



Sermon Series by Season

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Vol. 2 Part A
Advent through Transfiguration

“O Come, O Come Immanuel”
“The ‘I am’ decrees of Jesus”

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The purpose of this volume.

Churches are often vacant for long periods or are in locations where it is difficult to find pastors to fill the pulpit when they are vacant. This series of four books is my humble attempt to help vacant congregations. The sixty sermons, divided into four sections by the seasons, will give congregations an option on Sundays that it is hard to get a pastor. The sermons are arranged in series covering a specific section of scripture or topic. Some are meant to cover a season. Others will fill the long weeks between Pentecost and the beginning of Advent.

This begins my second year of sermons by season. This is the first of four volumes of sermons that will cover the church year. The 59 sermons in each of the volumes can be used during the season indicated or as a sermon series at any time of the year. There is no cost to use these sermons and so I encourage you to freely use them with or without citation of authorship. God gave them as a gift to us at Bethany and we want to pass them on to you. Feel free to pass them on to others so that as many as possible may share in what the Lord has given all of us. You are also allowed to edit them to fit your specific location or your personal style of preaching. May the Lord bless you as you learn and grow from His word.

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Advent/ Christmas – O Come, O Come Immanuel

We often sing the Advent hymn “O Come, O Come, Immanuel” without thinking about what the verses tell us about Jesus. Based on the Great “O” Antiphons of the ancient church, this hymn will take us on a tour of the Old Testament names and attributes of Jesus. This sermon series attempts to look back to the Old Testament texts that explain the meaning of each of these names. If you want to use this series during Advent and Christmas, you might sing “O Come, O Come, Immanuel each week emphasizing the verse that corresponds with each message and Old Testament passage. As you follow the series, you will notice that each name for Jesus tells us something about His character and the blessings that He alone can bring. This series will help you look beyond the manger to God’s plan for His Messiah and the impact that He brings to each of us in life. Let the Messiah of the Old Testament come into your lives this season and help you see the depth of His ministry to all people.

O Come O Come Immanuel

1. Wisdom from on high (v.2 – O Come, O Come)

Is. 61:1-6

Big idea: Wisdom is more than information.

Isaiah 61:1-6 (NIV)

¹ The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, ³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. ⁴ They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. ⁵ Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. ⁶ And you will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast.

So much information, so little wisdom

The internet spews information like a fire hydrant drowning the reader and providing very little refreshment. The television news gives snippets of information around the clock, which pretend to provide answers but are phrased to want you to hunger for more. We live in an information overload that has very little wisdom. True wisdom is making the right choices at the right time. It is the doctor who knows what treatment and how much is needed to cure someone. It is the financial advisor who gets you in and out of the market at the right time.

Such wisdom is hard to find. We think we can find answers for raising our children in books or on the internet. We believe we can discover what we need if we search hard enough. What we need is a wise person. What we need is Jesus, who is the wisdom from on high. Real wisdom comes from only one book. It comes from the Bible, where God reveals what has worked and when it works in life. It comes from the mouth of Jesus as He speaks in the gospels. We can learn more from an hour with the Bible than a week with television or other books.

I. He was anointed to share wisdom v. 1a. *The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.*

We have to learn wisdom from scripture. Jesus is wisdom. No one had to teach Him. He came to earth from heaven, where He sat at the side of God the Father. He was there when the world was created. He was there through every era of the Old Testament. He, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, inspired every Old Testament writer from Moses to Malachi and gave them the words to say and write with a wisdom

that can be found nowhere else. The book of Proverbs came to Solomon from Jesus, and the prophecies came to Isaiah from our Lord.

The child in the manger has the answers to every question that you and I have. While he was here on earth, He gathered the crowds – 1000's at a time – and spoke the wisdom of God so that people were amazed at the depth of His knowledge and the clarity of His answers. God anointed him for this purpose. While the Old Testament prophets spoke vaguely, Jesus said clearly and in detail. He didn't just have the information. He instructs us on how to live and succeed in a world constantly working with faulty information.

A. To preach to the poor v. 1b *He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoner*

The wisdom of the Messiah was given to heal the damage that sin brings. Sin destroys lives. We think it is ok to live as if life has no consequences. It is ok to demand that we be first in a relationship. It is ok to spend money like there is no tomorrow. It is ok to ignore the commandments. Our selfish culture has taught us all of that. We are to care only about ourselves and the happiness we can bring to our lives. It is killing us and destroying our tomorrows. Jesus comes with His truth and wisdom to show us how to live and repair our damaged lives.

He shows us when to make sacrifices for others and when to let them walk on their own. He shows us how to prepare for the future and when to take care of the present. He shows us how to balance work, family, and life while putting Him first so that you have what you need for life. And through it all, Jesus helped repair the damage that false wisdom causes in people's lives. He taught the crowds on the hillside and teaches in churches and homes today. Open up the scripture, and He will give you the answers you need to thrive in a culture that destroys.

B. To rebuild broken lives v.3a *and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.*

In the wisdom of God, Jesus also heals. The scriptures are filled with miracles of Jesus as He healed the sick and the lame. They are also filled with miracles where Jesus healed lives broken with grief and despair. Life was tough, and Jesus brought joy and healing. A single word from Jesus could cast out a demon or raise the dead. His words had power. So why do people today despise His words and refuse to listen? Why do they sit in the ash heap with heavy hearts and expect that the wrong answers they have received from the world should be made to work?

Come to Him all you who are weary and receive His rest. Let him wrap His arms around you and learn from Him. Those who will humble themselves and come to the manger will receive the healing for their souls and bodies. They will receive what the world can not give. He is the comforter who will comfort you with His words in scripture. He calms your broken hearts and souls. He is the healer we come to in prayer and brings healing at the proper time and proper way to do the most good. Wisdom from on high is freedom from the darkness of sin and its effects.

C. To lift us up to be priests v. 6 *And you will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches, you will boast.*

His wisdom will not only release you from sin's captivity, but it will lift you up to be priests of the Most High God. Think of who the disciples were and who they became. Think of people like Nicodemus and Mary and Martha. These were ordinary people who became extraordinary. Jesus had that effect on so many people that He met. He didn't just cure the things that ailed them. Our Lord lifted them so they could accomplish what the world around them could not. He gave them forgiveness from the cross and power from the empty tomb.

We see the effect that He has on a family when the father is a strong Christian and bestows on his children the love and values of the Lord so that their lives are different. We see how a godly leader in a church changes the culture of that church so that it is a place of selfless love which impacts so many. Jesus doesn't just take care of the hurts of the past. He equips His people with wisdom to live in the present and the future. Their lives will be different than others around them. They will succeed where others will fail because the Lord gives them answers every day.

II. Making the most of His wisdom

Wisdom will rebuild His church and people v. 4 *They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.*

In the days of Isaiah, the nation was going the wrong way. A country that had been godly and prosperous in the days of Uzziah had forgotten their Lord and was facing an Assyrian attack. They were using the wrong wisdom. They had given into the understanding of the world. Isaiah pointed to the time of the Messiah when He would rebuild His church and His people by teaching and caring. It would be like the Year of Jubilee in the Old Testament, where land and lives would be rebuilt, and prosperity would come. Those who listened to God would thrive.

The child in the manger is a turning point in history. BC has become an AD. The time of darkness is now the time of Christ. Those who have His wisdom will know what to do and when to do it. They will comprehend how to build solid relationships and know what will bring blessings, not destruction. They will have the values, character, and wisdom to change the world around them. Jesus has healed the past for them and given them the tools and knowledge to build a solid future for themselves and others. They will live in His wisdom and will be blessed by it.

Listen and learn

Jesus brought salvation to mankind. He also brought wisdom, and we would be wise to take the time to listen. Many rejected His words in His lifetime or were too busy to listen to him. They were destined to repeat all the mistakes of the past and to be unhappy in the future. Others sat at His feet in large groups on a mountainside or in small groups in homes. They were changed and equipped. The past mistakes were overcome, and the future was brighter. Jesus taught, healed, and prepared them to change their lives and the world.

I challenge you to open your life to the wisdom from on high. Make daily bible study and prayer a priority. Listen and even take notes on what you learn in Bible class and the sermons. Only those who listen and learn from Jesus will have the advantage. I close this with a challenge. Let your time in the Bible be abundant and more than your time listening to the evening news or in self-help books. Real wisdom comes from Jesus. The rest is information that may or may not be accurate or helpful. Open your heart and mind to Jesus, and watch where he can take you.

2. Lord of Might (v.3– O Come, O Come)
Psalm 2,
Big idea: Happiness comes only in His Kingdom

Psalm 2:1-12 (NIV)

¹ Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. ³ "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." ⁴ The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. ⁵ Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, ⁶ "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." ⁷ I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. ⁹ You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." ¹⁰ Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. ¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. ¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Only Jesus' rule will bring a perfect world. V.1 *Why do the nations conspire and the people plot in vain?*

Man has always dreamed of a perfect world where everyone lives in harmony and peace. It was President Wilson's dream in the League of Nations and its successor, the United Nations. It is the dream of science fiction, like a star trek with the Federation of Planets. We will never achieve it. David begins the psalm with a question that defies an answer. With all that God has done for humanity, how can they rebel against him? God offers the better world people want as He has fed them, provided for their basic needs, and provided a savior to bring forgiveness and eternal life.

Yet, man refuses to take from God what they want to create so badly. The man had a perfect garden with Adam and Eve, and yet they rebelled. Man and woman had a cleansed earth after the flood and built a tower to make an ideal world. The pattern has repeated itself again and again. God's reign will come whether man wants it or not. You can ride the wave of His power and have a better world, or you can stand up to it and let it crash against you on the beach. The power of God is absolute. The kingship of Jesus is here. The child in the manger is a force to be worshipped.

Where real power lies

A. The world rebels against the Messiah v. 2 *The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One.*

The only time the Pharisees and Sadducees got along in the gospels was when they opposed Jesus. They refused to bow down to Him or listen to His words of wisdom. The people's hearts should be theirs, and Jesus was stealing them. He must be destroyed. Of course, behind the scenes was Satan, who used leaders to defy and try to kill Jesus. He inspired King Herod to try and eliminate the child Jesus in Bethlehem. He tempted Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. He even deceived Judas so that he would betray His master.

At the heart of it is a desire to destroy or discredit Jesus so that we do not have to accept His rule or worship Him. From the very beginning, man has wanted to be their own rulers. They want to do things their way even if it isn't working and is harming others. We still see that heart when people have no use for Jesus. His rules are too rigid and confining to live. They want to be free to do their own thing. They will persecute the church and live according to their own values. Have fun now; there are no consequences and no tomorrow.

B. The Lord declares the Messiah's power v.6 *"I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill."*

While man shakes his fists at God and wages war on Christianity, God laughs. Man is but a fly to be swatted down by an almighty God and is no danger at all. He rebukes them with the prophets and the message of scripture so that they take heed and listen to their folly. Yet, most do not pay any attention to the warning. It doesn't affect the future. God has installed His king with glory and ultimate power. Man can do nothing to stop the crowing of Jesus. The strongest nations can be controlled with a flick of His finger. The Christian faith will outlast communism, Islam, and all the other creeds of Satan and man.

This text is a warning for all who oppose our Lord today. The free culture of people living together and irresponsibility will crash in on itself. The Islamic nations will be defeated just as Assyria and Babylon were in the days of the Old Testament prophets. There is only one king, and His name is Jesus. He rules by His power. He defeated sin by His cross. Everything is under His control, for Jesus is not inactive. He is controlling the history of the world on behalf of His people. Nations will rise and fall, but the church will survive and be victorious.

C. The Messiah will smash those who oppose Him v.9 *You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery."*

Those who do not bow down to Him will soon disappear. He does not ask for our opinion or take a vote. Man thinks they can bend the commandments or make Jesus do their will, but they are mistaken. Sin will continue to be sin. The path of salvation will always be found at the cross. The Roman Empire, which crucified Jesus and martyred Peter and Paul, bowed down to Jesus and became a Christian nation. The glory of the Islamic Turks of Luther's day is no more. Even Hitler and Stalin, with their opposition to the faith, are gone. No one can stand up to the Lord for long.

At times, we feel like evil is winning. We mourn the loss of Christmas carols in the mall or the right to pray in schools. Our nation is becoming less Christian, but God will not be mocked. Those who promote it in our country will ultimately fail. They will succeed for a while, but God will not be mocked. The child in the manger did not come to make our dreams a reality. He came so that we might live in His kingdom and be blessed because we have a genuine and honest king who cares about his people and can do everything needed to care for His people.

D. Submit to His power while there is time v.12a *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment.*

The wise will submit to the king's power and have authentic peace. Instead of fighting the kingdom that Jesus brings, people should embrace it. He pleads with sinners to repent and accept the forgiveness that He brings. He implores men and women to obey His commandments and have joy. Throughout all those horrible times of the past, some people believed in Jesus and were part of His kingdom. The disciples lived during the Roman Empire, Bonhoeffer lived during Nazi Germany, and many stand up today. They worship Jesus as king, and their lives are better for it.

As long as you are alive, you are welcome to be part of His kingdom. You are welcome to let Him protect and provide for you. You are welcome to bring your problems to Him and receive His solutions. Stop trying to find your own way and fail over and over again. This plea is a call for devotion to the king. It is what the shepherds and the magi did at the manger. It is what the disciples did during his ministry. It is the picture of Revelation 5, where all heaven worships the lamb who was slain and has risen in power. O Come let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord.

Freedom comes by submitting to King Jesus v.12 b. *Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*

Let us be honest with ourselves. The world thinks freedom comes when you are in control of life and can do what you want. That has only brought anarchy. Look at what happens when men ignore the law or riots fill the streets. Each man feels free to do what he wants. Genuine freedom comes when each man obeys the Lord and has the freedom to grow and develop without fear of people breaking into their homes

or riots in the streets. Real freedom comes as each man lives morally so that they raise their family in peace and have hope for the future.

When King Jesus is honored, and His ways are followed, the world has peace and prosperity. They work together because they follow Jesus and are in harmony with each other. They avoid the consequences of sin in their lives and find that blessings come to their lives daily. Everyone has a choice. They can defy God and face the consequences that come from our sins of selfishness and life without morals or boundaries – or- we can surrender to Jesus and live with the blessings that come from Him so that our lives are peaceful and filled with love.

The waste of rebellion *Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.*

Communism thought God was useless, and it collapsed over a few decades. The Nazi nation in World War II lasted even less. The Taliban, which forces Muslim values on the world, shows no signs of success either. You can't stand against Jesus and win. In our country, the sexual revolution of the '60s has brought us an era where fewer marriages last and more children are raised in broken homes or by their grandparents. The free spirit world has given us opioids and other drug problems. We have rebelled against God, and it has cost us.

Rebellion against Jesus is a waste for nations and individuals. The future is all in the kingdom of the child in the manger. Throughout history, the church has survived, and its people have had joy even in difficult situations. God is with them, and He will protect and provide for them. We often minimize the power of the child in the manager. Make no mistake. He is God, and rebellion against him brings only trouble. Those who worship Him will be forgiven by the cross and empowered by the empty tomb to live in peace in this world and the next. Amen.

3. Jesse's stem (v. 4– O Come, O Come)

Isaiah 11:1-5

Big idea: Only one person is the greatest leader of all.

Isaiah 11:1-5 (NIV)

¹ A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. ² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD-- ³ and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; ⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

⁵ Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

A leader even better than George Washington

What if God promised you that the next president would have all the best qualities of George Washington without any of his faults? He would be noble and willing to make sacrifices for the nation he loved, just like Washington did. Yet, this person would have wisdom that was more like Solomon's and would be a great leader like Nehemiah. He would be a general like Eisenhower and have the heart of Lincoln. It would be a golden era for the United States and end the troubled times in Washington, DC.

Such is the promise of the shoot from Jesse's stump. There would be a king like David, who was the son of Jesse but with a difference. He would be even greater than his ancestor David. He would bring an era of peace and prosperity to His people as they had never seen before. Such is the promise of the Messiah – a promise kept by the baby in the manger. When the people of God thought of the coming Messiah, they thought of such great times. No wonder the people were excited that the king of the Jews was born in Bethlehem.

The perfect leader described

A. A sprout from a dead tree v. 1 *A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots, a Branch will bear fruit.*

He came on a day when there had been no king in Judah for over 580 years. Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans had ruled the people. They had a brief period of freedom under the Maccabees but no king during that time. The line of Jesse was a dead stump 500 years old. In Bethlehem, a shoot from the stump was born that first Christmas. He was a direct descendant of David, born in the city of kings. He was a tender shoot that could have been easily broken off. Herod could have killed him in Bethlehem. Others tried to kill Him before the cross and failed.

This shoot was different, however. The Son of Man was an eternal shoot. David, Solomon, and the other kings lived and died. This king would live forever. He is still ruling and inviting people to be part of his kingdom, for His kingdom is the Christian church. His kingdom has spread around the world. The roots are in Jerusalem, but the realm of the church has sprouted across the globe. We see churches in Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Far East where people would have thought that the ground was dead for Christianity. The root of Jesse is worldwide.

B. Perfect wisdom v.2 *The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD*

Most of us are happy with an extensive knowledge in our field of study. The new king has a sevenfold wisdom that comes from the Father. He is wisdom that understands all things. On the hillside, he taught, understanding people's failings and helping them in their need. He knows what to say on every occasion, and his words can change lives and mend the broken world. The Pharisees tried to stump Him, but he always confounded them. He knows everything and can always do the right thing at the right time.

He knows what is in our hearts. He knows when we lie to ourselves and don't know the truth. He knows when we need to submit to the Lord for our good, and He guides us to have wisdom so we know what to do and what not to do. The shoot from Jesse is God Himself and wants us to live in discernment so that our lives will be a delight as we follow God's wisdom and live in His love. There is no reason to wander through life. Our friend will guide us with perfect wisdom from on high.

C. Justice for all v.3, and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes or decide by what he hears with his ears;

Isaiah lived in a land where the rich were often favored, and the poor were forgotten or used. The shoot of Jesse shows no favorites. He has come to judge people fairly and offer the same benefits to the rich and poor. Just look at his ministry to Nicodemus and dozens of poor widows and infirmed. He does not rely on outward appearance or the status of people. His concern is for the heart. Are you open to letting Him help? Will you stop trying to be in charge of your life and let Him provide for you what you cannot do for yourself?

He is the defender of the weak and the orphan. He is the one who punishes the wicked so that the lowly of this world and the fragile have the same opportunities as those who seem to have it all. Wealth or status will not determine the quality of your life. It will be whether Jesus is at the center of life. Those who live in His kingdom will live in peace, surrounded by a community that loves and cares for them. He will bring justice for all and mercy from His cross so that we might live with hope and a future. Those who know Him want to live with no other as their Lord.

D. No flaw in character v. 5 Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

The kings of Israel and Judah had been flawed, even the greatest of them, like David and Solomon. The prophets had also been deficient, whether it was Elijah or even Isaiah himself. The shoot of Jesse would have no flaws. He would have nothing that would mar his judgment or His rule. Jesus was the perfect friend and mentor to the disciples. He cared for them and knew when to push them so they might learn and when to take them into the desert so they could rest from the crowds. On the night before His death, He thought of them and prepared them rather than caring for himself.

Jesus was the perfect teacher who was not greedy or worried about promoting himself. He taught the crowds what they needed to learn, even when it offended them. Our Lord took time to train individuals who came with special needs. When the Pharisees put him on trial, they could not get witnesses to agree about anything he had done wrong. The only charge that would stick is His confession to be the son of God, which was true. Here is the leader you want, for He is one you can trust and has no evil in Him whatsoever.

Who can be such a leader?

Only Jesus could be so great Luke 1:32. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his Father David,

Such greatness could only be from God Himself. Two dozen or so descendants of Jesse are listed as the kings of Judah. None of them, not even David, can do all the things that this shoot will do. They are imperfect humans. He is the God-Man sent to be the Messiah of the world. The angel will proclaim that the shoot would come forth in the days of Mary and Joseph. The two would have a part in bringing this king into the world so that He might rule and bring a real solution to the world torn by sin.

There would be no man that God could trust with this ministry. No man would be wise enough, loving enough, or decent enough to pull it off. That is why God sent His son into the world to be our savior and king. That is why the shoot of Jesse had to come from heaven and be born on earth. Surely, Mary and Joseph had an inkling of what their child would be based on the words of angels and the Old Testament prophecy. His greatness probably surprised them as it began to unfold. There was a king like no other who would change the world for all time.

How would it be like to be in His kingdom?

What would it be like to have a leader who was so wise that He always did the right thing? He wouldn't make dumb tweets or sling dirt on Supreme Court nominees or public servants that may or may not exist. He would always share the right thing to do, the one that would help all, not a few. What would it be like to have a leader who was fair to all and cared that everyone in His kingdom had the best life? He would keep us from being lazy or proud. He would keep the wicked at bay and reward those who worked hard for themselves and others. He would bring prosperity as people did the right.

You have a choice to be part of such a kingdom. It is the kingdom of Jesus, and he invited you all to be part of baptism. How much of that kingdom you are a part of is up to you. You can devote yourself to Him in worship, prayer, and Bible study. You can seek to follow Him in your life. If you do so, the blessings of this passage will be yours and will belong to anyone you invite into the kingdom of the church. If you keep Jesus at arm's length, you will not have the full blessings of this kingdom but will choose to live in the world and under its leaders. The shoot of Jesse has come. Will you let Him be your leader?

4. Key of David (v.5– O Come, O Come)

Isaiah 22:15-25

Big idea: Jesus alone has the keys to the kingdom

Isaiah 22:15-25 (NIV)

¹⁵ This is what the Lord, the LORD Almighty, says: "Go, say to this steward, to Shebna, who is in charge of the palace: ¹⁶ What are you doing here and who gave you permission to cut out a grave for yourself here, hewing your grave on the height and chiseling your resting place in the rock? ¹⁷ "Beware, the LORD is about to take firm hold of you and hurl you away, O you mighty man. ¹⁸ He will roll you up tightly like a ball and throw you into a large country. There you will die and there your splendid chariots will remain-- you disgrace to your master's house! ¹⁹ I will depose you from your office, and you will be ousted from your position. ²⁰ "In that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim son of Hilkiah. ²¹ I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash around him and hand your authority over to him. He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. ²² I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. ²³ I will drive him like a peg into a firm place; he will be a seat of honor for the house of his father. ²⁴ All the glory of his family will hang on him: its offspring and offshoots--all its lesser vessels, from the bowls to all the jars. ²⁵ "In that day," declares the LORD Almighty, "the peg driven into the firm place will give way; it will be sheared off and will fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut down." The LORD has spoken.

Who is in charge?

Good leaders are hard to find. The nations of the world are in the uprising, with the departure of the English and French Prime ministers seemingly imminent. The Democrats want to impeach Trump, and a divided House and Senate means two years of fighting here. The Catholic church is under fire for not dealing with wayward priests. Some of the big nondenominational churches are falling apart as well. Most of the Mainline churches are slowly fading away as they close churches by the dozens between them.

Who is in charge? Who can turn things around in our world? The answer is the Key of David, Jesus Christ. He has the keys of authority in our world. He will push aside the wicked and raise the humble. His challenge today is that so few are willing to follow him. God can take away evil with a flick of his finger. Will he find people in this world who are godly and righteous to give the keys of the kingdom to so that the world can be filled with God's blessings instead of man's greed and power-grabbing?

Sheba

A. Many seek their own glory v. 16 *What are you doing here, and who gave you permission to cut out a grave for yourself here, hewing your grave on the height and chiseling your resting place in the rock?*

The text is set in the days of Hezekiah, a good king of Judah. Sheba was the treasurer of the nation of Judah. It was a place that put him second in power to the king. He had authority to do great things but was using his position for his own glory. God challenges him with a question. He had used the treasury to build an elaborate tomb in the rock as a monument to himself. He had bought chariots so he might have prominence. He may have even been working behind the scenes for Assyria against his nation.

God had given him a place of importance, and he was grabbing everything for himself. We have become immune to this kind of power grab. We are used to it as Senators and Representatives become millionaires and heads of corporations live in luxury while bankrupting the company they serve. Those in authority seek to bring glory to themselves but neglect the calling they have been given so that the people suffer. They think that they can mock God but are in for a surprise. Glory belongs to the Lord, and He alone has the keys to the future.

B. Glory belongs only to the Lord v.17 *Beware, the LORD is about to take firm hold of you and hurl you away, O you mighty man.*

In the end, Sheba will lose it all. Many think that the Assyrians took Sheba as a prisoner for not delivering the victory that he had promised. God himself would drive Sheba out of office so that he would never be buried in the monument he had created for himself. He would lose his chariots and fine living and be taken captive in a foreign land. Instead of having honor, he will have disgrace. Instead of being at the top of a country, he will spend his time in chains. God will not be mocked and will hurl Sheba away with a flick of his finger.

Such will be for all those who think of their own glory. The day of reckoning will come for legislators who care not for the country but only for their party's power. Such will come for the CEO, who cares not about the little guy on the factory line. God put them in power to care for people and will take away the power when they abuse it. We worry about the world spinning out of control, but God is there, and he will not let the world self-destruct because of the greed and selfishness of man.

Eliakim

C. God will lift the humble and righteous v. 20 *"In that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim, son of Hilkiyah. 21 I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash around him and hand your authority over to him.*

God will look for the humble and righteous. Eliakim is an assistant to Hezekiah. He is described as "my servant" by God. Here is a man who is a faithful believer whose heart was turned to the Lord. God will lift him and put him in the place of honor as his servant. He will give him the royal robes and keys of the kingdom. He will drive him as a peg put in a wall so that his place is firm, and he will not fall out of this place of honor. God looks for the righteous and the humble who will follow him in faith to be his leaders.

The challenge throughout history has been that such people are far too few. The people of God need to raise leaders like this. They need to be in the word and prayer so that the Lord can use them in the nation and the church. They need to encourage their children to follow the Lord. Such people don't just happen. They are grown by the church so that the wisdom of God and the gifts of God are found in them. When the church is not witnessing and teaching, we force God to use second best. We should not complain if all those available to lead are less than the best.

D. He will bring glory to the Lord by caring for others v. 20b. *He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.*

Eliakim is someone who God will use to care for His people. God has given him authority and wisdom to run the state and provide for the people of Judah. His purpose is not to promote himself but to ensure that people see God as their provider. He has the keys to the kingdom and can ensure that the widow is fed and the orphan has a place to lay his head. He runs the nation so that the wheels of government run smoothly and provide a place where the people can live their lives in security and prosperity.

Our task as God's servants is to care for His people. We run our church so that it is a benefit to the people who are members and visitors here. We live as citizens caring for our neighbors and helping people in our schools so that this is a nation where things run smoothly, and government works. We also have the keys to the kingdom given in the New Testament, in which we can forgive people their sins. We have the chance to take away burdens and grief. We can let people know how much God loves them and how much God wants to do for them. We bring glory to God by showing his love.

Christians today

Jesus alone has the keys to the kingdom v. 22 *I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.*

Christ has the key of David so that what he does can't be undone. When he raises people to lead, no one will be able to bring them down. When he decides that someone has abused their position, no one can stop his desire to remove them. He has the final say, and no person can take that away. He also has the power over the kingdom of heaven. His word on the last day will determine whether a person gets into heaven or is cast into hell. There will be no appeal and no second chances on judgment day.

He also gives some of this authority to you and me. We have the right to forgive and to keep the sins of others. Jesus gives us the chance to forgive those who repent and to bind those like Sheba in this text who have no use for God. The picture in Revelation 3:7 is one of the divine Jesus with all power. Here he has the key of David that shows that he is in control of this world and control of the next. He rules this world and has the keys to heaven and hell. His power is ultimate.

Those who seek God's glory will bring honor to themselves v.24 *All the glory of his family will hang on him: its offspring and offshoots--all its lesser vessels, from the bowls to all the jars.*

As Eliakim will be a blessing to his country, those who seek God's glory will bring honor to this kingdom. Prosperity and blessings do not come from our strength. They come as we acknowledge and obey the Lord God, who has the keys to the kingdom. He lifts faithful people so they can use His authority to care for others in the church and the community. They can do great things with his power and wisdom. They can also give forgiveness to people and take away grief and sorrow by His office of the keys.

Pray that the church might raise humble and righteous people who can serve the nation and serve the church. Without them, we will be served by people who do not have God's heart or concern for others. Yet, if the people of God can be His servants, then the nation will prosper. The Lord is in charge. The babe in the manger has the keys to success and failure. He rules the world and leads the church. May all who are in authority give him glory and honor all the days of their lives. Amen.

5. Dayspring (v.6– O Come, O Come)

Isaiah 9:1-7

Big idea: Why live in darkness?

Isaiah 9:1-7 (NIV)

¹ Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan-- ² The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. ³ You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. ⁴ For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. ⁵ Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. ⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Light in the darkest hour v.1 *In the past, he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future, he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by way of the sea, along the Jordan—*

They were always the first to be attacked and left in ruins. Zebulun and Naphtali lie on the northern end of Palestine. It was the area struck by the Assyrians first in Hezekiah's day. It was the first place attacked by Babylonians, Greeks, and Romans as well. It never seemed to recover. Yet, it would be known as the place of Galilee and as the place of light. Here in these areas, around the Sea of Galilee would be where Jesus concentrated his ministry. He would do his first miracle in Cana and preach on a hill near Capernaum. Light would come in their darkness, for the child would be there.

The light of Jesus still overcomes the darkness, whether it is the darkness that comes in those horrible hours when we lose a loved one or in the nation overwhelmed by crime and corruption. The light of Jesus shows reality and overcomes our troubles with his power and His peace. In any situation, we can sink into despair or find hope. The difference is the light of Jesus. We have real hope as we look at His kingdom and the future that He brings. Troubles will come, but we have a friend who can overcome them for us all.

The essence of the child's light v.6 *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

A. Wonderful Counselor

Everyone needs a guide in life. Throughout the Old Testament, God sent the prophets to help the people know right from wrong and to give answers to the trials of life. They reminded them of the commandments of God. They encouraged them when God seemed far away. In the New Testament, we see the crowds flocking toward Jesus. They sat before him, soaking up his wisdom. He was not like the scribes and Pharisees. He did not give formula answers but answers that matched the people's life situations. He gave them a piece of his wisdom so that their lives could be better.

He still gives the counsel we need in the pages of the scriptures. I am amazed at how often I pray for guidance, and I find answers in a random page of scripture that is in my devotional book or that is a page opened. I am amazed at how the solution comes to mind as my lips pray before the Lord. Many will try to counsel us in life. No one has His wisdom or insight. Others speak in generalities. He knows your future and the number of hairs on your head. Seek out the counselor so that you might have light along the path of life. There is no reason to stumble.

B. Mighty God

The armies came from the north, and the people were powerless to stop them. In the days of Hezekiah, the Assyrian Army swept down the coast and destroyed city after city. Only Jerusalem was left. Defeat looked certain. Then God intervened, and the Assyrian Army was annihilated without a shot fired. The light in the manger is God himself with all the power and majesty of God. The enemies of his people may try to defeat them, but they can not beat the child of the manger. He will cast out the demon and heal the sick. He will feed thousands on the hillside and provide wine for a wedding.

Life may seem impossible at times. In the manger, we find our deliverer. No prayer is too much for Him to answer. No problem is too difficult for Him to tackle. We often feel overwhelmed and resign ourselves to misery. Here is the one we can turn to and trust that He can help. Light comes into our lives when we spend time each day with an open Bible reading and feeling His encouragement. Light comes into our lives when we get down on our knees, confident that He can and will do all things for His people. No longer do people live in darkness. The mighty God has come.

C. Everlasting Father

The people of Israel felt isolated. They were different than the nations around them. That was true in the days of Joshua, the days of David, and even the days of Jesus. Yet, they always had an advantage. Their God loved them and always would. He was a Father to them who provided and protected them. Jesus cared for his people. He cared for the 12 disciples as they learned from Him, and he cared for the masses who looked to him for guidance in the Sermon on the Mount. Our Lord would be their protector and their guide in life. He would help them when life was just too tough.

He is the friend and father we need in this life and the next. I am proud to be part of his family. I am loved in this family of Christianity and know that this love will continue all my life. Other gods and other kingdoms come and go. They are distant, and they don't care about me. Jesus is different. He cared so much that He sacrificed himself for me. I know I can depend on him and his constant care. As my earthly father has loved me all my life so far, my Jesus will love me even more and will always be with me. I will always be loved and cared for.

D. Prince of Peace

Life can be troubling. Jesus brings peace. Being a Jew in Isaiah's time and in Jesus' time was not easy. There were always enemies ready to destroy Palestine. There were poverty and problems at the door. Yet, just being with Jesus gives calmness in a life on the edge. There is peace with God. Unlike so many around us, we know things are right between us and God. We are not at war with life. We live it according to God's values and find items in life fit together. We live it out as forgiven people of God who are not beaten up with our sins.

There is peace inside me. I am whole with guiding principles from scripture and a sense of direction in life. I know who I am and all that I can be in Jesus. I don't have to be down on myself. I can forgive myself when I sin and let Jesus help me to be better each year. With Jesus, I like myself. There is peace in the world. Yes, the world is messy, and it seems to implode occasionally, but Jesus is in control. As each Christian brings Christ into their part of the world, the world gets better, and the pieces seem to fit. Those who have Jesus will have his peace, and it will bring light to their lives.

The message of light

Light when light seemed impossible v. 4 *For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.*

The days of the judges were dark indeed. Midian was the enemy that ravished the land, and Israel could not do anything about it. Then God called Gideon, and with only 300 men, he defeated an army in the tens of thousands. It was God's victory, and everyone knew it. Light is like that. It overcomes the

darkness when you think that nothing can do so. When God comes, it is like a beacon in a dark room. The light overwhelms the darkness so that every corner is exposed. Every problem is dealt with, and every life has hope.

We often wonder how to deal with our troubles. The answer lies with the child. Get into the word and get down on your knees in prayer. Bring His light into every dark corner of your world, let the light purify those corners, and show you where you must go. His light makes the impossible seem possible. His light overwhelms our troubles and gives us hope and direction. This child is not just about heaven. He is about life now, and those who walk in His light will find that they can conquer their world and bring joy to their journey in life.

Eternal Light v. 7 *Of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.*

The good times of King David came and went. The prophet Isaiah would bring the light of his prophecy and die as well. America will have periods of success alternating with times of darkness where life gets tough. It would seem that nothing is forever. Yet, the light of the world is here forever. He is a sure hope and a constant friend and companion. He is someone that I can depend on every day of my life and even in the endless eternity. Jesus is here to stay. The tiny babe in Bethlehem will never leave me or forsake me.

Those who walk with Jesus in scripture, prayer, and worship will constantly shine a light in the darkness of life. They will find joy amid sorrow. They will find answers amid confusing choices. They will discover miracles when God does the impossible. There is no reason to walk in darkness, for the light of God, Jesus Christ has come into the world. His light chases the demons out of the corners of our lives. His light shines the way for us to go in life. Why live in darkness when the light has come? Live in Him and live in the light. Amen.

6. King of Nations (v.7 – O Come, O Come)

Isaiah 2:1-5

Big idea: Walk with Jesus so the world is better

Isaiah 2:1-5 (NIV)

¹ This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: ² In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. ³ Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. ⁵ Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

Insignificant Judah will raise up a Great Messiah.

It was such an insignificant little kingdom. Barely the size of one of the smaller states of the United States today. Gone were the days of might in David. Gone was the influence of Solomon, whose wisdom the world sought out from far away. Judah was a "nobody" in the days of Isaiah, trapped between Assyria and Egypt. To them would come a great Messiah that would change the world. God was not lax and had not forgotten His promises. God had plans for the city of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel. They would give birth to the man who would change the world more than any other in history.

Even today, the city of Jerusalem has influence far beyond what it should have due to its size or location. People flock to Jerusalem to see the church of the Holy Sepulcher and to be in the place where Jesus walked. People pay attention when the Jewish nation speaks or when it is attacked. Insignificant Jerusalem has become one of the great cities of the world. It has become so not because of commerce or location but because of the Lord and His Messiah. It is a place that the world would flock to to be close to God.

The Mountain of the Lord

A. He will rise above the nations v. 2 *In the last days, the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.*

The reference is not to the temple, for Jerusalem has no temple. It is a reference to Jesus and to the church that he started. Jerusalem is the place of the resurrection. Jerusalem is the place of the Pentecost when tongues of fire came upon the heads of the disciples and the church began. It is a place that cannot be hidden no matter what wars rage around it or what the world teaches and professes. The truth will come out of Jerusalem, and it will be the holy place of the Lord so that the nations will stream to it.

Jesus is the one that the wise men came to see. His star was in the east, and the world came to Him because they knew He was special. Here alone was the king of Israel. Here alone was the one worth bowing to and worshipping. He is special. Other people in the world come and go. We quote them for a while, and then they fall out of favor. Jesus is still the most mentioned person ever. More people can tell you about his life than can tell you about the life of Mohammed, Buda, or Joseph Smith. He eclipses them all.

B. The world will flock for His wisdom v.3a *Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths."*

Each year the Jews would go to the festivals in Jerusalem. They would encourage one another to join them and take the journey for the feast. Here it is the Gentiles who will encourage one another. The child of Bethlehem will be so great that the world will flock to see His wisdom. Even the magi came from the

east to see Him. You can picture them encouraging one another to make the long trip to find the child shown in the star. They came to see the fulfillment of the wisdom left by Daniel and others. They came to witness this great one sent by God.

The world continues to flock to Him for His wisdom. Christians are on every continent of the world and make up 31% of the population of Earth. While they are declining in Europe, they are exploding in places like Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia. Many recognize that Jesus alone has wisdom. They want what the Bible says for their lives. They want the forgiveness, mercy, and grace they can find nowhere else. Isaiah proclaims that the Lord is sending the Messiah to the world so that the world can walk in God's truth.

C. His teaching will be the standard of law v. 3b. *The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

Even as the law came down from Mt. Sinai and became the basis for everything that the Jews did in life, the teachings of Jesus permeate everything much of the world believes and the laws they make. The Christian teachings of justice and mercy form the basis for most of the laws of Europe and America. The great commission sent the disciples out across the Roman empire, where they slowly displaced the regulations based on the gods of Zeus and Mercury with the teachings of Jesus in the Bible. Even today, Jesus motivated many in our nation to build hospitals and provide food to the poor.

Furthermore, Jesus is still in charge. The nations think that they can rule over others, but he is the judge between nations. He will allow evil to reign for only a time before He brings justice and settles the disputes between people. Others may establish laws based on Buda or Mohamed, but they will not stand for long. The rule of our God will prevail as it is brought out into the world. It is kinder and fairer. It has the wisdom of God and can change lives for the better.

D. His teaching will change the hearts of men v.4b. *They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.*

The words are engraved on the United Nations Building in New York City. They are the dream of many in the world who think they can use negotiation and common sense to create peace. They will only be accomplished as the teaching of Jesus pervades the world. Many of the teachings of the world are warlike. They seek to convert people to their beliefs with the sword. It was the belief of Babylonians, Persians, and Romans alike. Christ conquers the world with his teaching and his forgiveness.

The words will happen as Jesus changes the hearts of men. He will change us by the cross so that we see others as brothers and sisters who we make sacrifices rather than beat down. We become part of a family that works together, for we become people of love and mercy. Yes, there are times when Christians fought the Crusades or the Irish fought with Catholics against Protestants. Those are not what Jesus wants or proclaims. His Christian church has taken over the world without weapons and only with sacrificial love. He changes the hearts of men.

A promising future

In Christ, the world will have a golden era

Where the Christian church has grown, and the teachings of Jesus embraced, the world has a golden era. You see it in American history and the history of Europe. Christ teaches people to care and to give their best for others. Christ teaches people to work together instead of tearing each other down. Christ builds up families where the father and mother love each other and work together to give children advantages that children from broken homes and warring nations do not have. They have education and stable homes missing in parts of the world.

Christ builds nations so that the leaders care about their people and will legislate for their benefit instead of lining their pockets and building their power. When Christ is forgotten, anarchy exists, and

leaders come with their values and rules and do not care about each other. The promise of Isaiah is to a nation under Ahaz that is facing such anarchy and fear of warring neighboring nations. It is a promise to us who live in a time when Jesus is being forgotten, and we see problems that America did not face in the '50s or '60s when Christian teachings were followed.

Let us walk in the light so others may join us v.5 *Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.*

The call for the Jews of Isaiah's day and our day was for the people of God to walk in the light so that others might see how great it is to be children of God. If we lead by example, the world will have the advantages of the Messiah as more of them follow our lead. It means for us to order our life according to the truth of the scripture. We must be in the word and follow God's commands knowing that His ways are loving and will lead us to better lives. People will see how God blesses his people and how His teachings work in a time when culture confuses them.

To talk in the light means to be people who enjoy what the Lord has given you. You are not dark, depressed people who moan because you don't have the latest I phone. You are people who celebrate your families, your jobs, and all the other blessings that God gives. We walk in the light and encourage others by our words and actions to join us. We show them and tell them how great it is to be in the kingdom of God. As we do that, more and more people want to become Christians, and the world becomes a better place. Let us go forward so that others walk in the light with us. Amen.

Baptism of our Lord
Focus on Jesus like John the Baptist
John 1:26-34

Big idea: A Church that focuses on anyone other than Jesus is not a church.

John 1:26-34 (NIV)

²⁶ "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." ²⁸ This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing. ²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." ³² Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³ I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

They came to John because they didn't know Jesus v. 26. *"I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know.*

The crowds were coming out to see John, and the authorities wanted to know who he was and why he was performing baptisms on the nation's edge. John was the frontman for Jesus. After 400 years of silence since Malachi, it was time for the Messiah to arrive. They tried to focus on John, but John focused on Jesus. John was just the first act. The real deal was coming shortly. John only knew in Jesus' baptism who Jesus was. He was probably surprised that it was his cousin, Jesus. Already, before he knew Jesus, he started pointing to Him. Jesus must be the focus of faith.

A lot of churches get it all wrong today. They focus on social issues of color and poverty. They are known for handing out free food and standing up for the poor. The focus is all wrong. People are looking for eternal answers in an insecure and insane world. Churches focus on things that will not satisfy them. The focus of the church must be Jesus. The problem is that we can only pass on to others what we possess. Like John, we must learn who our Lord is before we can share Him with others. Only then will the world know Jesus and have what He can give.

The focus of our faith is Jesus.

A. Savior – Lamb of God v. 29 *The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

Rush ahead to the days after Jesus' baptism. John had learned that the Savior had come. Here was the one to be sacrificed for the world's sins. Just as the lambs were offered in the temple on Passover, here is the one who will sacrifice himself for the sins of the whole world, not just the Jews. Here was the one that the world had been waiting for. Here was their hope amid their shame, guilt, and the filthiness of sin. Jesus would do what no one else could, so John pointed his disciples, the Pharisees, and the whole world to Jesus. Look, here is your focus.

It is the reason that the cross is central in every Lutheran church. Nothing else is as important as the gift we receive at the cross and the empty tomb. We can talk about the healing Jesus gives or how he loves the little children, but they are nothing compared to forgiveness and salvation. Jesus, as Savior, is at the heart of our faith and the provider of our greatest need. We start with his forgiveness at the beginning of the service. Without confession and Absolution, we can't come before God's presence and receive his blessing and gifts. Focus on the Savior and be free of sin.

B. Eternal Lord - Preeminent one v. 30 *This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.*

He was there before the beginning of the world, and he will be there into eternity. John is not speaking of Jesus' birth at Christmas. John was born a few months before the first Christmas. Yet, John knew that the Messiah was in time and honor before Him. He is also the one who will accomplish more in His lifetime than John will. John knew that Jesus would surpass him and be of far more importance. You can have salvation without knowing about John the Baptist, but grace and mercy come from no one else than Jesus.

Jesus must be first in the church. It is nice to be the food basket for the community or to provide children's programs after school, but those things are short-lived. Teach adults and children the truth about Jesus, and it will change the rest of their lives. Church programs only gain power if they draw people closer to Christ. The church is to help the world see that they need God and that His blessings are the only ones that will last. The church's focus is to point to a Jesus who always has been and always will be the answer to their needs.

C. Chosen - Anointed one v. 32 *Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.*

Just as Samuel anointed David to be the future king of Israel, Jesus, at his baptism, was anointed to be God's answer to all our needs. It was Jesus who was promised to Adam and Eve when they sinned. It was Jesus who was promised by Moses to the people in the desert. He is the one that God chose to be the bridge for humanity from this fallen world to the glories of heaven above. He was chosen to be the way, the truth, and the life. No one will get to the Father except by him. At Jesus' baptism, John was given a sign that here was the way to the Father.

The answer to all our problems and troubles is Jesus. He has opened God's favor for us. We pray in "Jesus' name," asking the Father for help to survive and thrive in a sinful world. No one can take his place. Praying to the saints or false gods will accomplish nothing. His baptism brings power to our baptism. There, at the font, the Holy Spirit comes on every child and adult baptized. At that moment, they become children of God and receive the mercy that he wants us all to have. The chosen Messiah chooses us to be God's people, so we must keep our eyes on him.

D. Divine - Son of God v. 34 *I have seen, and I testify that this is the Son of God."*

We may call God our Father, but we do so because God has adopted us. Jesus is the real deal. None of us can work miracles as Jesus did. It was proof that Jesus would later offer John when John sent his disciples to ask if Jesus was the Messiah. He would heal the sick, raise the dead, and cure the blind. No one before him had shown such power. No one before Him was God like he was equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit. It was Jesus who was there for the creation of the world. It was Jesus who would do miracles because He was God.

The church has power when it keeps its eyes on Jesus. Our task is to obey the Lord and not the world. The world calls for us to help it with its physical needs. God calls us to let the miracles that Jesus alone can do be done through his people. We pray, and God listens. People are healed of diseases because God's people bring those concerns to the altar. The struggling nation is put back on the right course because people appeal to the almighty power of Jesus rather than taking matters into their own hands. The focus needs to be on Jesus and not on us.

A church without Jesus as the focus is no church at all.

It is not too strong to say that a church without Jesus is not a church at all. John the Baptist knew that God had called him for ministry, but the real focus was coming after him. He would never save the people or bring the power of God into the lives of people like Jesus does. Churches should care for the needs of the people around them, but they need to do that as they are filled by the Spirit in Bible study and prayer.

A caring ministry is not the center of the church. It is a byproduct of a church that is in the word and prayer. It comes when Jesus and His love is the focus.

Any organization can give out food, clothing, and school backpacks. It is a Christian organization that prays over those items and asks the Lord to work miracles from the few things our hands have provided. Ask God to take the ordinary and make it great. Ask God to work miracles through our gifts. Everything must lead people to Jesus so that they can have the many advantages that only He can bring. Other focuses seem suitable, but they are shabby copies compared to having Jesus at the center and relying on his power and wisdom. A church is a group of people focused on and following the Lord.

Our task is to focus on Jesus so everyone knows him v. 31 *I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."*

The goal of John the Baptist was to gather people together, help them see their need for a Savior, and point out the Messiah to the world. His whole purpose was to be the front man who revealed the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to the nation of Israel and the world. Therefore, he would not take their honor for what he did. He would not change his message. He told others about Jesus and even prepared some disciples to become part of the twelve disciples of Jesus. His whole focus in ministry can be summed up in the words, "There He is!"

So it is for the church. If we want to be powerful, we must do things by His power. If we want to change lives, we will bring others to Him so that faith can be created. Food, programs, and other things we do for the community are a means to an end. We want them to see and know Jesus. Let your fingers keep pointing to Christ for others. Let your voices get a horse from singing his praises. He is the only hope for our world and needs to be the focus of your life so that those around you can join in the blessings that come for all who know and love the Lord.

Epiphany – The “I am” sayings of Jesus

The seven “I am” sayings of Jesus in the gospel of John connect Jesus to the sacred name of God in Exodus 3:14 in which God introduces Himself to Moses with the expression, “I am who I am.” In these sayings Jesus is asserting himself to be divine. The Jews of His day understand His meaning and try to stone Him in John 8:58-59 because they interpret His words as a claim to deity. If we look at these seven passages, we will gain a greater understanding of who Jesus is. Many of these sayings come directly after a miracle. He claims to be the bread of life after He feeds the 5000, the light of the world after he heals the blind man, and the resurrection and the life before He raises Lazarus from the dead. Each brings a deeper meaning to the miracles and teachings of Jesus and helps us to appreciate what our Lord brings to our lives.

1. I am the bread of life

John 6:30-59

Big idea: Only one thing truly satisfies.

John 6:30-59 (NIV)

³⁰ So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?" ³¹ Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." ³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." ⁴¹ At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴² They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?" ⁴³ "Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. ⁴⁴ "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. ⁴⁶ No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." ⁵² Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³ Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹ He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

The 5000 were fed but still hungry.

Jesus had fed most of the people in the crowd in the feeding of the 5000 a day or two before this. They had seen a great miracle and wanted to see what else Jesus could do for them. They experienced the miracle, but they did not understand what it meant. They were so intent on the benefits that Jesus might be able to give to them that they missed who He really was and why He had come. They wanted Jesus to

make life easy by bringing food to them each day, as the Israelites had received manna in the desert. They were not hungry for His message.

Many inside and outside the church are more concerned with what Jesus can do for them than they are willing to build a relationship with Jesus. They pray when someone is sick or when life throws them a curveball. They cry out to the Lord and expect that He will provide the necessities of life. Talk to them about believing in Jesus or learning about Him, and they don't have time. The only thing they are concerned with within the church is what they must do to get the blessings they want. Jesus tells them to believe, but many, as we shall see, find that hard to do.

A. We want a sign before we believe. V. 30 *So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you?"*

The people saw Him feed a crowd from just a few loaves and fishes, but they want another sign before they are willing to trust in Him. It is their lack of faith. They are just like their ancestors who saw God feed them daily with manna and still found it hard to believe. It was an act of pride seeking to make Jesus subject to them instead of believing in Jesus because of all the miracles they had seen and the message they had heard. They had selfishly sought to make him king after the feeding so that he could continue to provide what they thought they needed.

People still put conditions on Jesus. They want him to heal someone or provide the answer to their wishes in prayer before they believe in him. They try to manipulate Jesus and make Him into the savior they think they want before they accept him. Sadly, they want what Jesus can give, not Jesus. Like the crowds who pushed and shoved, hoping that Jesus would heal them, many today don't care about Jesus; they want the gifts and want Him to prove that He is worthy of their adoration.

B. Jesus is what you really need v. 35 *Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."*

Jesus tells them bluntly that they are missing the point. They are looking for loaves of bread that will not last. He is the bread of life that will provide everything they need spiritually for the rest of eternity. Why settle for a few golden eggs when you can have the goose that lays them? The problem is that people do not have hunger in the soul. They are sick with sin and refuse to see the answer to their real need in front of them. Those who will accept Jesus will have salvation and all the trappings. Those who think that they don't need God's gifts will be left to destruction.

It is like the beggar that comes to this church asking for gas money and refuses to sit in church and learn what Jesus can do for them. People are missing the greatest gift while they seek to bend Jesus into helping them with their petty problems. He is the bread of life that not only gives salvation from hell but gives real life here on earth. He gives us comfort in scripture, answers in prayer, and peace when life throws us a curve. He gives gifts that can never be bought, and He gives them freely so that you will never need anyone else.

C. God gives, but we must come v.37 *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.*

In these few verses is the progression of salvation. The gift is free, but you have to come and believe. The Father gives the free gift of salvation and sonship in the kingdom. You have to come when the Spirit calls and believe that the gift God gives has merit and can change your life. The people knew their need for food to eat. They had seen Jesus satisfy that by producing bread and fish. Now they needed to see their need for salvation and all that God can offer through Christ so that they come and build a personal relationship with Him and have every spiritual need met forever in Him.

Christ must be invited into our lives daily to satisfy our Spiritual life. People say that the Christian faith is boring or doesn't meet their needs. The problem is them and not Jesus. They want Jesus to care for their bellies and emotions and miss what He can do for their lives. God gives freely, but we must develop

a hunger and dependence on Jesus so that when problems come, we are strong enough through faith to deal with them. We need to feed on His word and go to Him in prayer so that we have the courage and power to overcome every demon that attacks us.

D. Believe in Jesus, and you will be well fed v. 47 *I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life.*

Jesus makes a bold promise that only He can fulfill. Believe in Him, and even death will be conquered. It is the Messiah's promise of victory given to Adam and Eve and repeated through generations of Jews. Earthly bread gives a day of life. Jesus will give an eternity of life. To have this gift, one must believe. You have to trust in Jesus, cling to Jesus, and rely on Jesus. He describes a faith that is not a conviction for pansies but for those who are ready to commit and trust only in Jesus as their Savior and Lord. He wants you to commit yourself to Him and trust Him for the future.

Every person feeds on something. Some get hung up on wealth or popularity. Others get hung up on knowing the latest news. None of those will satisfy for long. Only a deep relationship with Jesus will make a difference in life and bring true joy and peace. The truth is that happiness starts not with externals but with the heart and your soul. If your heart is filled with confidence about the future and relationships that feed your joy, then the other things will not matter as much. Jesus promises eternal life for His people, which is one thing they can count on.

Having the Bread of Life is what is most important.

Some will never have it v. 41 *At this, the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."*

The Jews could not accept the deity of Jesus. They could not acknowledge that He was the great "I AM." The people think that they know Jesus. He is just the son of a carpenter from Galilee. They have known his parents and his siblings. How dare He say that He is God? Yet, He has done things only God can. He has raised the dead, given sight to the blind, and fed thousands with bread and fish. They have all the proof that they need that Jesus is from God and His ministry is of God, but they refuse to believe it. They exclude themselves from all He wants to give.

If we listen to people today, we find the same pride. They refuse to believe that Jesus is God. He might be a great prophet or an all-around good guy, but they refuse to believe He knows everything and is someone we must follow. To them, he is one of many prophets whose ideas can be accepted or rejected. They will miss the bread of life because they will not acknowledge Him as God. They will alter his message and find reasons to abandon Him because He did not follow them. In the end, they will lose everything, just as many of the Jews did in Jesus' day. Unbelief robs them of all spiritual food.

Others will have it in abundance.

Those who cling to the Lord will find that they will have everything they need in Jesus. He will provide them with eternal life as a free gift because they believe in Him. They will find that trusting Jesus and following Him through life will bring them success and absolute joy. His disciples will be persecuted, and 11 of them will be martyrs for their faith, but they will die with joy while the world around them scrambles to find meaning and peace. They have Jesus, and He will be so precious that they will not give him up for anything else.

You can have that abundance as well. It comes when you value your relationship with Jesus so much that you want it to grow daily. You feed on the word of God and draw strength from daily devotions and weekly bible study. You grow through those times of prayer and intimacy with the Lord. In those, you find that the Lord will provide all you need. He will give you answers the world misses. He will protect you from the evil one and his attempts to destroy you by targeting your emotions. Thank you, Lord, for providing for my Spirit and, through that, for everything else.

2. I am the light of the world

John 8:12-36

Big idea: Why perish in darkness when the light shows the way?

John 8:12-36 (NIV)

¹² When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." ¹³ The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid." ¹⁴ Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵ You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. ¹⁶ But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. ¹⁷ In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. ¹⁸ I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me." ¹⁹ Then they asked him, "Where is your father?" "You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also." ²⁰ He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come. ²¹ Once more Jesus said to them, "I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come." ²² This made the Jews ask, "Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come'?" ²³ But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. ²⁴ I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am [the one I claim to be], you will indeed die in your sins." ²⁵ "Who are you?" they asked. "Just what I have been claiming all along," Jesus replied. ²⁶ "I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world." ²⁷ They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. ²⁸ So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [the one I claim to be] and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. ²⁹ The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." ³⁰ Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him. ³¹ To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." ³³ They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" ³⁴ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Light at the Feast of the Tabernacles:

It was early October, and Jesus was in Jerusalem celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles. Torches burned with a bright light to remind the Jews of the pillar of fire that led them through the wilderness during the Exodus. It was the flame of God's presence that guided them and protected them. God had been their light for those forty years. He went before them with a visible presence in the cloud to guide them through the wilderness and to protect them from their enemies. No one would have dared attack them when the whole sky lit up with the glory of the Lord.

Tabernacles was a harvest festival coming shortly after the Day of Atonement to remind them that the Lord was the source of all their blessings. God was the one who brought life to His people. God was the one who showed wisdom in everything that He did by chasing the darkness and fear away. At that festival, in the court of the women where the light burned brightly, Jesus proclaimed to all that "I am the light of the world." In the days of sin and darkness, God had provided light, and the light belonged to all. Jesus was that light.

Light changes everything

A. light goes before you – follow it v. 12, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness,

As the pillar of light went before the Israelites in the desert, the Jews followed that light because they didn't know where they were going. The light guided them, and they knew to follow it because only in the light was their safety and security. Jesus is the light of God. The people were to follow Him, for he alone knew where they were going. He alone was their safety as well as their guide. Without His light, people are lost. They would wander without direction and an understanding of what life is about.

Those who hold to His teaching are disciples who follow Him. They have learned to trust him and continue in His teachings. They know that His ways are always right and are the path through the darkness of life. They will avoid Satan's traps by following in the light of Jesus. Only the fool thinks he can walk safely in darkness without a flashlight. Such a person falls over furniture left in the way and wanders looking for a path. Jesus will be our light exposing the snares in our path and leading us safely through life by giving us guidance and help.

B. light takes away death – live in it v.12b *Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*

It will be the difference between life and death. The Jews had waited for centuries for the Messiah who would lead them through the darkness into the light of God. They knew the penalty for sin and made sacrifices in honor of the Messiah, who was to save the world. Now, he stood before them. Some would believe in the life that He gave and would have the life that came from the resurrection. Others, like many of the Pharisees, would reject Him and miss the free grace God gave them.

For all the mumbo jumbo of our culture, Jesus is the only source of light and life. Those who do not believe in Jesus will perish on the last day. They have rejected Jesus and are wandering through life without the benefit of someone to help them. Eternal life begins now as we walk with God and live in His grace and protection. We live with a God who brings life into our lives as He provides what we need and seeks to build a strong faith and character that will be a blessing to us in this world. Life is better with Jesus because He is life.

C. Light brings wisdom – be open to it v.15 *You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one.*

Standing before them was the Messiah the Jewish people had been waiting for and the Old Testament prophets had spoken about. Yet they could not get past their bias and beliefs so that they could see. They were in total darkness and were like blind men before him. They were bound in the darkness so that they would not listen to the clear testimony that He made about Himself. They were bound in darkness, blinded from seeing the witness of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah. They judged Jesus by human standards and stayed in the dark.

People still judge Jesus by human standards and remain in the darkness. They refuse to believe that God can do miracles or that His death on the cross can save them. At best, they will admit that He is a great man like Gandhi or Buddha who has the wisdom to follow. Those who will benefit from Jesus must take the blinders off their eyes to see the wisdom He alone can bring. They must not judge Him by human reasoning but be open to admitting that Jesus is wiser than us and that we will live better if we follow His will.

D. Light chases away falsehood – enjoy the truth v. 16, *But if I do judge, my decisions are right because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me.*

Jesus did not come to judge men but to save them. His opponents were always judging Him by false standards. You would have thought that they should have known the truth. They were experts in the Old Testament and knew the prophecies about the Messiah backward and forward. Yet, they were in the dark as the people had heaped layer upon layer over the clear word of scripture so that people followed the

thoughts of the rabbis on the Bible rather than the clear Bible itself. Like the later popes clouded the scriptures, they didn't know what was true or not.

In America, we have had churches that justified slavery by misquoting the Bible and now justify gay marriage and even abortion by misquoting scripture. They have darkened the clear light of the Lord and are chasing people from the truth. The result is that many don't have a clue what the Bible says. The answer is for God's people to abide in His word. Study it, ponder it, take it home with you after church, and let it open your eyes so you can see the truth. The light of scripture penetrates all the dark corners of falsehood and chases them away. Evil can't stand up to the scripture. It has God's power and light.

Light is freedom

Some refuse the truth and live in bondage v. 33 *They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"*

Light is freedom, but some will want to live in bondage. The Jews in the text reject Jesus. They do not see a need for His salvation. They are people of Abraham and are better than the rest of the world. They have their sacrifices and customs, which they slavishly keep to please God. Yet, they live in sin, unable to save themselves or to make things right with God. Jesus offers them the free gift of salvation if they will follow the light. Jesus offers them the chance to be children of God, but they refuse the Messiah who they have waited for.

There are still many who refuse to live in the light. They cling to their beliefs and reject Jesus because he doesn't match their creed. They are smarter than Christians because they are "open-minded." They don't need a savior because they are at the top of the world as they slave to make their hypocrisy work. Yet, they continue to find that their fallacy doesn't work. Humanity is not getting better. Man does not naturally love or serve his neighbor. Man is sinful and selfish, and only Jesus can free us from the bondage of sin and bring us into the kingdom and love of God.

Others are set free by the light of the Son v. 36 *So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*

Live in the light. Turn it on full force as you open your scriptures each day and take time to bask in the light that comes in prayer. Let the Lord shine in your life, chasing the fears away and letting you see clearly what God's will is for your life and the world. God wants to set us free so that we can truly be children of God. He doesn't want us to feel in bondage to sin. Our Lord wants us to be people who can live with Him and experience a piece of heaven on earth. He wants you to enjoy each day and celebrate all the blessings that come as you live in the light.

Sin has a way of enslaving us as it controls us and leads us in ways that can never work or be beneficial. Jesus will lead us through the deserts of life and bring us to the Promised Land as much as that pillar of fire did the Israelites in the desert. They had God's provision and protection, and so can we. How can Jesus do that? He does it because He is the great "I AM." He is the one who brought the Israelites out of Egypt, and He will bring His people to eternal life. Live in the light and be free, for the light is the light of life for the world. Amen.

3 I am the Gate of the sheep
John 10:1-10
Big idea: Abundant life begins at the gate

John 10:1-10 (NIV)

¹ "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³ The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. ⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

It began with a blind beggar.

It all began with a blind beggar who Jesus put mud in his eyes and was healed. Seeking the truth, he was brought to the Pharisees, who questioned him and cursed him because he continued to hold onto the truth that it was Jesus who healed him, and thus, Jesus must be from God. The religious leaders refused to believe the truth that was before their eyes. They tried to deny the miracle and then refused to accept a sinner like Jesus could do the miracle. Finally, they excommunicated the man who had been blind and threw him out of the temple.

By their actions, they showed that they were more concerned with their position and customs than caring for the people of God. They never once thanked the Lord for the healing and were a barrier to faith rather than an avenue to understanding the true God. They were blind in their understanding, and Jesus condemned them for their cruelty to the man and his parents. In this text, Jesus uses the picture of a gate and a shepherd to show what leaders are to be for their people. They are to be an avenue of grace and not use the people for their own advantage.

A gate to what?

A. He is the rightful shepherd of the sheep v. 2 *The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep.*

At night, the shepherd would gather the sheep together in an enclosure to protect them from thieves, wild animals, and even the weather. These sheepfolds were often enclosures made of stone or branches with a single entrance where the shepherd sat guarding the sheep inside. God guards the entrance, and only those who know the Father enter in and out through that gate. Those not recognized by the Lord try to get into the sheep enclosure in other ways. Jesus pointed to the fact that the religious leaders were unwilling to acknowledge what God had done with the blind man.

They were the thieves using the sheep of God's church for their purposes and had become a barrier to faith rather than leaders who brought people closer to the Lord. Jesus is challenging pastors today as well. Are they people known by God who acknowledge His teachings? God always intended that His people be led, fed, and protected by those who accept the Lord. The **door** is there for a reason. Some will always climb over the barriers, but God has the obstacles and the door there for a reason. He will keep out those who would harm the flock and allow those who care for it.

B. The sheep know His voice. V 3 *The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*

The blind man did not even know Jesus when Jesus healed his sight, yet he could sense the falsehood in the voices of the religious leaders. What they said didn't sound genuine. How they said it sounded selfish and angry. It was not hard for him to reject what they said and stand true to what He had seen. The voice of Jesus was one that he listened to. He believed in Jesus and was eager to learn who the son of man was when asked. It was clear that the voice of Jesus was the voice of the shepherd who cared and the shepherd who had the truth.

The sheep of God know the master's voice; they have learned his ways from His word by spending time in Bible study. The false teachers of this world, both inside and outside the church, are voices that the children of God sense are false. They can tell a lie when they hear it, and they avoid it. In contrast, they flock to churches where the trustworthy word of the Lord is taught. They sense that the shepherd is speaking in that church through the words in worship and bible class and the actions of the members. They feel God's presence and grow even more by being with the Lord.

C. The Sheep follow Him v. 4 *When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.*

The blind man was asked to renounce Jesus to keep his place in the temple. Follow us, and things will be OK. Yet, he would not follow them. He knew they were leading him astray and asking him to accept something false. He gladly followed Jesus, for the voice was that of God himself. He knew that there was one who would lead him and care for him. So it is with all God's sheep. They follow Him instead of all the voices that would lead us astray.

Our world is filled with many voices that promise great rewards if you only follow them. Listen to them on the campaign trail. Listen to them on the TV commercials. So many of them sound too good to be true, and they are. The hope is to get your vote or your money so that they can promote themselves. God's people are discerning. They have the scriptures, and they have God's heart. They pray and listen for God's direction in life, and they follow God's wisdom to have blessings instead of being used by others. God's people hear His voice and follow Him, trusting in God even when the path seems difficult.

D. Jesus is the provider and protector of His people v.9 *I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out and find pasture.*

The people were not getting the message, so Jesus spoke more directly. He is the gate. Our Lord is the only way of salvation and the only genuine provider for His people. He was the one who would protect his sheep from all the world's falsehood. In His care, they would be safe. He was also the one who would provide for their salvation. No one else was the gate to the kingdom of God and heaven. Others might claim to have a way to a better life and life after death. Only Jesus had a path. There was no other entrance but him.

Many will tell you that there are many ways to get to heaven. They will talk about living a good life or making a significant contribution to society. None of those are ways into the kingdom of God. Jesus is the only gate. Even the Jews in Jesus' day who had the Torah but rejected him would not be there. He is the only one who provides salvation and the only one who provides the things we need in life. Talk to Jesus in prayer and find the spiritual and physical food you need. Live with Jesus and let Him lead you to the green pastures and quiet waters. No other gate or path provides what Jesus does.

The difference in leaders

Others come only to steal and destroy v. 10 a *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;*

Here Jesus comes to the blunt truth. All the other ways are false and will destroy your soul. That was true for the religious leaders of Jesus' day and many of the false leaders of today. We see the false teachers tearing up the church and leading people away from the Lord. They are unwilling to follow the truth of scripture but have to bend it to fit their desires or make it appealing. It is where the church teaches the culture or tries to entertain people and make church and God's ways palatable.

They are just like the politicians who have put forward impossible solutions to get your vote and the commercials that promise the world to get your dollar. Beware of them all. Use your wisdom from the Lord to see through the falsehood and follow God's guidelines. The more you are in the world, the easier it will be to see them. The thief will be those who deceive you by being cunning. The robber is those who force their way on you by abuse of your beliefs and threats. The religious leaders had done both to the blind man, and people will try to do it to you.

He is the gate to life v. 10 b. *I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.*

Jesus is different. He always has our needs in his care. We will find the freedom to live a life filled with joy and peace in His care. We will live in his plans and directions, following him all our lives, casting away the worries of life in prayer, and receiving blessings by being with him. It will be an abundant life, which is a life of satisfaction and contentment. When Jesus says you will have a life to the full, he doesn't mean your life will be longer or even more comfortable. He means that you will have more blessings and love packed into that life.

You will have access to a God who is equal to every emergency you will face. You will have a God who brings blessings the world can't give. You will not live deceived but will live with the wisdom of God so that you see and experience things that others will never have. Jesus is the gate. He is the pathway to a better life and a protector who will keep us safe. Live in his kingdom and invite others to share the joy of being His sheep. Others will falsely advertise that they have a better life. Jesus is the real deal and the only one that can satisfy.

4. I am the good shepherd

John 10:11-21

Big idea: He is the best, and we are blessed to live with Him.

John 10:11-21 (NIV)

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." ¹⁹ At these words the Jews were again divided. ²⁰ Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?" ²¹ But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

I am the good shepherd v. 11a "I am the good shepherd.

To a nation that struggled to find God's love amid layers of culture and sacrifice, Jesus proclaims that He is the shepherd who cares. He is not the robber or thief who tries to use the flock for His own benefit or the hired hand who cares for them because He is paid. Jesus is good, intrinsically good, and a model for us all. His goodness is part of his nature. You see it in how their illness touches him so that He heals them. You can see it in how their sadness touches him so that He cares and teaches them, giving them God's word.

He is still the one person we can trust because we have learned He will always do what is best for us, not just the easiest for Him. He does not need our money and can't be bought. He is the owner and creator of all. He is the one who we can walk with all of our life. So many offer help at our expense. He has given himself so that we might be part of his flock. He is the good shepherd that every pastor has as his model and every person longs to have as his protector and friend. How blessed are those who are part of His flock and feel His love!

The Ministry of the Good Shepherd

A. He dies for the sheep v.11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Five times in this text, Jesus affirms the depth of His love for His sheep. Others will use them or abandon them. He loves them so much that He is willing to die for them. He is pointing to the cross where Jesus will sacrifice His life because the sheep are sinners destined to die. At the cross, he did not die as a martyr but as their substitute willing to face the wolves that the sheep might live. He does this so that the sheep are His, even though they are prone to danger and need a shepherd to care for them.

In a world where we have to guard ourselves against every telemarketer and scammer who wants to harm us for their own profit, it is nice to know that someone has unconditional love for us. Here is the shepherd that we can depend on. Nothing is too hard for Him or too great for His love. Our relationship with Him is dominated by the deep love that He gives to us before we do anything good for Him. He is someone we can always trust and depend on who has our best interests above Himself. He is the good shepherd who loves us like no one else ever has or will.

B. He knows His sheep v. 14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—

He has an intimate relationship with us. He knows us by name. Shepherds didn't think of the flock; they thought of individual sheep. So it is with Jesus. The Bible tells us that he knows the hairs on your head. He knows everything about you and about your future. We are not a flock but individuals that He loves. He knows our nature. Think of the individuals among the 12 disciples, from bold Peter to doubting Thomas to the loving heart of John. Each was different, and He allowed them all to flourish as the individuals He created. So it is with us.

He also knows our needs. Some of us need the freedom to be who we are. Others need reassurance that we are loved. Some want God's wisdom or healing from the pains that life has imposed. God provides what we need and not some cookie-cutter program for all Christians. What a joy to have a shepherd who thinks of me as unique and creates an intimate relationship with us so that we can feel His heart and know His will. He is not a God far away but a friend we walk with and get to know personally through Bible study and prayer. He is my shepherd, and I am His.

C. He will bring other sheep into the flock v. 16 *I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also.*

While the Jews thought themselves to be the only ones that God could love, Jesus came to love the whole world. His twelve disciples were all from the Jewish sheep pen. So were men like Paul and Barnabas. Yet, many, like the Roman centurion or the Gospel writer Luke, were Gentiles. His ministry was for them as well. He would die for people all over the world. They would be joined into one flock, for they would all follow one shepherd. It would not be their nationality that would determine if they were part of the flock but rather if they followed the shepherd and believed in Him.

So it is today. Few of us are Jews. All of us are His sheep, regardless of our skin color or nationality. The ministry of Paul and others would be to the Gentile world, letting them know that Jesus loved them too and wanted them to come and be part of His flock. Unity today comes not because we are all forced into one denomination or set of beliefs but rather because we all hear, answer, and obey the one shepherd. We are all cared for and owned by the Good Shepherd. We have our individuality, but we are part of one church with one God who saved us all.

D. He will take up his life again v. 18 *No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the authority to lay it down and the authority to take it up again.*

Many who stood at the cross thought that Jesus was executed by the Romans and Jews, but it was Jesus who laid down His life. He could have escaped at the Garden of Gethsemane or called down angels to stop the trial with Pilate. Our Lord laid down his life willingly for His sheep. Then, He took it back up again with the task of salvation complete. That means that the Savior is still with us. Unlike Mohammed, Joseph Smith, Buda, or many other religious founders, Jesus is alive and still is our shepherd.

We walk with a living friend, not a set of rules and writings to guide us. We have a savior who we can talk to in prayer and who helps us through life every day. The cross didn't end His love for us. It transformed it and made it a love that can conquer every evil in life and bring us real life.

Because He is our shepherd, we shall not want. He is there to provide for our every need and protect us from Satan. We are never on our own. The shepherd still lives and is there to personally guide us every day of our life from now into eternity. The shepherd is still with us, unlike Mohammed, Joseph Smith, Buda, or any other religious leader founders. He is still our shepherd.

A simple choice

Some will not accept v.19-20. *At these words, the Jews were again divided. 20 Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?"*

Jesus offers a simple choice here. You can be part of my flock or be outside in the cold. Some of those who listened to Jesus refused to believe. They had seen His miracle of healing the blind man just days before, or perhaps his miracles of healing and feeding thousands. Yet, they would not believe it. He

offered His care to a crumbling world, yet they saw no need for it. Caught in their own ways, they would call him demon-possessed and insane. In this, they walked away from His care and sealed their destruction.

Jesus still divides. That is what a gate does. It is what a shepherd does as well. Some will be His sheep, and others will belong to someone else. Some will accept Jesus's invitation, and some will cling to their ideas and even persecute the Lord. It will be a choice that affects all of life. Those who accept Jesus will have a shepherd who will fill their lives with His love and have a better outcome. Those who refuse Him will follow Satan's shepherds who seek to rob and destroy their flocks and take them to a harmful end.

Why should you and yours live securely in His care?

If we turn to the 23rd Psalm, we see three reasons to live in the care of the Good Shepherd. First, is that He alone guides and cares for us. At times we don't even know what is best for us. He does, and we can depend on Him to provide the best so that we have a life filled with His joy and daily bread. Second, the shepherd is with us when life turns ugly. There will be dark valleys that we must walk through, and He will be there. He will be trustworthy, helping us to cope with problems and protecting us from harm. We can't avoid problems, but they seem much smaller when the Lord is with us.

Finally, the shepherd brings security. No one knows what the future will bring, but the shepherd has the future covered. He will lead us to eternal life so that we might dine with Him forever. He will not abandon us but will bring his steadfast love every day of our lives. We are blessed to be part of His flock. He is the Good Shepherd, and we can invite others to have all the blessings that Psalm 23 speaks of for the sheep of His flock. Let us praise our God and follow Him all the days of our lives. Others seek to rob and harm us, but He will always love us and care for His sheep.

5 I am the resurrection and life

John 11:17:37

Big idea: Life comes when you live with the person of Jesus

John 11:17-37 (NIV)

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. ²¹ "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." ²⁸ And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. ³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Are you alive or just existing here?

Are you excited about life, or are you just existing? Sometimes we find ourselves in the daily grind. Nothing is wrong with life, but it just doesn't leave a smile on our faces. Other times, we are in the midst of a trial that makes us hang on for dear life, hoping that we will see the other side. We feel like the living dead. Each day is the same, but things seem to be getting worse. We look forward to a vacation, to retirement, or the day when the crisis is over. We want something more, and no matter how many gadgets or activities we do, we just feel blah.

Into such lives comes the one who has life. As we will see in this text, Jesus is the author and keeper of life. Those who live in Him have an advantage. They have hope in crisis and purpose in life. They find joy while the rest of the world encounters a humdrum existence. The lesson in this text is that life is not found in activities or attitudes. It is discovered in a person. The life the Jews have been looking for and people look for today is not found in Jewish laws or technology and entertainment. It is found in the person of Jesus. Have Him, and you will have life.

Jesus turns grief and existence into life.

A. The sisters are consumed with grief and wondering about life v. 21 *Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*

Life had fallen apart. The cheerful women who fed Jesus and sat at his feet to learn in Luke 10 had their world turned upside down. The first words we get from their mouths are not cheerful greetings but are the words of a grieving person wishing that life was different. Jesus had come that day to bring joy back to them. He had also come to lift their faith. They believed in Him, but they were struggling. They were trying to exist and get through this time of grieving so that they could figure out what they would do now that their brother was gone.

We know people who have been like that. Maybe you have even been in that situation. Crisis sucks all the joy out of life. You watch someone who has lost their spouse, and they are a zombie trying to get through the funeral service and greet the guests. They are often holding back a flood of tears. How do you get back your life when life is in crisis or when life is just plain boring and dull? You call in Jesus and seek Him out. He is the one who created you and who has a plan for your life. He is the one who can give hope and purpose. He will give life when the fire has gone out of life.

B. He is the resurrection – He gives life after death and a future v. 25 *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies;*

Everyone experiences death. Not everyone can say they will live forever and that life starts now. Jesus tells Martha that He has power over life and death. He can raise Lazarus and raise every Christian on the last day so they may live with Him in heaven. Jesus validates that claim with His resurrection. He rose from the dead, never to die again. Our Lord rose from the dead and is the pattern for our salvation. He wanted Martha to see the full extent of His powers and not think that it was over just because Lazarus was dead.

Most people look to the future, and there is a big deep hole called death. People claw and cling to life to avoid the great unknown. Christians are different. They know that Jesus will raise them from the dead and take them away from the pain into the eternal life of heaven. Even though they die, they will live. Death becomes a door to a better life free from sin and despair. It comes because of a person named Jesus, who died on the cross and rose again. It is not some abstract teaching. It is a person we come to know and love. He is our resurrection. We don't need to live in fear.

C. He is life – He allows you to live now and not be the walking dead v. 26, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

That life starts now. While the rest of the world fears terrorism and stock market crashes, God's people live in faith. They are confident the Lord will care for them and give them their daily bread. Life can be difficult, but Jesus is bigger and stronger. Others are trying to find the meaning of life by buying lots of gadgets and playthings. They think that they will be fulfilled through entertainment and achievements. Christians know that it is Jesus who gives life. They live in a relationship with Him and let Him provide the things they need.

They live with His character and values so that they work hard at their job but don't let it determine their value. They build a family of love who then surrounds them with God's love because the family all lives in relationship to the Lord. They have the wisdom to see the dangers and blessings of the world. Jesus has given them a new life that starts now. They don't have to wait until they die to have a piece of heaven. They live with his comfort when they hurt and his guidance so that they flourish. When you walk with Jesus, life improves in both good and bad times. He is life, and He gives it to you.

D. "I Am" shows us that life is not abstract, but a person v. 27 *"Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."*

All of it is personal. Listen to many of the people in other religions. For them, it is all about following the rules and gaining some unique wisdom that the rest of us don't have. Resurrection and Life for the Christian are found in a person. Walk with Jesus, and you have those things. When He said, "I Am He," he transformed the doctrines of the Old Testament into a person. You don't have to know the special handshake or mouth some special formula. You cling to Jesus and let Him be a daily part of your life, and all these blessings are yours.

Martha recognizes who He is, but she has not seen what life can become when she is near Jesus. Many Christians know the teachings but are not living close to Jesus. They don't have daily chats with him in prayer. They don't sit back and let Him renew their life through His word. Life comes not because of who you are but is determined by how close you are to Jesus. Look at Paul in prison or Daniel in the lion's den.

They are filled with joy and are alive because they hold the Lord near. Circumstances don't bother them. They have the God of life. They have Jesus with them.

He cares

He cares when people don't get it v. 33 *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.*

It troubles Jesus when people don't get that. The crowd is weeping on their way to the grave of Lazarus. Mary and Martha believe in Him but still don't understand who He is or what He can do for them. It hurts because people are not putting their trust in Him. They are in pain when they don't need to be. They acted like there was no hope. They acted like resurrection was a Jewish doctrine that you hoped was true. They had seen Jesus raise a young girl from the dead and a man on the way to his tomb, but it never occurred to them that Jesus could help them now. He knows some will not even get it when Lazarus rises from the dead.

It breaks Jesus' heart today when people come for a funeral and hear the gospel, but it never penetrates their hearts. He cries when people are trapped in worry and fear and never think to open up their bible or stop to pray. Life is waiting, and they will miss it because they never look to Him. Instead, they do everything they can as if it will make a difference. They will make their lists of things to do. They will make plans and try to get all the details done. They will cry in pain, but Jesus is not on the radar. How it hurts Him because He wants to help and give life but is shut out of their despair.

He cares and is the hope when people die v. 35-36 *Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"*

In the end, He will raise Lazarus from the dead. He has one more barrier to get past. Martha has to trust Jesus when He asks for the tomb to be open so Lazarus can get out. People of faith get that He is their hope. People of faith will live in Jesus and have lives that defy the world. We do so because he cares. "I am" has become human and cries when we hurt. He has entered our experiences and knows how we feel. He is in contrast to the Greek picture of a god that the Romans had and the image of gods and fate today. He is human, and He is one of us.

Can the one who raised Lazarus raise me on the last day? The answer is yes. He is the resurrection. He has promised to come back to take the faithful to heaven. Will life be fuller? Yes, life with the Lord can be as good as it gets, as every day is filled with His love and blessing. Come to the Lord and have this life. Resurrection and life are not bound by some set of rules. They are in a person who loves you and wants to draw you close to Himself. Invite Him in and trust Him, and you will have the joy Martha had that day as you see Jesus in a new light and embrace Him as your own.

6. I am the way, truth, and life

John 14:4-14

Big idea: Follow Jesus' way and change the world!

John 14:4-14 (NIV)

⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." ⁸ Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." ⁹ Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" ¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. ¹² I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Confusing times for God's people v. 5 *Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"*

Even Jesus saw that his disciples were troubled. It was the night before He would die on the cross. Jesus told them that one of them would betray Jesus. He informed them that He would be arrested and die on the cross. Worst of all, Our Lord told them that He would leave them. He had laid out a great plan for them to bring the gospel to the world. How would they do that? Where were they to go to bring salvation? What were they supposed to say? How could they change the world?

The church is struggling across America. We have lost our way. We don't know what to do or how to accomplish the ministry. Churches have significant differences in what they teach. Not just simple things like "Do you immerse in baptism" but big things like "Are there other ways to heaven?" We are often filled with doubt about whether our church can continue. We are wondering and confused about the direction and ministry of the church. We need the one who is the way as much as the disciples needed it in the text.

We need a way in the confusion of life! V.6 *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

A. He is not a way, but the only way

Jesus's statement gets a lot of anger among our fellow Americans in a world that sees multiple ways to get to heaven. He is not one of many ways, but it is the only way. No one else has dealt with the issue of sin. Our society minimizes sin. He has defeated it. Only he builds a bridge between God and man. For a confused set of disciples, he is saying: follow me. You may be lost, but I know the way. I know what the future should be like. I know how to bring you to the Father so you can complete your ministry and have a purpose in life. Follow me, and I will get you there. I am the way.

We often look for a set of directions that will show us how to proceed. We look it up on a "youtube" video or read a book filled with "answers." Such directions can be confusing. Wouldn't it be better if someone offered to take us to our destination? Jesus is the way. He is the guide and the path through life. Each day, Our Lord takes our hand as we pray and guides us so we get through the day. He shows us the path to the place he has prepared for us and the way to joy in life. I am is not about rules but about a person who is our guide.

B. His way is genuine and not confusing

The disciples were confused. They didn't know what to make of what Jesus was saying. They somehow knew that the things He spoke came from God and were true despite what the Pharisees said about Him. Jesus opened up the scriptures to them and told them the plain truth. Many Christians today are confused. We have more and more information surrounding us which contradicts itself. How do you know what the truth is? Even in humanity's greatest achievements, science and technology have given us more questions than answers.

As we walk along the path of life with Jesus, he will be our guide showing us the truth about ourselves, our world, and God. We learn every time we are with Him, and we can trust every word He has put in the Bible. It doesn't contradict itself and is trustworthy from beginning to end. As we live with Jesus, the fog of life begins to lift. We understand how to be good workers and managers of our resources. We learn how to build better relationships with friends and family. We learn about God and all He can and will do for us. His way is genuine and trustworthy.

C. His way brings us life

The disciples would die for Jesus, but in Him, they would live in ways they could never dream. They would lead a movement that would change their world. They would stand up before kings and crowds, proclaiming the truth that Jesus had shared. They would be part of a community and have peace. Life plays a prominent role in several of the I Am statements, for Jesus changes lives. He is the bread of life. Our Savior is the resurrection and the Life. For those whose life is mere existence, she brings a spark to our lives and fills it with power and influence.

He gives us a reason to smile as we build relationships with other church members. We are part of "caring people" who sacrifice for each other. We are people in touch with the Lord and find His help and encouragement are there daily. We end up living differently than others. We are also more confident about the future because we know that Jesus has risen for us. We don't worry about what comes after we die. We have a risen savior who will come back for us on the last day and take us to be with Him in heaven. How do we get there? He will show us the way.

Where will His way take us?

He brings us to the Father v. 9. *Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.*

Jesus is the only way to know the Father. The Jewish people prided themselves on the fact that they were the people of God. Yet, in many ways, God was hidden and vague to them. Few had ever really seen or talked to God. That made them unsure of their future and their actual status with God. Jesus was the one who could help them know God, that is, have a very deep personal relationship with God. He could communicate God's thoughts and promises to them better than anyone else so that they knew what God wanted in their lives.

He could help them understand God and themselves so that their relationship with God was based on knowledge and God's great truth rather than on a vague feeling of what God wanted. They would build that relationship on God's love for them, not rules or temple sacrifices. Jesus would assure them that God did indeed love them. He did that by His words, but he also did that by dying for them. God gave himself. What more did we need to know God loves us? Those who draw close to Jesus know God powerfully and can live in that love and blessings like no one else.

He brings greater things in this life v. 12 *I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father.*

In the face of Jesus' death the next day, Jesus promises the disciples that they will accomplish great things. In this, he is looking ahead to the ministries they will have over the subsequent decades. Their ministries would be greater than Jesus' in their scope and quantity. Think about it. Peter preached one

sermon on Pentecost, and 3000 came to faith in one day. Jesus never did that. The disciples would preach in countries from India to Italy while Jesus was never out of Palestine. The Holy Spirit would empower their ministries and give them success.

God's church today can accomplish such great miracles when they know and are empowered by the Father. They will reach out to the corners of the world because Jesus has been the way of their ministry. Jesus has shown His people the way to power, and they will change the world. All it takes is to draw close to Jesus and follow Him. Be in His word so that you let Him guide you. Take time for daily prayer to build a relationship with Him and the Father so that you can harness their power. Christian, you are capable of great things because you follow the way.

He brings glory to the Father v. 13, *And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.*

Where does that way lead? It leads to giving glory to the Father. We want the world to know through us about the Father we have grown to love. We ask in prayer that people would follow the path of Jesus and get to know God so that they might be part of His family and live in His blessings. When you know the way, you will spend more of your time asking for the things that Jesus would ask for, which will bring pleasure to the Lord. You will not just ask that someone is healed physically; you will request that the experience gives them greater faith and love for the Lord.

You will not just ask that things get better in your world. You will ask that the Lord has a greater share of your world and those of the people you love. You want the world to know God, love Him, and follow His way. It will be better for them and will bring God before others. Only 30 percent of Americans go to church every Sunday. What would America look like if 60% did? How would it change our culture and our friends if they had a deep relationship with the Lord? Let us ask for things that bring glory to God so that the world can see how great He is and what He can and will do for them.

7. I am the true vine

John 15:1-17

Big idea: Each of us is as close to God as we choose to be

John 15:1-17 (NIV)

¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. ⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

Why are Christians so fragile and feeble today?

At times, the church seems anemic. People make commitments to scouting and sports of all sorts. They commit to hobbies and camping on weekends. Yet, church attendance has become more occasional, and people find it hard to make time for church service or fellowship with others. We give the impression that the church is fragile and feeble. Churches rarely have money and are graying more each year. They discuss what they can't do rather than the exciting things other groups seem to do. Some churches are even talking about their imminent closing as people grow old.

The church in the Book of Acts is vibrant. Yes, they were persecuted, but they could do great things and change the world. They had strength and confidence that is sometimes missing. This text shows the key to being a church alive. One must be connected to Jesus. The power of a vibrant church comes from Jesus and not from us. When we are joined to Jesus, we have privileges that the world can't imagine. We also have responsibilities to Jesus that we should not neglect. In Christ, the fragile and feeble become solid, effective, and full of life.

I am the vine v.5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me, you can do nothing.

Jesus is the true vine. He is authentic and steadfast. Israel is often called a vine in the Old Testament, but she ran hot and cold for the Lord. Israel's Religious leaders are mediocre at best in their willingness to help and care for the people. Jesus is the only source of life. As we have discussed, many "I am" statements show Jesus as the source of life, just as a vine is the life for the branches. His disciples have experienced that life through the three years they have been with Him, and he promises to continue to be their source of life as they go forward in ministry.

We live in a time where many in the church attach themselves to other programs and ideas as if that will help them grow. We have business-like vision meetings and entertainment-style worship. We take our models from the corporate world and social ministry to the impoverished. None of those things will

help us grow. Jesus is the true vine, and only those plugging themselves and their churches into him will have the life that comes from His power and His future for us. Nothing else is authentic. Nothing else will tap into the power of God so we can do miraculous ministry.

You are the branches.

A Remain in Him and draw strength v. 4 *Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*

If the church is to have the strength that it needs, it needs to abide in Jesus. Only those who remain in fellowship with Jesus will be healthy and produce fruit. The reason is simple. We need to draw strength from Him. We need the nourishment that Jesus provides us and the resilience that only can come from him. To abide means to cultivate a deeper relationship with Jesus. You long for Bible study and devotional time and have it often. You pray for more than the meals and even ask questions of God that you expect answers. You meditate on these messages or other Bible passages. You want to be close.

None of this is done in a single act. It is a growth process, like marriage or learning to be a good parent. You develop those skills, and you come to know Jesus the way that you start understanding your spouse or child. The longer you are with Jesus, and the deeper your relationship, the stronger you will be. He has nourished you, and you have taken in His character. In contrast, others around you in the world are anemic from being underfed. Those who abide in Jesus are strong because He dwells in them.

B Branches are pruned so they are strong v. 2 *He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.*

Pruning is challenging and sometimes painful but necessary if the church and its members are going to be strong and vibrant. Therefore, God cuts off branches like Judas that bear no fruit and prunes branches like Peter so that an outspoken Peter would bear abundant fruit. There are times we wish that God wouldn't prune us. He may remove directions and activities that keep us from showing his love to others. He may painfully cut off sinful things that destroy us or others. Most of us may have times we want God to go away and leave us alone.

Yet, that would be the greatest judgment that God could give. To abandon us and let us have our way is to let our lives be filled with things that will hurt us. It is to reject us so that we wander in life instead of having a clear path. Pruning is necessary for us to produce fruit and have joy. So don't resent God's pruning. Be glad that He spends the time expertly disciplining us and helping us grow strong in directions that build a quality life, not things that waste our time. You will see fruit grow from your life, and the Lord will help you to be stronger than before

C. Branches have all they need if they ask v. 7 *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you.*

Asking God is connected with our bearing fruit. God is not saying that you will all have sports cars if you remain in him. No, he is telling us that we will have anything we need to do the ministry and bear the fruit that each branch is supposed to produce. Such times of asking come best in our times of Bible study and prayer. We ask in prayer, and the Lord listens to our needs and gives us his help. We come to Him in Bible study and get the answers we need if we are to bear fruit. Nothing happens apart from Him.

His words become like nutrients that take up residence in us. In those times of need, you recall a phrase from scripture that tells you what to do. You remember a message from a bible study or a sermon that gives you the courage to go forward for another day. You ask amid this constant feeding on His word, and it is all given to you. If you ask and you are not in the word, how will God be able to answer you, and how will you understand the answer or know that it came from Him? Remain in Him and ask, and everything you need will be yours.

D Branches bring a crop – fruit is not an option v. 8 *This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

What is the purpose of all this growing and remaining in Jesus? The answer is so that we may bear fruit. We bear fruit when we help others come to know Jesus. We bear fruit when we use our spiritual gifts to help others in the church. We bear fruit as we grow in faith and character. God expects a crop from the church and His people he nourished. Fruit is not an option. There are times in our lives when that fruit will be abundant because everything has been ideal. There will be times when the fruit will be less, but there will be fruit.

Having been fed by the Lord, it will be natural to bear fruit. We make the conscious act to obey Jesus and follow Jesus so that our lives are worthy of the effort that He puts into us. We want to fulfill His desire for us. We want to let him do miracles through us. Know that you do this for others. The grape doesn't eat the fruit; others do. The fruit you bear is for the benefit of God and others. God has fed you as you abide in him, and now you pass that blessing on to others so that God may bless them as you have been blessed.

Draw close and be friends with God v. 15 *I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.*

Abiding with God is a close relationship with our Lord. We remain with Him; that is, we spend time with Him and learn from Him. It makes us healthy, strong, and full of life. It can be as natural as eating a meal and as life-changing as eating the right foods instead of starving. God loves us and wants to provide for us. We never have to wonder if the life-giving word will still help us or if prayer will be the life-changer it always has been. God has promised to help us grow in our faith and provide us with all that we need if we ask.

The reason is simple. Our Lord wants us to have everything that we need to produce fruit. He wants us to have the strength we need and the direction we will follow. God wants us to have the power of his word at our fingertips and the power of prayer as our great strength and comfort. Remain in Him, and He will always remain in you. He is your strength and life in this life and forever. Amen.

**Transfiguration:
Why Moses?
Deut. 34:1-12**

Big idea: Moses had the qualities that Jesus seeks in all of us.

Deuteronomy 34:1-12 (NIV)

¹ Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the LORD showed him the whole land--from Gilead to Dan, ² all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, ³ the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. ⁴ Then the LORD said to him, "This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it." ⁵ And Moses the servant of the LORD died there in Moab, as the LORD had said. ⁶ He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is. ⁷ Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone. ⁸ The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over. ⁹ Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the LORD had commanded Moses. ¹⁰ Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, ¹¹ who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt--to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. ¹² For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

Who would you want to talk to if you were Jesus?

The cross is near, and the mission that the Father has given you has become heavy as you take the final journey to Jerusalem. If you were Jesus, who would you want to speak to? Who would you desire to talk to about what Luke calls your "departure"? There are many possibilities in the Bible. Jesus talks to Elijah and Moses. Many have asked why these two men. Some have said that it was because these are two of the three men in the Bible who never really die. Elijah is taken up in a fiery chariot. Moses is "buried" on the mountain by God himself, and no one knows where he was laid.

Yet, I suspect that their deaths were a symptom of the life that they lived. Jesus chose them for the life they had lived and not just because they did not die. So what was the life that they led? What are the elements of a life pleasing to Jesus and fulfilling his purpose? Let us look at Moses' life today and see why the Jews still honor Him today and why we should honor and emulate this one who Jesus brought back from the dead for a moment on the mount so that He could chat with one who was so special.

Moses had the qualities of a child of God.

A. Faithful v.5 *So Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, just as the LORD had said.*

He is called the servant of the Lord in this verse and is specifically called faithful in Hebrews chapter 3. Moses is a man who didn't give up. There are a few times when Moses complained to God about his work or the people. More than once, he seemed ready to quit, yet he was faithful. He put up with a stubborn people who created an idol at Mt. Sinai, who grumbled about everything, and who rebelled against God at the edge of the Promised Land. He kept leading them even when they faced 40 years of wandering for their sin when he wanted to enter the Promised Land.

God's servants are faithful. Ministry can be difficult, and it will often take longer than you think. People will not appreciate you and may even say terrible things about you. You still go on because God has called you to do this ministry and because you see it as necessary. The child of God is not a quitter because he knows that God doesn't quit on us. Jesus is faithful on the Mountain of Transfiguration and in

the Garden of Gethsemane. We can appeal to God for help when the going gets tough, but we need to go on because we know, like Moses, that God will be with us.

B. Intimate with God v. 10 *There has never been another prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.*

Moses talked to God face to face, not in visions and dreams. He spent days up on Mount Sinai twice, talking to the Lord person to person. He spoke to God at the burning bush and in the days after the golden calf. There is no one like him, other than Jesus himself, who had so much face time with God. He knew God intimately and was the one that had to explain God's law and desires to half a million Israelites who had come out of Egypt as slaves. His face even glowed at one point from talking to the Lord. When Moses spoke, the people knew that he spoke on behalf of God.

God would have us know Him intimately. We may not see His face, but we can hear His words as surely as if we were with Moses on the mount. God begs us to come and spend time with him in scripture. Let his words pour around you, and let other Christians speak to you in devotions. Build a relationship with God so that you, like Moses, know what God is calling you and others to do. Come to know God so well that when you speak, others comprehend they hear God's will for all our lives. If you want to move mountains, get to know God as a person face to face in the word.

C. Intercessor for others Exodus 32:11 *But Moses tried to pacify the LORD his God. "O LORD!" he said. "Why are you so angry with your own people whom you brought from the land of Egypt with such great power and such a strong hand?"*

Like Jesus, Moses was a man of prayer. Twice, he fell on his knees and pleaded with God not to destroy the people of Israel. Moses asked the Lord to keep the Lord's name strong and not wipe out the Israelites after the golden calf and after the people heard the story of the ten spies. He focused in prayer on God's glory and others' needs and was so influential in prayer that the Lord listened to Him both times. His face-to-face relationship gave him a boldness in prayer that is not matched anywhere else. Who else can appeal to God based on God's character with such force?

The great Christians are great intercessors. They have come to know God so well that they are not afraid to pray for the needs of others. They don't just pray for others to have life easy, however. They pray that the Lord's name may be glorified. They pray that God's people draw closer to the Lord. Those who would be like Moses have a ministry of prayer. They don't just tell people that they will pray for them. They do it with force and strength so that others know you have prayed to God for them. They see the glow in your face and feel the Lord's blessings come into theirs.

D. Does great things by God's power v.12 *With mighty power, Moses performed terrifying acts in the sight of all Israel.*

Finally, Moses did more miracles in the Bible than anyone other than Jesus. Jesus fed 5000 on a hillside. Moses was God's herald for the gift of manna for over 40 years. Moses parted the Red Sea and brought water out of the rocks several times. He even called for ten plagues on the Egyptian nation. He led the people as God covered them with a cloud from the hot sun and a fire that kept them warm at night. Miracles of food and clothes that never wore out were a daily occurrence. Fire and other displays of God's power happened throughout the Israelite's life because Moses was close to God.

Miracles still happen for those who are close to the Lord. They may not see fire or produce food but they will change lives. They will change lives as they share the message of salvation with others. They will change lives as they pray or speak the word of God to a person in a hospital bed. God has given his people the chance to do miracles and has given us the means to be such a power in the lives of others around us. They will know us by our love and our impact on the lives of others around us. There should never be a Christian with no influence on those around him.

Why be like Moses?

A. This is someone others will miss v.8 *The people of Israel mourned for Moses on the plains of Moab for thirty days until the customary period of mourning was over.*

Then one day, after 40-plus years of service, it was time for Moses to die. As he left, the people mourned his departure. There had been a leader who was devoted to his people. Here was a leader that could not be replaced as much as Joshua would try. Moses was one of a kind. Most of the people had never known another leader. They were children when they left Egypt. It was Moses who taught them. It was Moses who fed them. It was Moses who showed them God's path for their lives. He was one they would miss, but it was time to go.

Godly people are the ones that we miss too. They have brought us closer to the Lord and have been God's hands in our lives. We felt God's presence when they were around and learned what God was trying to say to us. They are the people through whom God speaks and works in our lives. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus would talk with Moses about what Jesus would do for the people of God. Moses would get it. He would understand, for he had served God's people too. He knew Jesus would be missed and would understand the devotion that Jesus had for His people. It was the reason that he would be missed after the ascension.

B. This is someone who will bring people to the Promised Land v. 4 *Then the LORD said to Moses, "This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.'*

Sitting up on the mount of Transfiguration, Moses saw the Promised Land firsthand; he had only seen it from a distance before. He saw what God had done with His life work. He saw a land filled with Jewish people and blessed by God. Such may be the joy of a Christian in the last years of their life. They look around and see all the children and grandchildren who attend church and know the Lord intimately. They can think back to all the people they helped as they brought the Lord to them.

They may even think of all the people they shared the message of salvation with, who came to faith, and who shared the message of salvation with others. God may give them a vision of the impact that they have had in life. He may show them from the mountaintop what their ministry has done. Why Moses at the transfiguration? He had faithfully done over decades what God had called him to do. I would want someone like Moses to encourage me when the load was challenging. It is what I wish for myself and all of you as we take our last breaths. Amen.