Jesus spoke of those who loved him, keeping his commandments. In verse 21, he speaks of the same thing. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.

And he who loves me will be loved by my father and I will love him and manifest myself to him. This connection between love and keeping the commandments of Christ is an important one. When we look through the Gospel of John, we will have a clearer sense of what the commandments involve.

First of all, Christ commands his disciples to receive and believe what he gives them. And then he calls them to love one another. And that keeping of his commandments refers to those two things, to believing in him and loving each other.

As they believe and receive Christ and love each other, it will be a manifestation of the fact that they love Christ. These are themes that are all explored within John's first epistle, where John talks at length about how do we know that we know Christ as we keep his commandments. Judas, not Iscariot, asks Christ how it is that he will manifest himself to his disciples but not to the world.

In his answer, Jesus teaches that he and his father will come to the one that loves him and keeps his word. And it will be in that person that that presence is particularly known. Jesus has already spoken about the spirit being given to the disciples as a whole.

But here there seems to be more of an individual emphasis. When the spirit comes, whom the father will send in Christ's name, he will teach the disciples all things that they need to know. So they will be made aware of everything that they need to know.

This may be a reference primarily to the apostles, not to disciples in general, to the apostles who will spread their inspired teachings to the rest of the church so that the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. At the conclusion of this chapter, Jesus returns to the theme with which he began it. At the beginning, he told his disciples to not let their hearts be troubled.

And now he gives them his peace and he assures them once again that their hearts should not be troubled, that they should not be afraid. He is assuring them that he is going away but he will come to them in these various ways. And if they love him, they will rejoice because he's going to his father and his father will give him all authority and will send the spirit in his name.

So it's better for them and for him that he goes. And now he's told these things before they take place so that when it does take place, they will, first of all, not be afraid but also that they will have proof of his words, that they will believe. As if interrupting a conversation to look at a clock to be reminded of an imminent appointment, Jesus tells his disciples that he cannot talk much longer with them because the ruler of this world is coming, Satan, however, has no claim upon Christ.

He does as the father has commanded him and so Satan has no purchase upon him. Satan can't ultimately defeat him. He can't hold on to him and as he does what the father has commanded to him, the world will know that he loves the father.

A question to reflect upon. Jesus says to his disciples that when the helper or the Holy Spirit will be sent by the father, he will also bring to their remembrance all that Christ has said to them. Throughout the gospel we've seen on a number of different occasions Jesus saying things to his disciples that they did not understand at the time or which perplexed and confused them.

Can you think of some of these examples? Examples that were later understood in the light of the resurrection and the coming of Christ at Pentecost by the gift of the Spirit. On several occasions in the Gospel of John, Jesus identifies himself as the true something. He is the true light.

He is the true bread. He elsewhere speaks of the true worshippers that are coming. Here in chapter 15, he speaks of himself as the true vine.

He is the reality to which all other things point or anticipate. They will find their realisation or their fullness in him. Furthermore, in saying I am the true vine, Jesus is also likely once more hinting at his divinity.

The image of the vine was associated with Israel in places such as Isaiah chapter 5 or in Psalm 80. The vine and the olive tree are both sacramental trees, one giving wine and the other giving oil. And I don't think it's accidental that Jesus speaks of himself as the true version of these things.

He is the true vine and as such the true root and source of Israel's identity. As we look in the prophets, we will especially see this arboreal imagery, this language of trees and vines, plantings of the Lord, etc. being used in a messianic context.

Israel is the vine. The Messiah is the branch or the root, the one from whom a new Israel or Davidic dynasty will arise. Jesus, by identifying himself as the vine, gives us an image of a restored people of God arising from him, a broader people that has something of the character of Israel itself.

The relationship between the father as the vinedresser and the son as the vine is interesting. It ties in with other descriptions that we find in the gospels. People are committed to the son's care by the father and also removed from it in certain cases.

The word that is translated prunes is also the word used for cleansed. So in verse 2 and verse 3 it is the same root word that's being used of the pruning of the tree and Jesus' cleansing of his disciples by his word. We might even think back to the Old Testament and the way that the cutting back of the tree and the cleansing of the tree might be clarified in part with the connection with the idea of circumcision with the pruning of trees in Leviticus chapter 19.

There the unpruned tree is spoken of as uncircumcised. Circumcision was a pruning of Israel. It was making a wild tree, a domesticated one, all by cutting back the flesh.

This purging of the flesh was an order that they would be suitable as a fruitful vine for the Lord. The disciples are cleansed by Jesus' word which stands for his broader revelation and message. The idea of removing branches from the tree of the people of God is similar to that in Jeremiah chapter 5 verses 10 to 11.

Go up through her vine rows and destroy, but make not a full end. Strip away her branches, for they are not the Lord's. For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have been utterly treacherous to me, declares the Lord.

We aren't told exactly how the branches are cut off. Perhaps they are cut off through persecution. This would also serve as a form of pruning, cutting good branches back for greater fruitfulness and faithfulness, along with removing the branches that lack any genuine life.

John frequently speaks of abiding in both his gospel and his epistles. This is perhaps nowhere more powerfully illustrated than by the organic union between the vine and the branches. The vine gives the branches all of their life and the vine bears its fruit through

them.

Apart from the vine, the branches die and the vine imagery can be helpful for understanding works in the Christian life. Fruitfulness is presented not as something that we do to earn or merit inclusion within the vine, but as an outflow of the life that we have been given. They're seen as a blessing, a harvest and a gift, rather than mere exercise of duty.

We have no power to produce fruit apart from Christ. Fruit is produced as his life works itself out in our lives by his spirit. It's produced as we abide in him.

And so it's by cleaving to Jesus, by holding on strongly to him and abiding in him, that we will produce fruit. As we have seen, the Father is also active on the vine, helping it to grow and produce much fruit as he acts as the vinedresser. Bearing fruit is the point for which we have been chosen.

We've been set apart in order that we might bear fruit and that our fruit might make a difference, our fruit might last. The Lord does not just want to save us as an end in itself. Rather, he wants to produce something new, good, beautiful and fruitful through and in us.

He wants the life of Jesus, the life of the vine to be expressed through its branches. And we are those branches. Jesus' words must abide in us.

The words of Jesus, the word who created all things made flesh. These are not just regular words as we've seen elsewhere in the Gospel. These words are spirit and life.

They're the words of the Father. They're the words with the power to judge. They're the words with the power to raise the dead.

These are the words that are supposed to abide in us. And as these abide in us, then we will be able to pray in a new way. We're told that if we have Jesus' words abiding in us, then whatever we wish, we can ask and it will be done for us.

As these words have their life within us, and as we meditate upon these words, as these words feed us and give us our life and germinate within us, we will find that they rise up in the form of efficacious prayer, as illustrated in so many of the signs of the book. The power that these words have in the mouth of Christ will be a power that they have in our lives and on our lips as we believe them and live in terms of them. Our bearing of fruit, then, is not some onerous duty that has been laid upon us, but something which God delights and wills to accomplish through us.

Jesus died in order to produce much fruit. Where does he want to produce that fruit? Through his people, through the branches. And this truth is one that we should meditate upon as it completely reframes our understanding of what works are.

If we keep Jesus' commandments, we will abide in his love. This reverses the earlier order that we saw in chapter 14 verse 15. Indeed, there is a sort of circular character to be observed here, a gracious rather than a vicious cycle.

As we love Jesus, we will obey his commandments, and as we obey his commandments, we will grow and abide in his love. Our relationship to Jesus' commandments should be modelled after his relationship to his Father's life-giving command. We're doing what he has done, and the commandments that Jesus gives us are liberating, empowering, and life-giving.

They are designed to give us fullness of joy. We shouldn't regard Jesus' commandments as a treadmill of rules and limitations and obligations, but as the shape of an authorising vocation. The Father wants to bear much fruit through us, and as we look to Jesus and abide in him, that fruit will come forth.

His words will have their effect in us, and they will produce something that lasts. This vocation takes the shape of loving and laying down our lives for each other, as Jesus did for us, and as we follow this vocation, Jesus will be powerfully at work within us to produce this lasting fruit for his Father. Jesus declares of his disciples, You are my friends.

This is the way that Abraham is described as the friend of God, or as Moses is described as speaking to God face to face. It's a remarkable thing to be described as Jesus' friend. A friend is someone who is not just a pal or a buddy.

A friend is someone who enters into another's counsel. We're not just servants doing Jesus' bidding from afar, but those who take an active role in shaping things, like the prophet in the heavenly counsel. Jesus intercedes for us in heaven, but as his words take root within us, we can intercede, we can speak, we can act, and we can work in the world with power and effectiveness for the kingdom of God.

Friendship also seems to be a particular emphasis within John's gospel, where there are a lot of one-to-one interactions, and where the cross itself is presented as precipitated by Jesus' healing of his friend Lazarus. Jesus lays down his life in large part on account of his love for his friend Lazarus, and the relationship between the disciple who witnesses all of these things is the writer of the gospel of John, and Jesus is also described in the form of friendship. He is the disciple that Jesus loved.

A question to consider. Where do you see the first epistle of John picking up some of the themes of this address from Christ to his disciples in this chapter? In the concluding verses of John chapter 15, Jesus teaches his disciples to expect to be hated and persecuted by the world, as he was. Indeed, this is presented as a sort of encouragement.

We are counted worthy to be persecuted for his name's sake. This isn't a teaching that is exclusive to John's gospel. We see a similar thing in Matthew chapter 10, for instance, as Jesus sends out the Twelve among the cities and towns of Israel.

But it is something that is emphasized here at a very important point. Jesus is teaching that suffering and struggling together is one of the means by which our union with Christ is known. We might perhaps think of the experience of warfare, where through struggle and suffering together a band of brothers can be formed.

And to be chosen by Christ is to be chosen to suffer with and for him. We might think of the example of Saul of Tarsus, who is told how much he must suffer for Christ's name's sake. The bond between us and Jesus, then, is a bond of blood and shared suffering.

If Jesus abides in us, we will be hated by the world just as our master was. The coming of Jesus heightens the culpability of the world. What formerly could have been excused by ignorance now becomes high-handed and willful sin.

How we respond to the light of Jesus, then, is a matter of decisive importance. Do we shrink away from the light back into the deeds of darkness? Or do we walk out into the exposure of the light, seeking forgiveness for our sins? Jesus is the one in whom is light. He is the one who brings light into the world.

And also he is the one who creates a people who will bear that light out into the world. The presence of that light is something that is a threat to the world. As long as the light is there, the deeds of darkness are exposed by it.

They cannot be obscured. They can't be rationalised in the same way. They're seen for what they are.

Consequently, the darkness will hate the light. It will seek to expel the light. As long as the light is present, the darkness will be fiercely opposed to it.

Where there is no light, it is easy to delude ourselves and to rationalise our actions. The light strips us of this possibility. Jesus goes further.

He argues that the hatred that's directed against him is a fulfilment of their law. There is clearly an irony here. They are holding on to the law.

But yet even that law testifies to Jesus. Jesus clearly teaches the authority of the law. And in fact, emphasises it at this point and others like it.

Where the law is seen to point towards the full reality of his mission. Indeed, the implicit claim that Jesus is making at this point is a startling one. He is fulfilling the words of the Psalms.

And the words of the Psalms being referred to in other places like Psalm 69 verse 4.

While these are words that are originally used by David, Jesus is saying that he is the one that's going to fulfil them. Jesus' voice is to be heard within the Psalms. These Psalms speak of him.

He is the true Messiah, the true son of David. The words of the King in the Psalms are the words of David. But they're ultimately the words of the greater David.

It's noteworthy that we find the words of the Psalms on Jesus' lips at many points in his ministry. Perhaps particularly at critical junctures such as that of the cross. At the Last Supper, Jesus also declares that he who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.

Quoting Psalm 41 verse 9. Those words in Psalm 41 verse 9 are about David and his experience. But yet Jesus can take these words as being prophetic words about his own experience. Here I think we see something of the basis for typology.

We see in the Old Testament things that anticipate prophetically the events in Jesus' ministry. There's a sense that it must be the case that the ministry of the Messiah will take the form of David's life. That will play out Davidic patterns.

And that the greater son of David will be like his father. All of this provides some of the basis for the way that the early church regarded the Psalms. In Colossians chapter 3 verse 16 we read Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

The word of Christ dwells in us richly as we sing psalms. And that connection is one that derives its strength in large part from the way that the Psalms are taken up as Jesus' first person speech within the Gospels. The Spirit will come and the Spirit will be sent by Jesus from the Father.

The Spirit proceeds from the Father. There is an implicit Trinitarianism in John's Gospel, more generally. But it comes to the fore in places like this.

We should note that each person of the Trinity is mentioned here. Father, Son and Spirit. But also the different ways that the Spirit is spoken of as coming.

The Spirit comes. There is a sense in which this is described as the Spirit's own action. The Spirit is sent by Jesus.

The Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. And so the Spirit's action is related to the action of Christ. And then the Spirit proceeds from the Father, relating the Spirit to the Father.

Here then we have the indications for rich Trinitarian doctrine. That's only just beneath the surface of the text. The more you look into it, the more that you are invited to reflect upon a deep mystery.

The relationship between Jesus, the Son and the Father. That the one who has seen the

Son has seen the Father. Also the fact that the Spirit is the Spirit of the Son.

The Spirit is the means by which Jesus will be present to his people. And that close connection between the Spirit and the Son cannot be understood fully without venturing into some of the reflections and meditations upon the doctrine of the Trinity that occupied later theologians. The Spirit will bear witness to the Son and will assist the Twelve in their own witness bearing.

The Church itself is included within this witness bearing. Witness bearing, of course, is a key theme all the way through the Gospel of John. The ministry of the Apostolic Church is the principal means by which the Spirit bears his witness to Christ.

The Spirit will be given to the Church. And as they receive the Spirit, they will bear witness in that Spirit. A question to consider.

How do we see the hatred of the world playing a revelatory purpose within the narrative of the Gospel of John? In John chapter 16 we move to a greater focus upon the Spirit in Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples. Chapter 14 particularly emphasised the Father. Chapter 15 particularly emphasised the Son.

And in this chapter the accent is upon the Spirit. Jesus had just been warning his disciples that they would be hated by the world for his sake. And he had been teaching them these things because he did not want them to fall away when the time came.

They should be forewarned about what was going to happen so that they would be prepared when it did. He proceeds to elaborate upon the persecution in verses 2 and 3. He teaches that the disciples would be excommunicated from synagogues much as the man in chapter 9 who was healed of his blindness. This also suggests a sort of legal context.

The rulers of the people and the religious leaders would be casting them out of the assembly. But there is a sort of ironic reversal here. Although the disciples will be on trial by the religious leaders through the work of the Spirit in and through them it will be the world that will ultimately be on trial.

In John's Gospel the work of the Spirit as the helper or the advocate is primarily legal in character. Once again Jesus underlines the reason why he is teaching these things to his disciples. When this persecution starts to befall them he does not want them to be without warning or without guidance when these situations arise.

A few chapters earlier the disciples had asked where he was going but they had been silent for quite some time. It would have been natural for them to repeat their question given a number of the statements that Jesus had made since. However they are clearly subdued and as Jesus notes it's because sorrow has filled their heart.

Wherever Jesus is going the hammer blow for them is that he is going. This is a crisis that makes them feel that they're going to be left alone. However as Jesus teaches them his going away is for their advantage.

Precisely in going away the Spirit can come to them. As he ascends to the right hand of the Father and receives the Holy Spirit he will pour out the Spirit's anointing upon the church equipping it to act in his name and by his power. Were he not to go away and if he just continued his ministry with them in the form that he had been to this point the intensified work that the Spirit would bring would never actually arrive.

Jesus declares that when the Spirit does come he will perform three key acts. He will convict the earth concerning sin, righteousness and judgment. Concerning sin because they do not believe in me.

Concerning righteousness because I go to the Father and you will see me no longer. Concerning judgment because the ruler of this world is judged. The work of God as Jesus has declared earlier in the Gospel is to believe in the one that he has sent.

Conversely sin is the rejection of the one that he has sent. Sin in its most fundamental character is relational. It is rejection of the Father and of the Son that he has sent.

The Son is the one in whom the Father is known and so those who reject the Son are rejecting the Father in his fullest revelation of himself. Sin is not primarily just the breaking of abstract commandments. It is the rejection of the God who comes to us in Jesus Christ.

The Spirit will convict the world of righteousness. This will occur as Christ goes to the Father and he will be seen no longer. Earlier in the Gospel some of Jesus' heroes took offence at his statement that he came down from heaven.

However as he ascended back up to the Father he would be vindicated in his statement concerning his origin that he came down from the Father in the first place. His ascent to the Father would also reveal the true character of his mission. As Saul of Tarsus saw the glorified Christ for instance he knew from his vision that Jesus of Nazareth was vindicated in his claims concerning his mission.

Finally the Spirit will convict the world concerning judgment because Satan is condemned. There is a decisive judgment against Satan performed at the cross and the Spirit declares that fact to the world. Just as Jesus did not act on his own authority but on his Father's so the Spirit does not act on his own authority.

The Spirit will guide the Church and the Apostles most particularly into all truth not least through inspiring the witness of the New Testament. This will be through taking what belongs to Jesus and giving it to the disciples. All that the Father has is Christ's.

The Spirit will take what belongs to Christ and give it to the Church. Once again we're getting at the heart of Trinitarian truths here. We're seeing something about just how inseparable the persons of the Trinity are within John's understanding.

Just as the Son does nothing of himself but always acts from the Father so the Spirit does not act of his own authority but rather he acts in the authority of Christ. The three persons are bound together in an indivisible unity. Furthermore through the promised gift of the Spirit the Church and the disciples of Christ will participate much more fully in what the Father has given to the Son.

Beyond Jesus merely acting on his authority for them they will be acting in his authority within the world more generally as the Spirit anointed them to continue Christ's mission. This is even indicated by the beginning of the book of Acts which speaking of the things that Jesus began both to do and teach also gestures toward what he will continue to do as he ascends into heaven gives the gift of his Spirit and continues to act now as the ascended Lord through the Spirit in his Church and world. A question to consider.

Jesus does not come according to his teaching in John to judge the world but yet the Spirit is here associated with the condemnation of the world and the coming of judgment. How are we best to understand the relationship between the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of the Spirit in these respects? At the end of John chapter 16 Jesus concludes his farewell discourse to his disciples. The end of John chapter 15 and the beginning of chapter 16 speak about the suffering and persecution that they will all experience in the world.

Even in that situation of suffering and persecution Jesus will give them his joy and his peace. The opening part of our passage focuses upon Jesus' riddle that he gives to his disciples in verse 16. A little while and you will see me no longer.

And again a little while and you will see me. In a somewhat amusing manner this statement is repeated almost four times in succession in the verses that follow. It recalls earlier statements that Jesus had made to his disciples.

John chapter 14 verse 19 for instance. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more. But you will see me.

The meaning of Jesus' statement in verse 16 is not entirely clear. To what is the little while or are the little whiles referring? Are there two little whiles or merely one? If we read it as just one little while it might be referring to the same thing from two different perspectives. In some sense they will see him no longer and in another sense they will see him.

Another possibility is that Jesus is referring in the first little while to the period between his death and resurrection. And then in the second little while to the period before his

second coming. We could also read this first of all as a reference to the period of Christ's death when they will see him no longer.

And then the little while referring to the period after the resurrection. Yet another possibility is seeing Jesus' departure not so much in terms of his death as in terms of his ascension to the Father. In such a framework his coming to them will not primarily be through the resurrection but through the gift of his spirit at Pentecost.

Jesus gives the example of a woman struggling to give birth and then the joy in the birth that follows the suffering of the birth pangs as an example for understanding his death and resurrection. The language that Jesus uses and the figures of speech that he employs are important. In talking about a woman and her hour coming Jesus is employing language that has a great charge within the Gospel of John.

This language of the hour that comes is usually applied to his own death. Here however it's used in reference to a woman. Throughout the Gospel of John there are a number of references to and stories involving women.

Jesus' mother Mary for instance is not named in the book of John. Rather she is spoken of or spoken to as his mother or as woman. In speaking of and to Mary in a less particularised way I think the Gospel highlights her symbolic purpose.

She's significant as an individual of course but she's also significant for what she stands for. She is the mother or the woman who is about to give birth Bringing a new man into the world after birth pangs is a paradigm for understanding what Jesus is going to do in his death and resurrection. His death is an event of birth pangs and his resurrection is being the firstborn from the dead.

Jesus opens the womb of the tomb. Such a connection between the womb and the tomb is found throughout the Old Testament and it continues into the new. We can think about poetic statements such as knit together in the lowest part of the earth in Psalm 139 referring to the womb.

Or we might think about the statement of Job naked I came from my mother's womb, naked I will return. That connection between the woman and the earth is also seen in the original judgments upon humanity where the judgment upon the woman and her womb is paralleled with the judgment upon the man and the earth. The womb and the earth are connected to each other.

For the first man Adam, the earth was his womb. He was fashioned from the clay. Every subsequent human being comes from the womb of their mother.

Recognizing the connection between the womb and the tomb I think we can gain an insight into a deeper theology of the cross as the cross is an event of birth pangs followed by birth. We'll see John picking up on the symbolism a bit more in his crucifixion

account but we should already register his presence here. After the resurrection and the ascension the disciples will have greater access to the Father in Christ's name.

Praying in Jesus' name does not mean praying for Jesus to pray for us but rather on account of Jesus having privileged access to the Father as we are known and loved by him. Now this more direct access to the Father should be related to the advocacy of the Spirit that is at work through and in us. We might think of this as Christ's gift of his Spirit by which we can pray with him and in him.

When we approach the Father we are not approaching a reluctant Father who has to be persuaded by the Son to take concern for the Church. He loves the Church himself especially as he sees the Church and the disciples of his Son sharing his own love for his dearly beloved Son. Jesus wants his disciples to approach the Father with confidence asking things in his name.

This access to the Father and the union with Christ that they will enjoy is one of the causes of their joy as they will see Christ again even as their hearts are weighed down with sorrow at this point and will be weighed down further after Christ's death. The joy that they will experience in the resurrection will not be removed even by the ascension. Christ's departure then will not be an absolute departure.

Rather it is a departure that allows for a more intimate presence in and with them by his Spirit. Jesus warns his disciples once more about what's going to happen in the future. They are told they will soon be scattered like sheep without a shepherd.

While it might seem in this situation that Jesus has been left alone he will not in fact be alone as the Father will be with him. Even in the agony of the cross the Father is there. This is important to bear in mind lest we overstate the reality of Christ's forsakenness.

Jesus promises his disciples that in their time of tribulation in their time of trial they will not be left alone. He has already promised his disciples joy that will follow from their agony and their sorrow and now he promises them peace within the world and his presence. He has overcome the world.

Even all of the attacks that we might experience within the world are ultimately futile. The futile flailing of a felled foe. We should take good cheer recognizing in Jesus' victory the definitive character of his overcoming of the world.

The ruler of this world who presumes that he has triumphed at this time has been decisively and definitively defeated. A question to consider. Once again Jesus speaks about the new way that his disciples can address and approach the Father in prayer.

This is a running theme of the farewell discourse and chapter 17 will bring this theme of prayer to its most powerful and pronounced expression. What sort of theology of prayer might we develop from the discourse to this point? How might we trace the Trinitarian

character of prayer from Jesus' teaching in the farewell discourse? John chapter 17, commonly called the High Priestly Prayer of Christ, is perhaps one of the most moving and powerful passages in all of scripture. Within it the son addresses his father speaking of his relationship with his people as something that is implicated in his loving bond with the father.

Behind John chapter 17 we might see passages such as the relationship between the Son of Man and the Ancient of Days in Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 to 14. There has already been anticipation of this great prayer earlier in the gospel in chapter 11 verses 41 to 42, in chapter 12 verses 27 to 28. It's also reminiscent of the beginning of chapter 13 where Jesus first addresses himself to his disciples in that context.

Jesus, realising that his hour had come, that he was about to go to the Father, that everything was about to be fulfilled, took up the cloth and started wiping his disciples' feet. There we had the beginning of the conversation with his disciples in the farewell discourse. The passage here is introduced with a similar set of statements.

Jesus recognises that his hour has come and he speaks to his father concerning it. Perhaps we should see something of the twofold aspect of the cross. First of all there's an action directed to the disciples in washing their feet, laying aside his garments and serving and ministering to them, but also addressing himself to his father.

The event of the cross is an event of glorification. It's an event in which he's going to be lifted up or elevated by the Father. He's going to ascend to his father following it.

Both aspects of the cross can be seen in chapters 13 to 17. While we saw the first part of that more clearly in chapter 13, now we see in the son's addressing of himself to the father, the lifting up of Jesus to God's presence, coming to the foreground. We might also see this prayer as one that has many parallels with the Lord's prayer.

Our Father who art in heaven, Jesus lifts up his eyes to heaven and says, Father, hallowed be your name. Glorify your son so that your son may glorify you. Your kingdom come.

I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. On earth as it is in heaven, the petition deliver us from evil also parallels with Christ's prayer that his disciples would be preserved from the evil one.

There are a lot of other parallels that we can see if we look deeper. What's the point of these parallels? I think that through them we can recognize the way that, first of all, our prayers resemble, participate, correspond with, and function within the prayer of Jesus for us. Jesus is here interceding for his flock, and Jesus' relationship with his Father as the Son is one in which we participate in.

The love with which the Father loves the Son is the love with which he loves us in his Son. We can speak to the Father in the name of Jesus and thereby enjoy access that he enjoys. In addition to such participation, we can see the way that Jesus himself is praying for the fulfillment of his own kingdom.

As we pray for this as his people on earth, he's praying for it in heaven. Our prayers are accompanied by Christ's prayers for us and for his kingdom in heaven. When we pursue the kingdom of God, we're not pursuing it alone.

We're joined with the prayer of Jesus to the Father. And so when we pray in Jesus' name, it's not just that we're having access in his name. We're joining our prayers with his.

Once again, Jesus refers to his coming death, not just to the resurrection and the ascension to follow it, as a glorification that he will be glorified in. He speaks of being given authority over all for the sake of his people. Often when we think of the authority of Jesus, we think about the authority of Jesus with relationship to his people as an authority that he exercises purely over us.

Jesus tells us what to do and we obey. However, here Jesus speaks of being given authority over all so that he might give eternal life to all who have been given to him. That authority has been given to him and is exercised for our sake in order that we might come to participate in eternal life.

Jesus describes this life as knowing the true God and Jesus, the Christ that he has sent. These two things are directly connected. We know the revealed Father in the revealing Son and knowing God is to know God in the Messiah, Jesus.

To know the Son is to know the Father, as Jesus has spoken about earlier in his conversation with Thomas. This passage stresses that the disciples are given to him by the Father. The Church is a gift of love from the Father to the Son, in the Spirit, and as such we are implicated in the bond of love of the Trinity itself.

The disciples have kept God's word. They have arrived at a true knowledge of Jesus and his mission. They know that he has been sent by God.

Throughout the Gospel of John this has been a recurring theme. Where does Jesus come from? From where and from whom has he been sent? The Jewish authorities and most of the people fail to recognise Christ's origins. However, the disciples have seen them and with this knowledge they have arrived at the point where they can move forward.

This is a source of joy for Jesus at this time, for his glorification has now arrived, because his mission has been realised in the fact that these disciples now recognise the truth of his origin. Jesus proceeds to speak of the intimate relationship between his possession and the Father's possession. What's the Son's is the Father's, and what belongs to the Father is the Son's.

There could not be a closer relationship between the two. We need to read this against the background of the Old Testament, where God declares forcefully in places like Isaiah that he will not give his glory to another, that his name is above all other names, and that in his name every knee will bow, every tongue will confess. This however is the name that the Son enjoys, this is the glory that is given to him.

And so the way that Jesus speaks of himself here is a claim to deity. He's very clearly filling out the picture that we found elsewhere in the Gospel, where Jesus is identified with the Father in a way that's closer than just one that is sent on a very important or central mission. Jesus and the Father are one.

Jesus declares here that he is no longer in the world, he is on the way out of the world, he's going to the Father, and yet his disciples will be left in the world. While he was in the world he protected his disciples, guarding them from the evil one by his teaching and his practice and his presence. Only Judas fell away, but did so in fulfillment of Scripture.

Note the reference to the Son of Perdition here. It's found also elsewhere in Scripture, in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 3. It seems to be an eschatological figure that is anticipated and fulfilled both in Christ's immediate mission, but then also in the events running up to 70 AD. Perhaps what we see here is an example of a pattern played out in history that plays out on a number of occasions.

There will be Judas characters later on in the story, later on in the run-up to AD 70, and then maybe also later on in the run-up to the final coming of Christ. The disciples remain in the world, but they're not rooted in the world. That's no longer the site that they find their foundation and their truest belonging.

They are hated by the world, like Jesus was, because they are not of it. They have been sent into the world by him. Jesus sanctifies himself for us by going to the cross, and he does so in order that we might be sanctified by God's truth.

He prays not just for his immediate disciples, but for all who will believe through their testimony. This prayer extends not just to the immediate twelve apostles, but extends to us as well, to those who have believed through the apostolic testimony. At later points in John's Gospel, we'll see also that the Gospel writer turns to us and looks us in the eye, telling us that these things were written so that we might believe.

Jesus' words here in the Gospel are spoken concerning us. We should recognize ourselves within them. Jesus prayed that his disciples and the ones who believed through their word would be one.

This is not primarily about ecumenism and about a unified church and visible institutions. It's primarily about the shared roots of our union with God, and our shared union with and in God is the basis of our union with each other. It's important to get the order right

here.

We look to God for our union by faith, not primarily to a more visible church union on earth. However, as our union with the Father and the Son and the Spirit and with each other in the Triune God is made manifest, people will believe that Jesus was sent by the Father. So the unity of the church is important, but that visible unity must be grounded in the deeper unity, the unity that we have in the Triune God.

That is the true unity that Christ prays for here. Jesus gives the glory and the love that the Father gives and shares with him to his disciples. It seems to me that this is likely a reference to the Spirit.

The gift of the Spirit is the gift of the union of love and the glory of the Triune God to his people. Through the gift of the Spirit, it's made possible for us to enjoy the glory and the love with which the Father loved the Son before the foundation of the world. A question to consider, in this chapter there are a great many references to the Father and the Son and the way that they secure our redemption through their united work.

I believe that we can also hear some allusions to the work of the Spirit, which I've already mentioned. Putting the various parts of this picture together, what are the ways in which each person of the Trinity is involved in a united work constituting the church as the people of God within the witness of this chapter? John 18 describes the betrayal, capture and trials of Jesus leading up to his crucifixion. His crossing of the brook Kidron should be related to David's crossing of that same brook in 2 Samuel 15, verse 23, during Absalom's coup.

A number of the Gospels explore this background for thinking about the betrayal, the arrest and the death of Christ. Christ, like David, is retreating from Jerusalem. Like Absalom, the ruler of this age seems to have had his great triumph.

His coup seems to have been a success and David is leaving the city. Judas, in these stories, is like a Hithophel. He's the one who gives counsel to the opponents of the king.

And Jesus, as he crosses over the brook Kidron, ascends the Mount of Olives, he's playing out this story of David again. And each of the Gospels explores this in slightly different ways, thinking of the angels ministering to him, the various people that are met, and the background of Abishai, who is the right-hand man to David, who wishes to strike down Shimei, who's cursing David to take off his head. There are parallels there with the story of Peter, Peter who attacks the high priest's servant.

In these parallels then, we're seeing Jesus portrayed as the greater David, replaying the story of David, but on a grander scale, not just dealing with the coup of one of his sons, but dealing with the ruler of this age himself. Jesus enters a garden, which obviously carries all sorts of biblical resonances. There will be another garden later on, connected

with the tomb, and in Jesus' encounter with Mary Magdalene, once again playing upon the Old Testament background, the background of the Garden of Eden itself.

Jesus answers those coming to arrest him with highly significant words, I am, the same words that he uses of himself in chapter 8 verse 58, and they draw back and fall to the ground. This is a response to him using the divine name. Once again, we see very strong Christology coming through in the Gospel of John.

Jesus' words in verses 7 to 9, where he speaks about none of his disciples being lost, and his concern to protect his disciples, show his commitment to suffer on behalf of the disciples and protect them even as they abandon him. The disciple who attacks the high priest's servant isn't mentioned in the other Gospels, but here we're informed that it is Peter. David Daube has suggested that an attack upon the right ear might be intended as a disqualification for priestly ministry.

Whether or not this is the case, and I'm not entirely sure, Malchus could be thought of as Peter's opposite number. Both are servants of a high priest. Peter is the lead priestly assistant to Jesus, a fact that is particularly significant from this chapter onwards in John, and the sort of laying down of his life that Peter has in mind, something that is mentioned in chapter 13 verse 37, is this sort of thing, actually fighting for Christ and being willing to die in that conflict.

He's less prepared to lay down his life in the manner that Jesus actually requires of him. Jesus is said to act to fulfil the word that he has spoken, of those whom you gave me I have lost no one. That language of fulfilment connects Jesus' words with those words of Scripture, that Jesus fulfils his own word like he fulfills the words of Scripture itself.

He must drink the cup that the Father has given to him. He must take that burden of judgment and punishment upon himself, the cup that belongs to Jerusalem and Israel for its sins, the Messiah is going to drink as the King of the Jews. Simon Peter sort of serves as a leading priestly figure among the disciples.

And while Jesus is being tried before Annas and Caiaphas, Peter is denying Jesus in the high priest's courtyard. There's an important parallel and contrast being established. Peter stands around the fire of coals and note that there is also a fire of coals when Peter is restored in chapter 21 verse 9. The other disciple, which many have presumed to be the disciple that Jesus loved, was known to the high priest as we see in verses 15 and 16.

He seems to be well positioned, have good connections and access. Could it maybe be someone like Lazarus or would it be Joseph of Arimathea or would it be Nicodemus? We're not entirely sure. We can speculate.

Many have seen this as the disciple that Jesus loves, the one who writes the gospel. Jesus is questioned but Peter is questioned at the same time, heightening the contrast

between them. Jesus' I am's contrast with Peter's not me.

Peter is questioned by the servant girl at the door, primarily about his association with Christ's disciples, then by the servants and the officers warming themselves by the charcoal fire, and then finally by one of the high priest's servants, a relative of Malchus. Peter's denial, along with the entrance into Jerusalem, is mentioned in all of the gospels. This is a very significant event.

Peter is very clearly not the hero of the story, nor are the other disciples. Jesus is the only hero of this story. And the failure of Peter helps us to recognise that he is not the person that we're supposed to be looking up to primarily.

He has his flaws, he has his failings. Note also that Peter is questioned about not just his direct association with Christ, but his association with the disciples of Christ. We might fancy ourselves, if we were in the position of Peter, that we would stand up for Christ, that we would associate with him readily, that we would speak on behalf of the one who is our master.

But yet, like Peter, we can so often be quick to dissociate ourselves from his people, to deny that we have any affiliation with the church when it embarrasses us, when it limits the degree to which we can fit in with the crowd that's around us. Like Peter, we can be tempted to deny Christ in denying our association with his people. A question to reflect upon.

Jesus almost exactly repeats the first words that he speaks in the gospel. For whom are you looking? Or what are you looking for? And he makes this statement twice in this chapter. And he repeats the exact same question to Mary Magdalene in chapter 20, after the resurrection.

The repetition of this particular question suggests that it is an important one for the evangelist. The evangelist wants to think about our relationship to this question, how we might respond to it as the readers of the gospel. What response should an attentive reader of John's gospel give to this question? At the beginning of John chapter 18, Jesus has been arrested and has faced Annas and Caiaphas.

After Peter denied him, Jesus was then sent from Caiaphas to Pilate. This was done early in the morning, probably around dawn, so that this would be the first thing on Pilate's desk in the morning. They're dealing with Jesus as a matter of urgency.

They are concerned to be able to eat the Passover. This, of course, raises chronological questions. How are we to relate this account to the account that we find within the Synoptic Gospels? There are some details in Mark that might support John's chronology, but it seems difficult to reconcile the fact that Jesus eats the Passover with his disciples, and then at this point, the people are preparing to eat the Passover after Jesus has eaten

with his disciples and been arrested.

Unsurprisingly, there have been a number of suggestions put forward. Some have suggested that the Last Supper is an early Passover, that it's connected to the Passover, but not actually the Passover meal itself. Others have suggested that the disciples were using a different calendar from that of the Judeans.

The Jews are using a lunar calendar, but Jesus was using a solar calendar. In John, as in the Synoptic accounts, it would seem that this occurred on a Friday. The question then is not what day of the week this occurred on, but how it relates to the celebration of the Passover.

An important consideration here is that the different Gospel accounts have their differing purposes. John, as elsewhere, focuses more upon the relationship between the symbol of the Passover and the fulfilment, with Christ as the Passover lamb himself. Christ is our Passover, sacrificed for us.

In the other Gospels, however, there is more of an emphasis upon the new symbol of the Last Supper, which is then connected to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and so there is a connection more between the two symbols than between the symbol and the ultimate reality to which it points. This fits into John's theology more generally, which connects Jesus with the Lamb of God, the Passover lamb that is sacrificed for the people. It helps us to understand a bit more of the theology of the cross that John is operating in terms of.

Jesus is the Passover lamb, he's the firstborn son, and this gives a very clear Passover context for what takes place on the cross itself. Such a theology is also seen in places like 1 Corinthians chapter 5, where Paul speaks about Christ as our Passover sacrifice for us. Pilate asked for an accusation about Christ.

He isn't particularly keen to get involved. The fact that no compelling charge can be brought against him might serve an apologetic purpose. Likewise, highlighting the fact that Pilate is a reluctant participant might underline the point that the true enemies in John's Gospel are not the Romans, but Jesus' own people.

As the Gospels spread throughout the Roman world, this might have been a helpful point to emphasise. Even though he was put to death by the Romans, they were never his primary opponents. The Jews didn't have the authority to give a death sentence, and so they brought Jesus to Pilate so that they might have a death sentence delivered upon him by Pilate.

Once again, we are reminded that Jesus' word is being fulfilled even as he is being condemned to death. Pilate questions Jesus, presumably after hearing the accusation that he presents himself as the king of the Jews. Naturally, Pilate would interpret this as

revolutionary.

On the surface of it, that's what it sounds like. The claim is a political one. Jesus needs to be challenged as such a figure.

There are details within John's Gospel that would seem to give some substance to such a claim. Jesus had a triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which suggests some sort of royal aspiration. The people wanted to make him king after the feeding of the 5,000.

But yet, as he speaks to Pilate, it becomes clear that Jesus' kingdom is not what Pilate might have expected. Jesus defines himself not primarily as the king of the Jews. That is a title that was given to him by others.

He never fully owns it. Rather, he thinks of his kingdom in terms of truth, rather than in terms of ethnic identity. His is a different sort of kingdom.

He's the king of the Jews, but that's not primarily the way to understand him. If he really were a pretender to be the king of the Jews in the way that the Judean leaders were presenting him to be, and in the way that Pilate initially presumed, his servants would have fought to protect him. But they didn't.

Rather, Jesus' kingdom is a kingdom of truth. Truth might mean different things to different ears. To the ears of a Greek, it might be associated with philosophical claims about the nature of reality.

To a Roman, it might be more about factual accuracy of things that occurred. And to a Jew, it might be more about God's covenant faithfulness. Pilate's response, what is truth, is ambiguous.

Probably he's dismissing Jesus as a mere philosopher, a harmless, innocuous figure for Pilate's political purposes. He's not really a political challenge to the Romans. He's just someone who's an annoyance to the Judean leaders, who have their own peculiar religious sectarian objections against him.

Pilate wants to set Jesus free, but he does not want to aggravate the crowd and the Jewish leaders. And so he refers to the custom of absolution at the time of the Passover. The Jews, however, insist that he should release Barabbas, the insurrectionist, instead.

They falsely present Jesus as a political revolutionary, but then they asked for an actual violent revolutionary to be released to them instead of him. This is an example of some of the irony that's going on in John's Gospel. John frequently uses irony to highlight and to contrast certain things, to help us to perceive what is really taking place.

A question to consider. In his conversation with Pilate, Jesus speaks about his kingdom. At this point we might start to wonder why this is such a rare occurrence within John's

Gospel.

Neither Jesus nor John the narrator typically speak about the kingdom. In the other Gospels, however, we have constant references to the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God, yet it's very rare that we find references to it in John's Gospel. Why might this be? John chapter 19 begins with a sort of mock coronation.

Jesus is dressed up with a crown of thorns and a purple robe, and the soldiers greet him saying, Hail, King of the Jews. The purpose of this was probably more to bring about a public shaming than to cause the most extreme pain. Pilate seems to have hoped that a public humiliation of Jesus before the crowd would satisfy their murderous desire and give them some sort of catharsis.

This would have saved Pilate from actually having to go through with an execution. Once again, John probably wants us to see the irony of the situation. Although the soldiers are performing a mock coronation, Jesus really is being prepared for glorification at the cross.

The crown of thorns that he wears is reminiscent of the thorns of the curse of Genesis chapter 3. Fittingly, the crown is born upon his brow, another place connected with the curse. Pilate's ploy fails. The people insist upon crucifixion.

He presents Jesus again using the words, Behold the man. Again, this is presumably a mock royal acclamation. This is the man that you want to lead you.

Once again, John however wants us to see the irony that this is the man being prepared for the coronation of the cross. Initially refusing to go along with them, Pilate tells the Jews to crucify Jesus themselves. He sees no fault in Jesus.

But the Jews insist that they have no authority to crucify Jesus themselves. But Jesus' claim to be the son of God means that he must be put to death according to their law. They challenge Pilate again and Pilate returns to speak to Jesus.

He points out to him, perhaps rather frustratedly or angrily, that he has the authority to put him to death. Jesus should speak up for himself. However, Jesus claims that Pilate's authority comes from God alone.

Pilate would have no authority to do anything were it not for the fact that God had given him that authority. Once again, we're reminded that this is the day of preparation. Jesus is the Passover lamb.

In Isaiah chapter 53, we were told that the servant would be like a sheep, silent before its shearers. That Jesus does not present a case for himself again would remind us that Jesus is the Passover lamb. He's the one who's the servant of God, the one who fulfills and brings together these roles.

The Jews manipulated Pilate, claiming that he was no friend of Caesar if he allowed Jesus to live. And so in the end, Pilate hands Jesus over to them. Who is the them here? It would seem to be the Jews on the surface of it grammatically.

But yet when we look at the crucifixion, it's supervised by the Roman soldiers. So it seems as if part of the ambiguity is the point that the Jews actually have their way with Jesus. It's not primarily Roman instigation of the crucifixion.

Rather, the crucifixion is instigated by the Jewish authorities and Pilate and his men go along with it. Once again, we should recognize the irony of their claim that they have no king but Caesar. They disavow the Messiah and they present themselves as the servants of Caesar.

However, they had already just asked for an insurrectionist to be released to them. Throughout this passage, Jesus is presented as being in control. He's not just a victim.

No one does anything to him that he has not submitted to himself. He bears his own cross and he brings it to the place of crucifixion. The title above the cross is written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, suggesting the worldwide significance of Christ's work and rule.

We might notice that two other words are translated in this passage, suggesting again that there is an audience beyond the immediate Jewish audience. Here the title was presumably the charge that led to Jesus' crucifixion, King of the Jews. However, as in many places in John and particularly in this passage, there is a rich irony here.

For Jesus is indeed the King of the Jews. And though the chief priests object at the title put over Jesus, Pilate's word is treated as final. Once again, people are saying and doing more than they understand.

They are fulfilling the scripture in their actions. Pilate, who had been humbled in part by the crowd and the Jewish leaders who had forced him to go along with them, went with this superscription presumably in order to spite them. The Jewish leaders want to reject and kill this man.

But Pilate is connecting this man to them, claiming that he is their king. Various scriptures are fulfilled in the crucifixion. We find more of the language of fulfillment in this chapter than almost anywhere else in the Gospel of John.

Some of the scriptures that are playing in the background here include things like Isaiah 53, Ws 69 with the reference to the thirst of Christ, Ws 22 15-18, Exodus 12 46 with the reference to the bones not being broken, Zech 12 10. All of these verses highlight the fact that this is happening according to the scripture. Jesus is playing out many themes of the biblical text and fulfilling its prophecies.

This is what ought to have taken place. Now it may seem that everything has gone wrong, but at this time when everything seems to be going wrong, we get this litany of fulfillments of scripture. This highlights that this is no accident.

Step by step, what is happening in this chapter is fulfilling what God has declared in the past. Jesus is here carrying out the mission that was set for him. He's not rejecting or swerving from it, nor has he stumbled and fallen.

This is exactly what God had always intended. The appearance of Jesus' mother again at this point is probably significant. John never speaks about the virgin birth, it would seem, but birth is a constant theme of his gospel.

Chapter 16 verse 21 speaks of the cross and the resurrection as if birth pangs followed by a birth. A woman with birth pangs, at our come, and struggling to give birth to a child, and then rejoicing that a child is born into the world. The death of Jesus is like Israel giving birth, and it's also accompanied by the giving of a new son to his mother.

This son is the beloved disciple, the archetypal disciple. The womb of Israel is being opened, and the firstborn delivers his brethren into the arms of his mother. Jesus gives the beloved disciple and his mother to each other, much as we are given to each other by Christ in his church.

When we speak about the motherhood of Mary, our focus tends to be upon her physical role in the incarnation, the conception of Jesus, and his birth in Bethlehem. And the physical dimension of this is obviously important. However, the scriptural text here particularly seems to focus upon the spiritual and symbolic role that Mary is playing.

The mere physical act of bearing and nursing Jesus is not the great thing, rather the spiritual act of hearing God's word and keeping it, bearing Jesus within herself as the archetypal disciple is the most important thing. Mary's bearing of Christ is presented as a fuller realization of that great act of faith. Mary is described in Luke chapter 1 verse 45 as she who believed.

Her physical bearing of Christ is fundamentally seen as a spiritual act, one in which the Spirit comes upon and empowers her. Mary's physical bearing of Christ is not highlighted in John's Gospel, but in passages such as this one, the spiritual and symbolic aspect of it really is. Mary's motherhood here is not according to the flesh, but is a stronger form of spiritual kinship, formed by the gift of Christ.

What we see Christ doing here is forming a new family at the foot of the cross. At this point, Jesus can declare that it is finished. He has completed what he intended to do, an intention seen most clearly in the bringing together of the beloved disciple and his mother.

Jesus hands over the Spirit in verse 30. Even his very moment of death seems to occur

on his own terms. John chapter 7 verse 39 spoke of the Spirit being given over when Jesus was glorified.

The lifting up of Jesus on the cross is the first stage of his glorification for John. So appropriately, there is a handing over of the Spirit at this point, presumably to the new family that's being formed at the foot of the cross. As Jesus is pierced by the soldiers, blood and water come out from his side.

The emphasis upon the truth of this event and the reliability of the witness that was born to it suggests that these details really matter. They're underlined for a reason. Some have related the piercing of the side to the formation of Eve from the side of Adam.

Perhaps we might also see birth imagery here. Jesus is the belly or the womb from which living waters flow. Blood and water might relate to the blood of the covenant and the water of baptism.

Finally, Jesus had also spoken of his body as the temple. As in Ezekiel chapter 47, water would flow out from the side of the temple and heal and give life to the nation. The pierced body of Jesus might be related to the torn temple veil of the other gospel accounts.

As we get further on in John's gospel, I think we'll see other allusions to these passages from Ezekiel. So I think it's natural to see it as the waters flowing out from the temple to give life to the world. Jesus has spoken of his gift of living waters in chapter 4 and in chapter 7 and now the waters flow out as a result of his death.

In chapter 1 verse 29, Jesus was related to the Passover lamb. His bones are not broken. In fulfillment of the law concerning the Passover lamb here, Zechariah chapter 12, from which the verse quoted in verse 37 comes, speaks of repentance given to Israel through the gift of the spirit.

This also serves as the fulfillment of Jesus being lifted up for all of the nations to look at as a sign. A question to consider. John emphasizes Jesus' fulfillment of scripture throughout the crucifixion account.

Can you collect the various references to the scripture that are found in this account? Go back to the original context and see how the broader context of those passages sheds light upon the meaning of the crucifixion and what Jesus is accomplishing here. At the end of John chapter 19, after Jesus has died, secret supporters of Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, come and take Jesus' body away and bury it. Nicodemus is taking a risk at this point.

He originally came to Jesus at night to avoid being seen and he's already come under suspicion in previous chapters. But now he is doing something on a grander scale and more openly. None of the disciples or even the women seem to be directly involved at

this point.

The women come later on, as in the other gospel accounts. They see where the body is laid and they come to bring more spices. Of course, this is not the first time in the gospel that there has been reference to spices in association with Christ's burial.

In chapter 12, Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus' feet with nard and he declared that this was for the day of his burial. But yet the quantity of spices that are brought here are fit for a king. Some have estimated that they would be even 100 times more costly than the nard used to anoint him.

There are other accounts from this period of people bringing such costly spices for a burial. But this really stands out. This is the sort of thing that you would have expected for one of the rulers of the Jews.

Jesus is here being given treatment, fitting for the king of the Jews by figures who are themselves rulers of the Jewish people. The purpose of the spices was not to preserve the body, but to mask the smell and to honour the deceased person. With the reference to spices in a garden here, a background from the Old Testament is being evoked.

The term used for garden is not the one that we typically find of the Garden of Eden in the Septuagint, but is a word that is commonly used in Song of Songs. Here we might think of a passage like Song of Songs chapter 4 verses 12 to 16. A garden locked is my sister my bride, a spring locked, a fountain sealed.

Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates, with all choicest fruits, henna with nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all choicest spices, a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon. Awake, O North Wind, and come, O South Wind, blow upon my garden, let its spices flow. We find references to spices in connection with royalty as well, in places like Psalm 45 verses 6 to 9. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.

The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.

Your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia. From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad. Daughters of kings are among your ladies of honor.

At your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir. Myrrh and aloes, then, are connected not just with death and burial, but also with these themes of love. The garden and the spices remind us, I think, primarily of Song of Songs.

This is the king entering into his spiced garden chamber, a chamber from which he will later come forth, with the wind that awakes these spices, and the fountain that has

opened up so that its life is brought outside. The opening up of the garden so that its living waters will flow out is something that should recall a number of Jesus' statements already in this Gospel of John. He's the one who will let the spices flow out into the world, as the wind awakes and blows them out.

The wind, of course, is the wind of the Spirit. These are all themes that the evangelist delicately evokes at this point by the way that he describes Jesus being laid to rest. Reading the Gospel, we've also seen a number of cases where there are references to love, themes of love taken from the Song of Songs.

For instance, the allusion to Song of Songs, chapter 1, verse 12. The king on his couch, and the nod of the woman filling the room in the story of the anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany. Jesus began his ministry to wedding feast.

He was announced by the friend of the bridegroom, John the Baptist. He's the bridegroom, the one who comes to the woman at the well and speaks about himself as the man who is to come. He's the true Messiah, the true bridegroom of Israel.

He's the one who will later meet with Mary in the garden in another scene that evokes marital themes. I think then that we should see the Song of Songs in the background here. Jesus is the royal lover, and this is preparing his bed, preparing the room of the king, the room of the royal lover, from which he will later come forth.

Throughout the book of John, the glorification of Christ is focused upon his death and his burial, not just upon his ascension. And so it seems appropriate to see in the way that the burial of Christ is described, these themes of glory. He's being buried like a king.

He's being brought into this chamber, this garden, this garden that's going to release its spices and its living water, filling the world. We should have a sense of expectation here. When is the bridegroom going to come forth and open up the garden, allowing its spices and living water to flow out? We might also faintly hear the way that John is setting things up for a birth event.

This is nowhere near as strong as it is in the Gospel of Luke. In Luke, we see the parallel between Jesus being wrapped in linen garments and laid in a manger, and then wrapped in linen garments and laid in a tomb. There's a Joseph and a Mary at Jesus' birth, and then a Joseph and some Marys at his death and resurrection.

There are a Joseph and a Mary here. But yet the theme that is more prominent, I think, are the themes of love. These themes look back to the Song of Songs, and perhaps beyond that, also to the Garden of Eden.

In John, the proximity of the cross and the tomb is mentioned. I think this highlights the connection between the two of them. These aren't detached things.

They belong very closely together. And Jesus' burial is not just appended to the story of the cross as something purely incidental to the main event. In John, as in the other Gospels, the burial itself is charged with symbolism.

It too is an integral part of the story of Jesus' bringing of salvation. A question to consider. We're told that no one was previously laid in the tomb.

What other things in the Gospel might this remind us of? And what significance could be found in the fact that this is a tomb for Jesus and Jesus alone? John chapter 20 is clearly one of the most powerful and moving stories within the whole of the Bible. Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb early in the morning. She sees that the stone has been rolled away, and she runs and tells Simon Peter and the other disciple, the disciple Jesus loved.

Now, the disciple Jesus loved is later identified with the author of the Gospel. And throughout the Gospel, we see a number of points at which Simon Peter and the disciple Jesus loved are connected to each other in ways that suggest some sort of contrast, comparison being drawn between the two. At the meal in chapter 13, the beloved disciple is reclining at Jesus' side in the meal, and Peter has to ask him to ask Jesus a question.

The beloved disciple has a closeness to Jesus that is even greater than Peter's. In chapter 18, there's another disciple who accompanies Peter to the house of Annas, the high priest, and that disciple goes all the way in, whereas Peter remains outside at the door. At the cross, the beloved disciple is there at the foot of the cross and is given the care of Jesus' mother.

In the next chapter, it's the beloved disciple who's the first to notice that it is the Lord on the beach. And then at the very concluding episode of the Gospel, Peter looks around, sees the disciple that Jesus loves, and asks, Lord, what about this man? To which Jesus responds, if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me. And so in this chapter, right where we would expect this clear focus upon the story of the resurrection, we find this strange incident of a running race.

Why on earth is the Gospel recording this? And it seems to me that part of the purpose is to relate and to compare and contrast the witness of the beloved disciple and the witness of Peter and the leadership of Peter. Peter is the one who eventually goes in to the tomb first. He leads the way in mission just in the same way as he will lead going out of the boat in the chapter that follows.

But the disciple whom Jesus loves is the first to see. If Peter has a priority in mission, the disciple whom Jesus loves has a priority in vision and also in proximity to Christ. The point, despite the fact that there is a running race here, is not to pit the two against each other, but to show that they have different callings and they have priorities in those

different callings.

When they come to the tomb, the disciple whom Jesus loved looks inside and sees the linen cloths lying there. He doesn't go in, but then Simon Peter gets to the tomb, goes into the tomb, sees the linen cloths lying there and the face cloth folded up in a place by itself. Evidence that this is not something that's happened in a hurry, a hasty rush to remove a body, but that something very different has happened here.

When the other disciple, the disciple Jesus loved, comes inside the tomb, he looks inside, sees around and believes, even though they do not fully understand the meaning of the resurrection at that point. The disciples go back to their homes, but Mary stays outside the tomb and weeps. Looking inside the tomb, she sees two angels in white, seated where the body of Christ had lain, one at the head and one at the foot.

Now, what's going on there? I think we should notice that this is some sort of allusion to the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant, where you have an angel on one side and an angel on the other, the head and the foot of that particular piece of furniture. Jesus has gone into the Holy of Holies. The tomb is that Holy of Holies and he's opened up the Holy of Holies and now living water flows out into the world.

This is the spring in the centre of the garden from which the spices and the water will flow and give life to the world. And Mary coming to this is wondering where her Lord is. The angels ask her why she's weeping and she says to them, they've taken away my Lord, I do not know where they have laid him.

Many people have seen in the encounter between Mary and Jesus in the garden, a reference back to Eden. And I think there is something of that here, but I think there's something more. I think the reference that I hear primarily is the reference to Song of Songs.

The woman who opens to her beloved but her beloved is not there. I opened to my beloved but my beloved had turned and gone. My soul failed me when he spoke.

I sought out but found him not. I called him but he gave no answer. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him that I am sick with love.

Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned that we may seek him with you? My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to graze in the gardens and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. He grazes among the lilies.

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus is the lover. He's the one who comes as the bridegroom. He's announced by the friend of the bridegroom.

He begins his ministry at a wedding feast. He speaks to a woman at a well, the place

where the patriarchs met their wives. He has nard poured upon his feet in the same way as Song of Solomon 1.12 speaks about the nard filling the room with its fragrance while the king was at his couch.

He's laid to rest in a kingly scented chamber in the garden where it will be opened up so that the spices and the living water can fill the earth and bring life. And so now the woman comes to seek for her beloved, the one that she has seemingly lost, and she goes to the place where she last saw him. And he's not there and she's desperate.

She's looking for her lord and the one that she loves, and he's not to be found. And then in this powerful moment, Jesus speaks to her. Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? And she thinks he's the gardener, but yet he's not the gardener.

He's the one that she loves. And he declares himself by speaking her name. My sheep hear my voice and I call them by name.

He calls Mary by her name. And her name may make us think of some other events in the story of Scripture. Miriam, who's there to witness the deliverance of Moses, and then later on at the deliverance of the Red Sea, there is another sort of deliverance here.

And just as there was a Mary at his first deliverance of his birth, delivered from the womb, now there's another Mary to witness his delivery from the tomb. Our focus can so often be upon the theme of faith when we're reading the Gospels. But yet John has a lot to say about love.

John is the disciple that Jesus loved. And we see in characters like Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, Mary the mother of Jesus, we see the love of the church for Christ. Now the disciples go their own ways when it seems that the mission has failed.

They scatter. But in the case of Mary and the other women, you see something about the love that binds them to Christ. They're attached not just to Christ in his seeming mission, but to Christ in his person.

Mary of Bethany anoints his feet. The other women are present at the cross. Mary Magdalene seeks him at the tomb and then clings on to him.

Now in this, I think we're seeing something of the power of her love, and that even when faith seems to have failed, love can hang on. Even on Holy Saturday and the darkness of that first Easter morning, Mary Magdalene's love burns fiercely in the darkness, refusing to grant the darkness its final victory. And there I think we're seeing something about a different aspect of our relationship to Christ, something that goes beyond just faith.

There's something about the way that we should cling to Christ, that we should have a personal attachment to him which is exemplified particularly by the women within the Gospel. But yet Jesus has to go to his father, so she cannot cling on to him forever. He

has to leave at some point.

But she's sent to tell his disciples all the things that she has seen. And that very evening, Jesus appears to his disciples when they're locked in this room for fear of the Jews, and he shows them the tokens of his crucifixion, his hands and his side, and their response is one of joy. He tells them twice, peace be with you.

And he gives them a commission, as the father has sent me, even so I am sending you. We can maybe think of the way that the son is in the side of the father, and the beloved disciple is in the side of Christ. There is a symmetry between the church's relationship to Christ and Christ's relationship to the father.

And likewise, between the missions that they're given. Christ is sent by the father, the church is sent by Christ, we continue that mission. And the role of the Holy Spirit is important here.

Christ gives his spirit. He handed over the spirit on the cross. He will deliver his spirit to the church at Pentecost.

But here he gives his spirit to his disciples. This is part of the great commission, as it's presented by John. Jesus appears on a second occasion, eight days later, and this time Thomas is with them.

Thomas has doubted the appearance of Christ on the first occasion. We often focus upon Thomas' doubts, but his confession is arguably much more notable. Of all of the disciples, it is Thomas who makes the great Christological confession of the gospel.

He declares, my Lord and my God. It's in this statement that we finally see the disciples arriving at the full Christology of the gospel's prologue. It's in the confession of doubting Thomas that we arrive at the definitive form of faith to which the evangelist is summoning us as his readers.

And this point is underlined in the summary verses that follow. The purpose of the entire gospel is to enable us to come to this point. In Jesus' response to Thomas, it's as if the fourth wall is broken, and he turns to address us directly.

Blessed are we who have not seen and yet have believed. A question to consider. Throughout his gospel, John presents a number of different examples of faithful responses to Christ.

Our people receiving Christ in a good way. And we've seen a few of these within this chapter alone. Mary and her love.

Thomas and his faith in response to the sight of Christ. Peter and his obedience and mission. The disciple Jesus loved and his loving witness.

What are some of the other examples that we're given to learn from within the gospel? Their positive, their negative features. Is there a particular character that you most identify with? What do you learn from their example? John chapter 21 is an unusual chapter. We've just read John chapter 20 verses 30 and 31.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. That seems like a pretty good ending for the gospel.

But yet, the gospel goes on for a whole other chapter. What's this other chapter doing here? The question of what this chapter is doing here has exercised many scholars and many have thought that John chapter 20 verses 30 to 31 is the ending of the book and that chapter 21 is an awkward later addition. But yet, that doesn't seem to be the case to me.

As you look through the structure of the gospel more generally, this seems to have served the purpose of an epilogue. Now an epilogue is not part of the main body of a story. It's fenced off from the main narrative.

But yet, it is intended to be part of the narrative more generally. It's not just an appendix that's been added at some later point. It's deliberately set apart but it's part of the design of the work.

And in the case of the gospel of John, as Richard Borkham and others have argued, this balances the prologue with which the gospel begins in verses 1 to 18 of chapter 1. And what the prologue does is give us a sense of the prehistory to the gospel story. What occurs before any of the events of the gospel. And then the epilogue gives us a sense of what's happening next.

What's going to happen into the future of the church's mission. The epilogue previews what the church is going to do and gives us an understanding of the character of its mission and how its ministers are prepared for it. As Richard Borkham points out again, the story of the gospel opens with the words in the beginning and the last words of Christ in verse 23 are until I come.

There is a holding of the narrative of the gospel between these two poles. The very beginning of history and the very end of history. Borkham has also observed that while the prologue has 496 syllables, the epilogue has 496 words, which would heighten the sense of a balance between them.

Now the epilogue is a story about the failure of the disciples in their fishing, followed by a miraculous catch of fish. And this is a story very similar to the story associated with the first calling of Peter, James, John and Andrew in Luke chapter 5 verses 1 to 11. Not a

story that's recorded in John's gospel, but which would be familiar to readers of the gospel who knew other gospel accounts.

Peter takes the lead in the plan to go fishing. Some have seen this fishing expedition as a bad thing, that Peter and the other disciples are returning to their original trade, abandoning the gospel, abandoning the work of Christ. I don't think that's necessarily the case.

Jesus' question to his disciples about whether they have any food in verse 5 might recall the similar question that he asks in the feeding of the 5,000 in chapter 6 verse 5. Once again, Jesus instructs them and they receive numerous fish. So it recalls, first of all, the calling of Peter, but also recalls the bread and the fish of the feeding of the 5,000. There's a miracle here, once again, that involves believing and obeying Jesus' words.

We've seen in the signs of the first half of the gospel that most of them involve taking Jesus' word and obeying it. There's no pyrotechnics. It's not something that Christ does directly without any other party being involved.

Indeed, most of the time, Jesus is giving instructions to people that they must obey. Take up your bed and walk. Draw some of the water.

Return to your home and give out the bread and the fish. Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam. Lazarus, come forth.

Open up the grave. All these sorts of things are events in which people must obey for the miracle to take place. And it's the believing of Christ's word that is really important here.

The beloved disciple tells Peter, not the other disciples, it is the Lord. However, although the beloved disciple is the first to recognise Jesus, Peter is the one who plunges into the sea and seeks to beat the boat to the land. The fact that he puts on his outer garment before doing so suggests some great defeat of physical strength, especially as he then goes and drags the net filled with 153 fish to the land seemingly single-handedly.

The beloved disciple is physically outmatched by Peter by some distance in the previous chapter. But Peter is really without equal here. Putting on the garment again might also suggest that he's returning to his office in some sense.

It's an image of restoration. The catching of fish is probably symbolic of the role of the church in the mission to the Gentiles. The church is like a part of the land that's been brought out to sea.

The nations are presented as the sea in the Old Testament. And Peter's plunging into the sea could maybe be related to his leading of the way in the Gentile mission. The fact that the net was not broken maybe suggests the capacity of the church to fulfill its mission in the world.

Now the fact that there were 153 fish caught is an unusual detail, in which many have seen symbolism, I think quite rightly. Why are we given the exact number of the fish? Why not just say a great multitude of fish? Or maybe even around 150 fish? Why give that specific a detail? James Jordan has argued that 153 is the triangular number of 17. He's not the only person to argue this, but I think there's something there.

Crucial background, I think, is found in Ezekiel chapter 47, verses 1 to 12. And behold, the water was trickling out on the south side. Son of man, have you seen this? And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food.

Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail. But they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.

We've already seen Jesus and John as the gospel writer take up the imagery of this passage earlier on within the gospels. Jesus is the one who provides living water. Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water, like the waters from the temple.

Water flows from his peers' side. Christ is the one who awakens the winds of the garden, so that it blows out the fragrance, but also so that the living water from the spring can flow forth into the world. Christ is the one who opens up this living water, and as it flows out, there is healing for the rivers and the waters.

And fish thrive, and then fishermen can catch many fish as they spread out their nets. These are all themes that we're seeing here. First of all, the flowing out of the living waters as Christ's tomb is opened up, and the living waters of that holy of holies flow out into the world.

The living water of the royal lover's garden. Some scholars have suggested that there's an association with all the kinds of fish in the world, and 153 is the number of them. That's one possible interpretation.

But there is another, and that is the gematria of the words gedi and eglam. In Hebrew, letters serve the purpose also of numbers, and so they have a numerical value attached. And so when you have a particular word, it also has a numerical value that can be given to that word.

Gedi is 17, eglam is 153, and 153 is the triangular number of 17, which many have noticed independent of the connection between those two names. This seems like quite a striking connection to me. Probably too strong to be just a coincidence.

The fact that the fishermen are catching fish from En Gedi to En Eglam maybe suggests this movement from 17 to 153, which is an expansive movement, as that 17 is made into a triangular number, and the ministry of the church is going out into the world more broadly. This also helps us to see this event as a sign. It's not just a miracle.

It's not just a great act of power. But it's a symbol of the growing ministry and mission of the church, a ministry that will involve the catching of fish from many nations, the healing of the waters as the waters flow out, and it will involve Peter pioneering in that way as well. And all of these things are symbolized within this particular event.

Jesus has prepared a fire of coals with fish and with bread, and the fish and the bread might recall the feeding of the 5,000. In that particular occasion, Jesus involved his disciples in the ministry there, and he gave them a ministry in which they were participants in the spreading of this food. Here he's doing the same thing.

The fire of coals also recalls the fire of coals of chapter 18, verse 18, the fire of coals by which Peter denied Jesus. The fact that Jesus asked Peter three times whether he loves him would also seem to recall Peter's three denials. Jesus, as in the story of Emmaus, he reveals himself in a shared meal and a bread action.

But there's some sort of doubt lingering in some way, or at least they know it's Jesus, but after Easter something has definitively changed about him. This is not Jesus as they knew him previously. There's something about him that has changed.

He's in a resurrected body. There's a sense that something is not the same and he's going to move on. Jesus, as he questions Peter, focuses on Peter's love.

Does he love Jesus more than the other disciples? Now he had bragged earlier that even if all the others were forsaken, he would not forsake him. And Jesus' question is one that challenges him on that front. He calls him to feed his lambs.

Now is this a reference primarily to the weaker of the sheep, the small of the sheep, the children, and the people who are more vulnerable, those who have just come to faith? Perhaps. I wouldn't read too much into it, nor would I read too much into the different words for love used here, as some have done. Jesus says much the same thing each time.

And the point is that Peter is to demonstrate his love for Christ in his care for his people. Remember that when Peter denied Christ, he also denied his association with Christ's people. Here he's being told that to demonstrate his love for Christ, he has to demonstrate it by loving and caring for Christ's people in their vulnerability.

Jesus then goes on to predict Peter's death. The physical strength that Peter has just displayed will depart, and he'll be girded, as Jesus was, for the utmost act of service. And the suggestion is when a martyrdom, specifically on a cross, he will stretch out his hands.

And there's a parallel here between the death of Peter and the death of his Lord. In 2 Peter 1, verse 14, Peter suggests that Jesus had informed him about the nature and the timing of the death that awaited him. Now, all of this calls back as well to chapter 13,

verse 36 to 38.

Simon Peter said to him, Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered him, Where I am going, you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward. Peter said to him, Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you. Jesus answered, Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.

So Jesus restores him, but he also gives him an assurance that he will now be able to follow him. And he will be able to follow him to that point of martyrdom. Not the martyrdom maybe that Peter expected, this martyrdom where he can chop off the ear of the servant and fight for Christ, but now a martyrdom where he will be seen in that very act of weakness, where he'll be led to a place where he doesn't want to go.

He'll be put in a situation where he's not in power and it'd be precisely in this moment of weakness, rather than the martyrdom of strength that Peter was anticipating, that he will follow his Lord. At this point, Peter proceeds to ask about the manner of the beloved disciple's death. This isn't for Peter to know.

He must rather focus upon following his own calling that he's been given. At this point also, that the identity of the author of the gospel is revealed to be the beloved disciple. Like certain other figures within the gospel, the beloved disciple is never explicitly named.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is never actually explicitly named. She's spoken of as the mother of Christ or as woman. I would suggest this is because they are playing not just specific historical parts, but also symbolic purposes.

We're supposed to see in these specific characters, characters that we can identify with, that we can recognise our own connection with them, and the way that they stand for the broader reality of the church or the paradigmatic disciple. And this concluding passage presents the characters of Peter and the beloved disciple alongside each other, revealing them to have two unique and crucial callings. The beloved disciple and Peter have already, as I've noted, been played up against each other in different ways, compared and contrasted.

The beloved disciple has a closeness to Christ that Peter maybe does not. Peter is the one who pioneers a mission in many ways, in the way that the beloved disciple does not. The beloved disciple and Peter are nonetheless always found in association with each other.

They work together. They're not at odds and in a fundamental rivalry with each other, even though they're racing and other things like that, and one's going ahead out of the boat. It's not seen as some fundamental opposition or antagonism between the two, but

it's a recognition that they both have different parts to play.

And there's something cryptic about the destiny of the beloved disciple, if I will that he remain until I come. And this seems to be discussed quite extensively by people following Jesus' statement. What might be meant by it? Well, I think one thing that might be meant by it is a fulfillment of what Jesus says elsewhere, that some of those standing here will not see death until they see the kingdom of God coming in his power.

And that refers in part to the events of the Transfiguration, which occurs beforehand in the Synoptic Gospels. But I think it also refers to the events of AD 70, the events in which Christ would come in judgment upon Jerusalem. I think this anticipates that in part.

In the book of Revelation, John is the great witness of the prophecy concerning those events, and he seems to be the one who lives to see those events take place, unlike most of the other apostles who die before they occur. There's also something about the character of the ministry of the beloved disciple, or John, as I believe he is, that does continue to the end. Peter seems to be established as the chief shepherd of the church at this point, and earlier, but John is the chief witness.

He is the one who is in the side of Christ, much as Christ is in the side of the Father. And in the light of the extreme emphasis upon witness within the book, it's significant that the witness-bearer that comes to the forefront at the very end is the beloved disciple. While the beloved disciple will not survive until the very end of all things, his witness will do.

The beloved disciple and his witness are active means of the Spirit's advocacy concerning righteousness, concerning the judgment of the world, and testifying to Christ within the underlying legal drama of human history. And as the readers of his testimony were left with the question of where we stand in relationship to it, the gospel began with a statement about time. The very beginning is the place where Christ is found, and the very end of history is where Christ is to be found as well.

He is going to come. But if the whole scope of time is referenced, there is also the whole scope of space referenced too. The whole world would not be able to contain the witness to all the things that Christ has done if they were written down.

In the very prologue of the gospel then, and in the very epilogue, we see that Christ completes the full span of human history. He's the Alpha and the Omega. He's also the one who fills space, the one who cannot be contained by space, the one who's greater than any of the scope that this world, this created universe offers.

He is the one who's greater than all these things, for he is with God and he is God. A question to consider at the end of this treatment of the gospel of John. The gospel of John begins with the witness of a John, and ends with the witness of a John.

The witness of John the Baptist, and then the witness of John the beloved disciple. The book of Revelation contains many similar patterns and themes. Once again, it begins with an emphasis upon witness.

And as we work through it, we can see many patterns and similarities emerging. And it ends in a similar place too. What are some of the ways in which the ending of the book of Revelation mirrors the ending of the gospel of John?