

# JOHN



Day 119

## “The Word”

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April 29 - John 1:1 - 28

**O**ur God Reigns, What is a “word”? A word conveys the mind of the person who speaks. The word of a person defines that person. Some people do speak other’s words and so they are not truly their own but another’s. The person who is called “The Word” is unique and original and set apart from all other words.

In the beginning (literally in the Greek, “In beginning” to emphasize not an actual time period but an indefinite beginning) was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God” (John 1:1). God is called “the Word”. The Greek for “Word” is “Logos.” It can also mean, “Reason,” “logic,” “mind,” and similar ideas. The emphasis is not on a particular word but on an idea or concept. For example, it conveys the idea that the Word is all that God is. “The Word was God.” Even the word “was” in the Greek indicates indefinite past. John is trying to convey through his known language an idea of eternal understanding. So essentially he says that the Word always existed and that the Word is God.

The Word is the creator of all things as well. This idea is in harmony with “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” John says that all things were made by him and just to emphasize this he says that without Him nothing was made that has been made. Think about how this coincides with Genesis chapter one as well. God spoke and it was made. He just made everything out of nothing. But again it was through His Word that the world and all that’s in it came into existence. For example, “God said, ‘Let

there be light and there was light.” Where did light come from? God. The Word.

We have said before that God is incomprehensible. On the other hand, God has made himself known in some ways so that we can get to know Him as best we can. God has made Himself known through Words. It is His words that make Him known to us more than anything else. Through the use of words He has revealed The Word. And so from the beginning God has spoken clearly so that we can come close to Him and know Him and love Him and listen to Him. If I close my eyes I can hear my dad’s voice very distinctly. Do you know what I mean? His words are encouraging and comforting to me and so I will never forget a great deal of the words he has spoken to me. The same is true of God’s words. He has revealed his words to us so that we can be close to Him. And so John emphasized this so that the good news of Jesus will be real to us as we read the gospel.

John contrasts Moses and Jesus. He says that Moses gave the law but grace (God’s unconditional love and favor) and truth were given through the Son, Jesus. Moses had given God’s Word indirectly but through Jesus the Word came directly and so John says the “Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.”

In the book of Revelation it says that Jesus is the “Word of God.” That is His name. Why? Because everything that God is has been revealed to us in the Son. So now in the gospel the good news of God’s love is made clear because the Word has come into the world.

What voices rang clear in your mind? Whose

voice has made the greatest difference to you? Is it a parent or a friend or a teacher? I appreciate so much the different words (voices in my life) because they have made a difference to me. They have helped to shape me into the person I am. But it is God's voice that has made the most difference. His gentle voice has reassured me of His parental love over and over again. In Hebrews it says several times that if today you hear his voice, then act on that and do not close your heart.

You can hear His voice.  
Keep reading His word.  
Keep opening your heart to Him.  
Allow His Spirit to speak to you in the quietness of your soul.  
Lord, speak to us today. Open our hearts and minds to you.  
God's blessings come through God's special Word,  
Pastor Steve



Day 120

## "A Lamb"

April 30 - John 1: 29 - 51

**G**od Is Found In Jesus,  
It seems like John the Baptist came out of nowhere. Someone asked me the other day if there was any precedent in the Old Testament for baptism. Baptism was not a part of the Old Covenant. In the Old Testament circumcision was the sign of the covenant. Of course it was limited to males and was also combined with animal sacrifice. The circumcision signified the removal of something - the foreskin = the sin that separated a person from God.

There was a few Jewish communities that were known to be "super spiritual". In those small groups they did practice baptism as a form of cleansing from sin and purification in general. These practices were not prescribed by the law to my knowledge. It may be that John was a part of one of these strict religious sects.

The Old Testament prophets predicted that he would be the forerunner of the Christ and that he would come in the spirit and power of Elijah. He is described as a thundering and rugged man who knew his mission. But when he meets up with the Messiah, he is a humbled man. The presence of greatness will do that to you. John didn't even feel worthy to

untie his sandals. Before John met up with Jesus he had been anticipating his arrival. Jesus was then the culmination of his entire ministry.

When John sees Jesus coming he simply says, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Up to this point a great number of people were following John and many of them had already been baptized in the Jordan River. When John views the Messiah in the distance, his first reaction is to point his followers to Jesus. He tells them to look at Him. Take your eyes off of me and look to Jesus. That would be quite a change. John was loud and brash, Jesus was quiet and meek; John was austere, Jesus was humble. As a matter of fact, He was like a lamb. The meekness and humility and naïve nature of a lamb is well known. They are animals completely at the mercy of others.

John could have called Him a mighty warrior, or a lion, or a valiant conqueror, or a King. He didn't; he called Him a lamb. A lamb would probably have been the furthest thing from the people's minds. How could the Messiah be so humble? How would He be able to relieve the Jews from Roman tyranny with such a submissive attitude. They could have swallowed the

description "Man of God," but to be called a harmless woolly beast was hard to accept.

John's ministry was a spiritual ministry. From the time he was in Elizabeth's womb, he was called by God to do what God had planned for him. Mary had received prophecies about Jesus that she probably shared with her cousin Elizabeth. Even though we have very little information about John's early years, it is reasonable to think that he was aware of some of the aspects of the Messiah that God had revealed to him. Obviously he knew that Jesus would be a sin bearer. It's also possible that John spoke the words in 1:29 prophetically and he didn't necessarily know the full impact of his own words.

No matter what John knew about the long term affect of Jesus' ministry, he still is clear about his identity. Maybe the fact that John balks at baptizing Jesus is connected to John's statement about Him bearing the sins of the world. John thought Jesus should be baptizing him and not the reverse.

Jesus' mission was to die for the sins of the world. Essentially, it would be the sins of those in every part of the world. His saving work would have a worldwide

impact. The Lamb would be dying for His sheep living on every continent on the planet. His death would have a global impact. The fact that He saved you is an indication that he died for all. You are part of that select group. When the angel appeared to Joseph and gave him the name of his son, he said, "And you shall call him Jesus because He shall save His people from their sins." If you believe in His death and resurrection then you are one of "His people."

Will you take the invitation of John to "behold Him"? Today would be a good day to do that. Instead of looking at the problems of the day, let's behold Him. Let's think about Him and His love and His death and His victory over the enemy for us. He is our deliverer. He can be our deliverer today wherever we are. Look to him. Stare at Him. Let His image imprint the main theatre of your mind. Meditate on Him. Think about Him as a lamb who came to save us from our sins.

Look to Jesus and...

Rejoice in Jesus always,

God's blessings are found in the Lamb of God,  
Pastor Steve



Day 121

## "Save The Best For Last"

May 1 - John 2: 1-25

**R**ejoice in Jesus Always,

A great number of people live their life like a piccolo Pete. They make a lot of noise for a short amount of time and then sputter out in the end. Jesus said that some people receive His word with joy but when troubles arise because of the word, they fall away; He says that they shrivel up.

A "retirement mentality" kind of goes this way in modern day America. The progression goes: work - retirement - death. For many the distance of that last hyphen is not a great amount of time. How many

people have you known who retired and then got sick and died? Too often that is the case. I tend to wonder if the let down from a life of meaningful employment doesn't disillusion some and cause them to go into a depression that leads to other illnesses. Retirement can be very sad when a person loses all purpose for their life.

Also, of course, as we get older there a lot more aches and pains to deal with. I was once at a pastor's meeting where the preliminary conversation was all about the various surgeries and ailments that the men

had experienced. I looked around and realized that these men were all about ten years older than me. I changed the subject.

Our lives are filled with limitless possibilities when:

We see life as a daily adventure of trusting the living God.

We consider ourselves servants of the God who is near.

We see that God uses men and women of all ages in the Bible.

We make love of God and others our aim.

We save the best for last.

Someone said that "your attitude determines your altitude." If we live for a day when our work will cease, it seems like it is all too easy to stop the momentum of serving God in our lifetime. I love the story of Rick Warren, who said that his dad's last words were "win one more for Jesus." There was a man with a lifetime mission. He knew why he was here and didn't live for his own comfort.

Jesus took six empty water jugs and had them filled with water. Earlier in the evening when it looked like they were not going to be able to accommodate all of the guests Mary comes to Jesus for a solution. This tells me that the party was probably for someone close to the family. Jesus lets her know that He is working on His own time table. But when the wine had run out Jesus went to work. All of the good wine had already been consumed and now that the guests were in a carefree mood; it really didn't matter the

quality of the wine. Some of the guests probably couldn't even taste the difference. But when the head waiter tasted from the pots, lo and behold, the best wine was ready at the last.

Jesus desires to work in our lives from start to finish. "He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6). I think Jesus has some new wine for us today. Do you believe that Jesus can make some of the hum drum in our life disappear? Or, if we feel like we lack something, like energy or motivation or hope or encouragement or focus or whatever else that makes us feel anemic spiritually, He can put new life into us where we lack.

Do you feel a bit powerless today? Do you feel like the joy has been stripped from you? Is it tough to see the road ahead because there is too much of a focus on what you lack? Then listen to the head waiter. He knew that there was no wine left. He knew that there was not another source for more. And he knew that somewhere somehow, miraculously, there was a supply of new good wine. Listen to the servants too. They knew the source. They had just witnessed a miracle first hand. The best wine would be served last. This was better wine than what they had to begin with.

Let's put our faith in Jesus today to provide. He has resources that we know nothing about. Excuse me, I'm going to go check my Sparkletts cooler.

God's blessings come in unexpected ways,  
Pastor Steve

hallmark of it all.

Why God is love is such a mystery to me. Why was it that in the beginning before any of the created order was made, God was there and He was love? Think about it, God was self-existent and self-sufficient and without beginning and without end; and God is love and not a hater or cruel or mean or nasty or conniving. He was none of those things that make their way into our day to day world. I also tend to believe that no matter how much I think about this subject and no matter how knowledgeable I become, God is still somehow infinitely more loving than I could even imagine. Why though?

I don't know.

Paul said that "God demonstrated His love toward us, in that, while we were sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Love is an action word. Love acts on behalf of others. Love focuses on the welfare of those outside ourselves. "God demonstrated" the kind of loving God He is by making an amazing sacrifice so that His people could be rescued from a horrible fate.

John chapter three, as you know, is the museum of God's love. The objects in the museum include a bronze serpent, a cross, and water. Over the door are the words "You Must Be Born Again." The serpent represented the plague of serpents that slithered into the Mosaic camp because the people were complaining. Moses lifted up a bronze serpent on a pole and whoever looked at the serpent was healed of their snake bite. The cross on which the Lord was raised became the source of salvation for those who looked to Him. Faith in Christ's death was the bridge for forgiveness and access into the holy presence of God. The water, mentioned in Jesus' words to Nicodemus as the means of cleansing for those "born of the water and the Spirit." Then we see Jesus baptizing simultaneously with John the Baptist, even though Jesus was not doing the dunking but His disciples.

Are you up for a Greek lesson? The New Testament was originally written in Koine Greek, the common language of first century Palestine as well as the entire world. In the Greek of John 3:16 the word "loved" is in the aorist indicative. This emphasizes a point of time when God loved the world. Go back to verse fifteen and you see that the subject is the cross

of Jesus. At the time of the crucifixion God was displaying the ultimate in love. He was sacrificing His life for others - for you and for me. After the word "loved" you have "He gave his only begotten Son." This is a reference to the cross as well. He loved when Christ was hanging on the cross and He loved as He gave His unique, one-of-a-kind Son.

How can we experience the love of God? Isn't that the question we all would like answered? I wonder if that wasn't on Nicodemus's mind when he went to speak to Jesus that night. He was impressed with what Jesus was doing but isn't it the love of Christ that draws us to Him mostly? Nicodemus appears to be frustrated and I say this because of his literal interpretation of what Jesus was saying. He responds to Jesus' comment about being born again with a cynical response about how impractical it would be to enter again into your mother's womb and be born again. Jesus expects him to know that Ezekiel had talked about a new heart, a new spiritual life that would be the gift of God. Nicodemus, it seems, trudges away confused.

To experience the love of Jesus we need to start with Jesus and not focus on ourselves. We need to admit that we need Him. We need to acknowledge that our deeds are evil and that we have loved darkness rather than light, but now we are turning to Him and want to have Him in our lives and we want His love to be our love and His Spirit to be in our spirit. Secondly, we only need to accept the love of Jesus by faith in the same way a child responds to the loving care of his grandfather. The grandfather pats the boy's head and leads the boy to the fishing hole and spends time talking to the boy as if the boy were the only person in the world. Accept the love of Jesus. The cross makes His love accessible to you anytime. Now would be a good time. Thirdly, keep yourself in the love of God by praying in the Holy Spirit with an expectation for the second coming of Jesus in the clouds (Jude and 1 Thessalonians 4).

Lastly, hang out with Jesus people. Spend time with others who love the Lord and want to serve Him. They are out there and they would love to spend time encouraging your love in the Lord.

God's blessings are established in Jesus,  
Pastor Steve



## "Agape"

May 2 - John 3: 1-21

I remember hearing someone say that love makes the world go round. I would say that is true from the standpoint of God having the whole world in

His hands. Everything in the world and in our lives rubs against the love of God. From creation to the cross to our final state in heaven, God's love is the

**“John The Baptist On Jesus”**-----  
May 3 - John 3: 22-36

**W**hen I was a kid I thought the Dodger first baseman Wes Parker could walk on water. I wanted to emulate him in every way. At that time I knew all of his stats and collected every one of his bubble gum cards and listened on the radio to his every at bat. If the opposing team hit the ball anywhere near first base, Parker would scoop up the ball like a vacuum and put the guy out.

When I began to play baseball in junior high I played...you guessed it, first base. I walked like Parker and talked like Parker and tried to carry myself on the field like him too. If his name came up in a conversation I could enter right in and give my two cents because I was a student of the man. When he was awarded the Gold Glove, which happened many years, I was right there cheering him on. And when the Dodgers were in the World Series everything else stopped so that me and my family, with mom and sister abstaining, could watch the big games.

John the Baptist was big on Jesus. He knew from an early age that his mission was going to be that of a voice for the Messiah. I'm certain that John's parents and cousin Mary were also influential in forming John's early views of Jesus. But remember too that John was full of the Holy Spirit even while in his mother's womb and would have had deep spiritual insight into the identity of God's Messiah.

The Holy Spirit acts like an intercom to give God's people a clear message about God so that the person and work of God can be accurately understood. John the Baptist experienced this interaction with the Spirit and we today need to keep in mind that the Spirit still desires to guide us into the truth so that we too might comprehend the things of God. Too often I take the Spirit for granted, but it is the Spirit who makes the things of God plain to us so that we can walk with the Lord each day. So what message was it about Jesus that John understood at this time in his ministry?

The emphasis is on the authority and greatness of Jesus who, though born of a woman, actually descended from heaven. It is this heavenly origin that John points to as the basis for the authority by which He ministered to others. This also put Him in a whole other category than the Baptist. John saw himself, rightfully so, much inferior to the Lord Jesus. He says somewhere else that he is merely a “voice,” and here he says that he is like a friend of the bridegroom who simply enjoys hearing the bridegroom's voice. This is a true spiritual perspective of the person of Christ. Any other perspective that lessens the authority or origin of Jesus is unacceptable and unspiritual. Jesus is exalted and deserves exaltation. We would do well to listen to the Spirit and like John be lifted to new heights by merely being able to hear the voice of the Son.

John's emphasis on Christ increasing and he simultaneously decreasing is the right attitude for all of God's children. The closer we are to Him and the more we get into Him the less we will think about ourselves. We will be more concerned that He increases in our life. What did John mean by Christ increasing? In the context John is answering some of his own followers who are concerned that some are leaving the Baptist and are beginning to follow Jesus. They see it as a competition. To John it's perfectly fine that this is happening because the spotlight is meant for Jesus and not him or anyone else. Paul also takes up this theme in many of his letters and tells us that when we think of others as more of a priority than ourselves then we will be acting with the mind of Christ.

Do you want to be refreshed spiritually? Do you want to grow in the Lord and find a peace that makes life worth living? Do you desire to rise above a lot of the pettiness around you? Think about Jesus. Find ways to put Him in the driver's seat. Take a back seat and stop striving to make life work for you. Instead,

pray about ways to make Jesus real to others. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...” (Philippians 2). John the Baptist knew this and we would do well to follow suit.

God's blessings are showered on those who bless Jesus,  
Pastor Steve

**“Worship God In Kind”**-----  
May 4 - John 4: 1-26

**I**grew up in a non-integrated town. Two towns over that was not the case. When I was young, that other town was predominately white. By the time I was in high school it was mainly black. To me that was no big deal except for the fact that I had a couple of bad experiences where a group of black teens tried to beat up on me and my friends. That kind of thing leaves a bad taste in your mouth, especially when you are not looking for trouble, but trouble comes to you.

When I was in high school the husband of my journalism teacher, who was a teacher from that other town, introduced me to one of the student body leaders from that school. He was a likeable soft spoken person without a prejudiced bone in his body. His name was Louie. Louie would come over to my campus and I'd go over and visit him at his. After high school was over we still got together from time to time to see how things were going.

I can still remember how uncomfortable I felt on his campus when I got the “what is the white boy doing here” stare. It didn't have to be that way, I honestly wasn't interested in creating any feelings of hostility. I would have to admit though that some of my more negative experiences did add a bit of bitterness to the way I viewed race relations. Louie would always bring me down to earth though; he had such a non-assuming manner. It's always good to have people in your life who help you out of the pit of cynicism. Louie did that for me.

In Jesus' day, like ours, there were many religious

divides. One of the biggest chasms was the hostility between Jews and Samaritans. The Jews looked down on the Samaritans because they were a half-breed race made up of a union between Jews and Gentiles. Many of the Samaritans wanted to keep the Jewish traditions, but had to do so privately because they were considered unclean by their half-brothers. Often when Jews were traveling they had to avoid Samaritan areas because of the threat of violence. They were two opposing groups and were not able to see eye to eye by any means.

When Jesus meets the Samaritan woman in our reading today we get another glimpse into the compassion of the Lord. Not only was she Samaritan, she was immoral and she was a woman. Usually men did not have conversations with women in the open like this. Remember that it was Jesus who requested her help at first. He struck up the conversation. “Will you give me something to drink?” He said. The dialogue soon turns into a spiritual theme with Jesus offering her the kind of water He has, living water that continuously quinces the thirst. In response to Jesus' knowledge about her personal life she, probably nervously, brings up the proper place for worship. She is used to worshipping there whereas the Jews, Jesus' people, worship in Jerusalem.

Jesus then moves the discussion to the true nature of God and worship. He is saying that worship is an inside experience. You are to worship in your spirit. You can do that wherever you are. It doesn't

matter if you are in Samaria or Jerusalem or Portland, Oregon; worship of God is an inside job. Interestingly, Jesus says that true worship is experienced when we realize the nature of God. God is spirit. I think He is saying that God is everywhere present. God is not localized. He can be with you here and in India at the same time. He is also saying that we shouldn't see God as a glorified man. God became a man, yes, but God in His full essence or being is spirit, non-material, invisible, physically untouchable.

In Psalm 139 we read that you cannot escape the presence of God. He is everywhere present at the same time. He can be this because He is not bound by time and space like we are. Even Jesus in His resurrection body, though it was a body, was not hindered by space and time. He could simply appear to the disciples in a locked room. He could ascend to heaven without being affected by the laws of gravity. Now that's a unique body! Someday those who believe in Jesus will receive a body like that.

Worship of God is a matter of our spirit responding to the work of God's Spirit in us. The inner man, that new man who loves God always and desires to please and honor God at all times is refreshed and strengthened when we express to God from our hearts the adoration and praise we have for Him. You can be in a church service and you can mouth the words to the "worship songs" and still be a million miles away from God in mind and heart. On the other hand, you could be rummaging through the dump

looking for something and be moved to pray and worship from your heart of hearts. The place is irrelevant, but the movement of the heart plays a melody of worship to "Our Father who is in heaven."

Let's worship God in kind. He is spirit and we have the opportunity to worship in our spirit.

Let's worship the true and living God. When you worship Him for who He is and do not try and reconstruct Him in your own way, you will be lifted beyond the pettiness of race differences or religious differences and begin to view God for who He truly is - the all knowing, all powerful, everywhere present God who created all things by the Word of His mouth.

Are you in tune with your spirit? Here are a few helpful suggestions that will help you to worship from your spirit:

- be still
  - let prayers flow from the heart to the screen of your mind, then speak the prayers
  - pray internally without speaking
  - think regularly about the greatness of the Lord
  - practice spiritual breathing; inhale the Spirit, exhale sins
  - be honest with where you think your heart is.
  - express your heart's cry in a variety of ways: write, sing, read, stand, lift hands, kneel, walk, shout, memorize, lift someone else, be patient.
  - God's blessings are in spirit and truth,
- Pastor Steve



## "Grade "A" Food"

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May 5 - John 4: 27-42

**Y**ears ago some friends invited my wife and me over for a rare treat. They were making some special Indian cuisine that we would eat together while sitting on the floor- no eating utensils, just

our fingers. We had a blast and the food was absolutely scrumptious. It was weird, but delectable. That was a once in a lifetime experience, I guess, because we haven't had anything close to that since and, quite

honestly, I haven't been real motivated to go to an Indian restaurant and copy that one time experience. Really, most of what was good about it was bound up in the fellowship we had with that couple.

Are you a picky eater? I've never been too picky. I do not like Spam. The thought of it turns my stomach. Otherwise, I enjoy most foods. I can even stomach chicken when it's cooked with spices or something on it. You can keep plain old chicken; I'd rather eat cardboard. Mostly everyone has an opinion about food. We have an individual taste for certain foods and have our own likes and dislikes. Any way you cut it though, there is nothing much more enjoyable than sharing a great meal with a friend or two. The quality of the food heightens the enjoyment of the camaraderie.

When Jesus' disciples return and find Jesus talking with a woman, they are surprised that the Lord would be doing this, after all it was a socially unacceptable thing in those days. But Jesus was about people, all people, and He had a mission to fulfill that was directed from heaven and would be accomplished despite any social pressures to the contrary. Jesus likened his mission with a certain kind of fulfillment that was better than even the best meal you could imagine.

From time to time I get glimpses of what this might mean. Anytime I am able to help someone move closer to God and find their fulfillment in Him I too feel the satisfaction of spiritual food that pleases the soul's taste buds. When you are involved in any ministry that furthers the things of the kingdom of God there is a sense of accomplishment that satisfies. In a world where very few people are truly happy and fulfilled this is a big deal. I'll never forget the quote from Chariots of Fire, the movie made to portray the life of missionary and Olympian Eric Liddle, when he says to his sister, "When I run I feel God's pleasure." At that time he felt like his mission was to run for God. Later Liddle would go to China and die at a young age while serving the Lord there.

Have you ever experienced something like this? Have you ever thought to yourself that the thing you were doing was so in the will of God that it gave you goosebumps to be a part of it? Are you still searching for your place in the church, the Body of Christ? If so,

the Holy Spirit will help you if you only have a desire to find your place. The Bible says that He distributes to each as He sees fit. Once you find where you "fit" then you will, like Jesus, be able to talk about a food source that will not be understood by everyone.

A good place to start on this pursuit is with the Word of God. Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). According to Jesus, real living happens when we partake of the Word and let it assimilate through our lives. It is God's Word that nourishes us and sustains us and makes us spiritually healthy. In our day and age when so many are thirsting for spiritual value and truth, there is still too much of an emphasis on spiritual self-discovery. If people would discover the riches of the Word they would then find it easier to find the will of the Lord for them.

You might take an excursion today in Psalm 19 where the virtues of the Word are laid out. Because the Word is perfect food, able to do much greater things to our spiritual body than even the burritos and spaghetti and steak and burgers and chicken and all the other stuff we spend so much time craving, we ought to be renewing our commitment to the Word so that we can be assured of the will of God. Jesus saw this as a first priority and we would do well to move in the same direction.

I was recently telling someone how God used a particular Bible verse that I had remembered thirty years ago to give me balance when the trials of life bombarded me through the years. Without that particular insight I would probably have been susceptible to all kinds of strange thinking. When I quoted the verse to him I could tell that it was like a filet mignon, medium, with just the right flavoring.

What is your place in the church?

Whatever it is, do it with all your might.

Don't hold back because others sometimes pull you down.

Paul would say, "Your labor is not in vain in the Lord." I concur.

God's blessings are like steak and lobster,  
Pastor Steve

**“Take Jesus At His Word”**-----  
May 6 - John 4:43 -5:15

**I** Hope It's An Awesome Day For You, Who hasn't been disappointed by someone who promised to deliver and didn't? Do you remember putting your faith in someone only to be let down later? This happens in marriage partnerships every day. The neat and spiffy bride and groom were adamant about their promises until they began to believe that they really didn't love their partner any longer. Or, maybe they have found someone better, someone who would be more lovable and give them what they wanted.

It's quite amazing what or who we will put our trust in. I once sat with a stock broker who convinced me that it would be the road to a windfall to invest in a certain car company. He had heard or read or maybe he had dreamed about this certain company making future profits that would be through the roof. I naively listened and went along for the ride. Well, in the end he took me for a ride. I think I ended up selling those shares for about twenty cents on the dollar. You live and learn!

People fall to any charismatic crack pot that comes down the lane. From Jim Jones to David Koresh to the more mystical like the Bagwan Rajneesh, these men had devoted followers pay big bucks, give up their careers and follow them to the ends of the earth. These gurus made grandiose claims and gave simple people reason to hope in their promises. Eventually though many of their claims proved to be bogus. Many of their devotees died and the ones who remained were left with scars to deal with for years to come. How is it that people can so easily give themselves to someone or something that seems so "out there"?

The whole human race is on a quest for meaning and purpose. When a person finds something to believe in, then they are apt to jump in with both feet. This is also the way marketing works. If the advertis-

ers can get us to believe that we cannot live without their product then they have us hooked. It may only be a fad thing, but that doesn't matter to them because they are in it for the burst of money. Very few products make it for the long haul. A good example is cigarette advertising on TV. I can remember when the Marlboro Man would ride into the valley, looking rugged and manly, and puff away on his cig in order to give the viewer the feeling that he would be happier if he too smoked that brand. Those ads won a generation of nicotine addicts. They were hooked because they wanted to be manly too and they also enjoyed the fix of nicotine.

Fads come and go, self-proclaimed prophets rise and fall, fountain of youth ideas tickle our fancy for awhile and most of us spend the majority of our lives looking for the right size peg to fill the hole in our hearts. Jesus is the only one who can fill that space. He is the only source of lasting peace and happiness. He is the only one who can be trusted absolutely. If you have Jesus you have all you need. You do not need Jesus and anything else; He is sufficient. In the end, when the kingdom of God is realized, there will be no need for Procter and Gamble or Ford or cable or a fancy suit or any mind numbing hobby or pill. At that time everything we are saying here about Jesus will come to completion and we will see that Jesus is what it is all about. "He who has the Son has life," John the Apostle said. He knew first hand how important that was. He lived in a very hostile environment to Christianity and had to trust the Lord every day.

The father who comes to Jesus on behalf of his sick son hears the words from Jesus' lips that he longed to hear, "Your son will live." That's all it took for him. To him that was better than the word of a doctor or anyone else; Jesus had claimed that the boy would be better and he believed the word of Jesus and went on his way. Don't you love how John puts it,

"The man took Jesus at his word and departed."

Jesus people are the most secure people in the world. They are like well fed sheep lying down in green pastures. They do not fear the low growl of the wolves because they know that their Shepherd is always there for them. They have peace. They have encouragement. They have Jesus' Word.

How about you, do you take Jesus at His Word? Do you simply believe that what He says He does? Paul said, "I know whom I have believed and am

persuaded that He is able to keep what I have entrusted to him until that day." Paul was secure.

Jesus is trustworthy. He will not lead you down a wrong-headed pathway. He will lead you where there will be plenty of good food and water.

Let's follow.

God's blessings are poured on those who take Jesus at His Word,  
Pastor Steve

**“Christ's Deity Is as Clear as a Bell”**-----  
May 7 - John 5: 16-30

**W**e live in a day when the trend is to think that truth is relative. What I mean is that truth is no longer seen as absolute and binding. I saw a Leave It To Beaver episode recently where Beaver is being instructed by his mom because she suspects that he has been stealing. Actually another boy was stealing stuff and giving it to the Beaver to win his friendship. Nevertheless, his mom tells him that he can't do anything without being watched. He responded by acknowledging that his parents and teacher and the usher at the theatre all saw him. When his mom said that she meant all of the time, Beaver said, "Do you mean God?" Beaver said that he knew that and he didn't want to make God sad. He figured that God had a long list of things to do and didn't need to be too concerned about him doing wrong. Could you imagine this as a topic for a current sitcom? Just mentioning the word God, outside of an off the cuff curse, would be taboo.

No longer is a spade a spade. People reserve the right to contradict a statement like " 'a' cannot equal 'non-a.'" It used to be the two were mutually exclusive and that you could be certain of the truth of that max- im. For example, a right angle cannot be 90 degrees

and not 90 degrees. If someone comes along and says they believe a right angle is 35 degrees, can they be right as well as the person who believes it is 90 degrees? Honest to goodness, someone once told me that it wouldn't matter if I taught their children that  $2 + 3 = 6$ . Huh? That's right, truth was so relative to them that as long as I qualified them into the school I was principal of, to them, it didn't matter what I taught their child. This is, of course, a pretty extreme case. Let's try an example related to the truth about Jesus. If Jesus claimed to be the unique Son of God, equal to the Father; if He said that He was the Messiah like the Son of Man depicted by Daniel in chapter seven of his prophecy; and if Jesus was essentially saying that He Himself was God, not to be confused with the Father and Spirit, but eternally equal to and in concurrence with them from all eternity, what would we say to the person who came along and gave Jesus another interpretation?

We have heard of people thinking they were God. Insane asylums are full of megalomaniacs. The difference between these quacks and the Lord Jesus is that Jesus always backed up His claims with action. If you can raise the dead, walk on water and

feed a multitude with a Happy Meal then you are in a different class of God-claimers. Someone could claim or promise great things but if they do not deliver the goods then they ought to be rejected. Jesus said that after He left many would come on the scene and claim to be the Christ. He said do not believe them, rather look for me to come in the clouds with an unmistakable visual presence.

I lay all of this down so that we can talk about Jesus' undeniable claim to deity. As a matter of fact, almost every signpost in the New Testament points to Jesus' unmistakable identity as God in human flesh. John 1:1,14 says it outright - "...the Word was God... and the Word became flesh..." And here in chapter five we see the connection of Jesus' relationship with the Father as a certainty that He is equal to the Father. He also talks about the perfect harmony between the Father and Son. Jesus says that He and the Father are in perfect unity, so much so that whatever He sees the Father doing He does and whatever the Father wills He wills. There are no secrets in the relationship. Interestingly enough, Jesus later says of the Spirit that He would take the Words of Jesus and reveal it to the apostles. All three persons of the Godhead are in perfect sync. Lastly, also in this same chapter Jesus

says that the Father has committed all judgment to Him. The Bible is clear that only God can make a final judgment on a person and at the same time only God can forgive sins. These two roles are played out in the life of the Lord Jesus.

Any religion or pseudo religious group who undermines the truth of the deity of Jesus is on thin ice. They are preaching another Jesus, not the Jesus of the Bible. He is and always was "God among us." Paul said that in Him the fullness of deity dwelt in bodily form. In Jesus you have God, not a part of God or the qualities of God or a God-likeness, no, but God. In Hebrews the Father addresses the Son, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever." Any questions?

The application is striking. God became a man that He might take on Himself the gross sins of humanity so that we might have the opportunity to have the gift of eternal life. He died for our sins so that we do not have to. O, what a gift! God really cares. He didn't stay aloof, even though He had every right to do that. He came. He suffered. He died for us. He rose. He is coming again. "Come, Lord Jesus!"

God's blessings are incarnate in the Son,  
Pastor Steve



## "Everything Points That Way"

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May 8 - John 5: 31-47

**W**hen you become a Christian something much more is happening to you than you even realize at first. God is working in your life and doing things that are unfamiliar to you. It's somewhat like the metamorphosis that takes place for the person who becomes a master guitar player. They pick up the guitar at first and feel at home with the instrument, but do not have any idea where their interest will take them. Then they learn their first note

and then chord and then progression of chords, etc. and they are hooked on the melodies that come out of their work.

The Christian life is more like God playing us as his instrument. We have already alluded to the verse in Ephesians where the Apostle says that we are "God's workmanship" (or "poem"). At first, when God begins to strum our lives with His presence and

purposes for us we may be a bit unaware of the tune that is being played. Up to that point we had been used to sounds in our lives that were not the same as the new songs God began to play. But the more we submitted to the Master's touch and skill, the more we knew that this new melody was the reason we were made in the first place. Some of us may have felt like our instrument was being used for the wrong reasons. Maybe like using a guitar to hammer a nail. But when the Lord began to play our lives we knew that now we were in tune.

The Apostle John records that Jesus is the Master. With all of the detours in the world, both physical and spiritual, it is too easy to take your eyes off of Jesus and look to other things for a sense of well-being or connection. Each and every one of us, no matter what our personal likes and dislikes, and no matter what we think is the most important and pressing issue of the day, cannot afford to neglect the one person who is central to faith and life. Jesus is the Master.

It's amazing how someone can be so close and yet so far away. Jesus told the Bible students listening to Him that they were good pupils of the Word and had a desire to know the life-giving message of the Bible, but they were blind because they did not see how the Scripture was being fulfilled in Him. They were versed in truth but were unwilling to come to the embodiment of truth. They did not want to bow before Jesus and submit to Him because in their minds the cost would be too great. They might be persecuted or looked down upon by their peers. They were not willing to learn from Jesus because they already thought their way was the right way. Jesus said that they were men-pleasers who did not have the love of God in them.

The Jews are very proud of their heritage from Abraham. They wear that distinction like a badge of

honor even to this day. Jesus puts Himself in relationship to Moses by saying that Moses wrote about Him. By doing this He automatically puts Himself in a greater position than Moses. There was already a great deal of hostility brewing in the hearts of the Pharisees and the allusion to Moses would have to strike them the wrong way. The next couple of chapters bare this out. The fact that Moses wrote about Jesus does two very important things for us. First, it confirms again Jesus' high regard for our Bible. Moses was responsible for the first five books of the Bible and Jesus essentially puts His stamp of approval on them. Secondly, Jesus bids us to interpret verses of prophetic import as fulfilled in Him. For example, in Deuteronomy 18 Moses wrote that someday God would raise up a prophet like him who would speak God's Word directly.

Do you believe that God is at work in your life? This is an essential part of walking the Jesus walk. Paul applies this by describing it as a believer having a treasure in a common clay pot. The pot is not the essential thing because it merely holds the thing that gives life. This life is the Spirit of Jesus in us who works in us to make us like the Master Himself.

Let's also allow this teaching in John to encourage us to see Jesus in the Old Testament. Someone once said that "Christ is in the Old Testament concealed and in the New Testament revealed." Fortunately for us most of the Old Testament ideas are clearly made known in the New Testament. For example, the Baptist's declaration that Jesus is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Thus, the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system is made perfectly evident in Christ.

God's blessings encourage those who see Jesus in all of Scripture,  
Pastor Steve

**“Pop Quiz”**

May 9 - John 6: 1-24

**C**lass, this morning we are going to have a pop quiz. Take out a blank piece of paper and a pencil and put your books under your desk. This quiz will test not just your knowledge but your will and use of wisdom as well. You will be asked to explain what you would do if... “If what?” you ask.

1. “Your friend Ben has been in a car accident. You don’t know how severe the accident was until you arrive at the waiting room in the hospital. There you encounter many grieving people, family and friends of Ben. One of Ben’s cousins knows that you are a Christian and nervously asks you why God has allowed Ben to be injured. How would you respond to this individual?”

2. “You have been preparing to compete in the high jump of the state track and field meet. You have worked and worked and worked, putting in hours upon hours of practice. Your coach is excited about your potential and thinks that you could possibly get an athletic scholarship if you do well at state. Two days before the big meet you spring your ankle while approaching the bar during a practice session.” How do you handle such a disappointment?

3. “Sally, a member of your small home group, has not been around for some reason. You are pretty sure that she is doing well but you are the kind of person who does not like to butt in on someone else’s business. Weeks go by and Sally is on your mind quite a bit. Something inside of you is telling you that you ought to contact her and see how things are going. It’s so much against your nature that you are still struggling with it. What should you do now?”

4. “You are taking a leisurely walk downtown. You glance to your right down an alley and see a man beating up a helpless woman. Your adrenaline begins to pump through your body and the anger over what you see rushes into your head. You have the wits to

step back momentarily and ask yourself what you ought to do. What ought you to do?”

5. “Lately you have been overwhelmed. It seems like everyone is asking you for the world. No one knows the financial pressures you are under. The mounting stress seems unbearable and you find yourself acting unlike yourself. You think to yourself that if one more person asks you for a favor you’ll go crazy. When you are in a tough spot like this, what should you do?”

These are difficult questions but not far from reality. Possibly one of them hit home for you. The tougher things in our lives are sometimes met with questions about where God is in the mix. I hear this in the desperate cries of those who feel like things would not turn out like they do if God were directing the universe. Why we think God somehow owes us is beyond me. On the other hand, you can be assured that God loves you in the middle of the mud and mess of life. I can’t help but think that God will bring things into our lives to check our view of this world. If we get too cozy here we will tend to lose our purpose of bringing others to Christ and helping them to grow in Him. We also forget that God has something better in store for those who love Him and await His coming.

Jesus turns to Philip and poses a difficult question, not unlike one of the scenarios above. The crowds around the Lord are in the thousands. Jesus asks him, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” Philip is a realist and states that it would take way more than they had to buy enough grub. Andrew is the practical one; he sees a boy with a small amount of bread and fish and thinks maybe we can start there, but he also expresses his doubts. What would you think if you were there? I’d probably tell the Lord that if they are going to come out in the desert then they need to be responsible for their own meals.

What was the test here? Wasn’t it to see if they

had faith that Jesus could take care of the problem? They had an unsolvable dilemma. Do you ever have “unsolvable dilemmas”? I do. And usually my mind starts to spin with possible solutions. I will pick one and frantically try to solve the problem. Sometimes I forget to pray about it. Sometimes I forget to bring my requests to the Lord and throw my burden on Him. After all, He made the worlds, I think He can take care of my little problem or my big problem.

After the feeding of the crowd the disciples picked

up 12 baskets of leftovers. With Jesus there is always more than enough. He provides more than we could ask or conceive. Do you have a dilemma going today? Where are you going to get the money to take care of it? Perplexed? Jesus will provide - let the problem sit down on the grass and the Good Shepherd will feed His sheep.

God’s blessings are in abundance,  
Pastor Steve

**“Real Nourishment”**

May 10 - John 6: 25-59

**T**here is nothing like a real good meal. You know what I mean, one that really satisfies. On the other hand, it is tough to feel healthy and nourished by eating stale or moldy bread. Today my wife came home from the market and realized that two items she had bought were expired, one by more than two months - yuck!!

I am amazed that we can eat crud and expect to feel good later. Or maybe we have overeaten and then wonder why we feel so cruddy the next day. Maybe we ate no fruits and no veggies but we expect to feel like we have the food pyramid mastered. It won’t work that way. Sometimes when I see that so and so is losing weight, I ask them what they did. Most of the time I learn that they began to eat right. They began to focus on healthy eating habits and practicing moderation with their food intake. Surprise, surprise, in no time they were down to their ideal body weight and began to feel much better.

Spiritually, these principles are true too. If we rely on the “gospel” of “what’s happening now” we will get out of it short-lived satisfaction. It may be something to eat for now but later we feel bloated and out of shape. We simply need to partake of Christ on a daily

basis. Let’s mark what Jesus Himself said about this: “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.” I love when Jesus says, “Come to me.” I can do that. I can bow before Him and pray and come to Him and experience Him in my heart and life. Simply come to Him. Reach out to Him. Hold on to Him. Spend time with Him. Let Him be near to you and hold you (spiritually speaking), and you will find rest for your soul. You will be able to rest and enjoy life because He will fulfill your deepest hunger.

This world does not have what it takes to meet your needs. Sometimes the things of this world taste like frosting on a cake. You can eat and eat and eat and still you are not nourished, you are only left with that uncomfortable bloating feeling that doesn’t soon go away. You may say to yourself that you won’t eat like that again and then, out of desperation, there you are again eating spoonful after spoonful of frosting. Same result.

The second thing besides coming to Jesus is to believe in Him. Take Him at His word. Cherish His words. Let them soak into your heart and impact you on the inside. Become more and more convinced

of them so that they can form the basis of what you believe. Believe in Jesus. This also involves trusting Him. Can you do that? Say to Him, "Jesus, I trust you and believe in you, I believe you love me and are working in my life. Thank you for always being there for me; believe me, I want to trust you and believe in you more and more." The promise for doing this is satisfaction.

Are you satisfied in life?

Do you want to know a peace that passes understanding?

Do you want your inward thirst to be quenched? Come today to Jesus and believe in Him.

He is there.

Rejoice in Jesus Always,  
God's blessings nourish,  
Pastor Steve

teacher and you are the student. He is the leader and you are the follower. He is the Master and you are the "slave."

Lord, Where you lead I will follow. Lead on. In

Jesus Name, Amen.

God's blessings divide the wheat from the chaff,  
Pastor Steve



## "To Whom Shall We Go?"

May 11 - John 6: 60 - 7: 13

**W**hen we were babies we involuntarily went to our moms. While in school some of us went to a favorite teacher. I had a couple of teachers who made a real difference in my life and I would go back and visit them years later. Last year when I was down visiting my old stomping grounds, I stopped by my old elementary school to look up my sixth grade teacher. He really had a positive influence on my life. I don't think I would say he changed my life but there is no doubt that he made a difference.

As we get older some of us form friendships that we depend on and others still lean on their parents. Others go to chemical dependency to find what they need. My sister, who died in 2001, went to Jack Daniels for comfort. You can imagine how angry I become when the commercial comes on for that hard booze and glamorizes the experience. Drink responsibly they say; yeah, right!

Jesus often said things that weren't conventional. Because of this John records "many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." I have always found it interesting that the Bible doesn't then describe Jesus going after these wanderers saying things like, "Hey guys, don't take it so literally, I didn't mean to offend you; come on back and we can work

this out." No, He turns to the 12 and asks if they are on the way out too. Jesus divides. He divides because He is Lord (Master, Boss, The One in Charge) and it is His way or the highway. On the other hand, Jesus unites. He unites those whose hearts are truly His. For those people he is their all in all and they love to talk about Him and adore Him and honor Him. Jesus! Yes, Jesus! We love to talk about Him!

Peter's response is classic. He basically says what he has already realized, that Jesus is it. There is no one else who compares. This, in Peter's mind is true whether he understood Jesus or not because he had already determined to follow the Lord to the death. To Peter, Jesus has eternal words. This is another confirmation of the respect the apostles had for the words of Jesus. They believed they were God's words. So the issue is, do I follow God's words or the men who were offended by the teaching of Jesus? Peter felt it best to trek with the Master.

Who do you go to?

Does he/she have eternal words? Does he speak words that will have lasting value?

If not, turn to Jesus even if His words are a bit bizarre and hard at times to follow. Follow Him.

As a disciple, you are a follower of Jesus. He is the



## "Mere Appearances"

May 12 - John 7: 14-44

**T**ake a Look Around at What God Has Done Today,  
"You can't tell a book by its cover." Have you ever heard that expression? Or have you ever had an unfavorable first impression of someone only to find out that they were not like how you perceived them at all. Maybe they even became a friend after awhile. Here, I may have judged him very harshly because I didn't like something on the surface about them and all along there was something deeper about his life that became very appealing to me.

Sometimes we Christians can do this to other believers in other churches. We mistakenly form prejudices against a person because he does things different than us. This can lead to an attitude of superiority, where I believe that the way I experience spiritual things is the only way to do it. And so I begin to look down on people who are linked to such and such church or who use such and such version of the Bible or who worship in a different manner.

We need to be careful not to be so quick to judge others. Could this be what the Lord had in mind when He said, "Judge not, that you be not judged"? In other words, don't have a judgmental attitude, rather, be an encourager and someone who builds others up. In Acts there was a man named Apollos who was "mighty in the Scriptures." Yet when he met some of Paul's friends, named Aquilla and Priscella, they noticed that he did not have the whole truth of the gospel in his message. They didn't publicly criticize him or speak

harshly to him, no, they took him aside and explained the Way more thoroughly to him. They were encouragers. If they would have jumped the gun and judged too harshly at first there could have been a rift in the work of the gospel.

Jesus had healed a man on the Sabbath. The enemies of Jesus used this as an opportunity to scrutinize Jesus by saying that He was breaking the Sabbath rules on rest. Evidently this was considered work and the Jewish regulations about Sabbath rest were interpreted by them very strictly to mean "no work" whatsoever. I was in Israel on a Sabbath day. We were on a tour and kept on going even though it felt like the whole country was shut down. We had trouble finding a bathroom rest stop. To this day the Sabbath is practiced with strict regulations by the Jews. The truth of the matter is that those first century Jews were looking for a way to discredit Jesus. Imagine what a thinking person must have been thinking. Jesus makes a man well and the Pharisees are saying that Jesus is not from God because He did this "work" on the Sabbath. Huh?

Jesus' rule was that love always supercedes any rules. Was it the good and loving thing to heal someone who had been infirm for a long time? Of course! People often ask what God's will is for their life. They are concerned that they will not miss out on all that God has for them. If we would simply do as Jesus did and love others the best we can with God's help then we will be on target when it comes to doing the

will of God. Men want a set of rules to fulfill so that they can go back and measure themselves by those rules and feel good about themselves. The problem with that approach is that we also tend to reinterpret those rules to fit our own likes and dislikes. Then we will justify ourselves by feeling a sense of superiority to those who do not keep the rules like we do. The Pharisees had fallen into this way of thinking and they could not see the goodness in the Lord Jesus. To them He was a threat to their rules and their way of life.

Appearances can also be very deceiving. What we see is not always what we get. This works two ways. Sometimes we think we see more than is really there and other times we see little and get more later. So Jesus encourages us to judge with a right judgment. When the prophet Samuel was directed by God to anoint the second king of Israel he had six boys, sons of a man named Jesse to pick from. As each boy filed by the aged sage, each was rejected. Samuel knew that there must be another boy because God had not chosen any of the others. There was one more boy, but he was such a runt and not old enough to fight, but Samuel called for him and, lo and behold, David was introduced into Israel's history; he would become "the man." In the context of this presentation the truth was revealed that "man looks at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart." David became a man with a true heart for God.

Do you have a heart for God? Do you want to do God's way for you? Are you more concerned about

God's reputation than your own? Are you concerned for others who do not know the grace of Jesus? If you can answer yes to these questions then you are in a good place. You are in a good place for God to work in your life and use you for His purposes. You will not quickly judge those you see but will give them the benefit of the doubt until there is good reason to believe that they do not have a good heart. You will know by their fruits. Good ones out of the good treasure of their heart will produce good fruit and those contrary will produce rotten fruit. But you will not be quick to judge their point of view until you know them truly.

Remember, God looks at the heart and it is much more difficult for us to see the heart. So let's reserve judgment until we are sure that we are sure. Is the person we are judging actually acting out of love and we are unaware of their motivation? Years ago I had a neighbor who wanted to do me a favor and so he sprayed around my lawn sprinklers with Round Up. That was the way he liked his sprinkler wells. I didn't, but he didn't know that. On the surface, once my grass began to die, I thought that maybe my neighbor was a real mean person, a bad egg. But his motivation was love and I tried to accept it as such. "Judge not according to appearance but with a righteous judgment."

God's blessings bless those who see beneath the surface,  
Pastor Steve



## "Join The Mob"

May 13 - John 7: 45-8:11

**D**on't you just hate being stereotyped? I remember when a well known preacher was standing before the world in tears confessing to a lifestyle of adultery and how it made me feel knowing

that he was giving many an excuse to lump all believers in the hypocrite category. There is something in all of us that wants to simply be ourselves. We do not want to be the brunt of a prejudiced viewpoint hurled

at us by some ignorant commentator.

The problem is that when the church gets a black eye we all suffer. This type of thing goes all the way back to the time of king David, the man after God's heart who committed adultery and murder and was forgiven but gave his enemies a reason to blaspheme God. In the church at Corinth Paul has to address an issue of morality that he says is something that even the non-believers feel is gross and out of bounds. Nevertheless, each of us individually must give an account of our own life before God. Each of us can follow the Lord and enjoy the Lord and walk with the Lord and not worry what others say. It's good to just let God take care of the way the chips fall. God can work it out.

At this point in our reading in John the Pharisees are starting to boil against Jesus. The Lord has been drawing attention and followers and the Pharisees were not interested in competition. They wanted the people to follow them and they were insecure about the number of people who were attending to Jesus. In verse 44 it says, "Some wanted to seize Him. But no one laid a hand on Him." Hostility was in the air. The temple police who reported to the Pharisees were not inclined to arrest Him at this point because He seemed to be a man who spoke with such...um...um...grace maybe. It's hard to say how they took Him. Imagine listening to the gracious words that fell from His lips. It would be easier to arrest your grandfather for feeding the pigeons too much than to arrest the Son of God. Nevertheless, the guards came back to their superiors empty handed.

This lack of obedience outrages the Pharisees. And so they argue that Jesus couldn't be anything special because they hadn't given themselves to Him. Then they do what most do when they are trying to persuade from a position of weakness- they discredit

the people who are following Him. They call the believers a group of mobsters who are cursed by God.

I can't help but see the parallels with today's criticism against Christians for holding to more conservative values. When Christians stand up against abortion or porn or euthanasia or homosexuality they are maligned as narrow-minded and bigoted. On the other hand, as the commentators try to discredit us and paint us as unkind or unloving or unthinking, they merely show their own inability to be open-minded and accepting of the Christian point of view. The fact that the Christian viewpoint is exclusive because we are following the Master does not give anyone the right to discount Jesus because of it. Jesus will stand on His own merit. It just so happens that Jesus stands head and shoulders above every other belief system ever disseminated. Jesus makes this clear in chapter eight as He hones in on His credentials to make the statements that He makes, statements primarily about His own deity.

Are you part of the "mob"? Do others misunderstand you? Are there some people in your life who discredit you simply because you are associated with the mob who is following Jesus? Interesting, in the end when Jesus is being arrested, this "mob" is instructed by Him to stand back and not fight. Peter would later write: "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander" (1 Peter 3: 15, 16). Some mob. Turns out it's a bunch of people trying to do good.

God's blessings are misunderstood by some,  
Pastor Steve

**“The Nitty Gritty”**

May 14 - John 8: 12-30

One of my favorite songs in high school began: “Sometimes late when things are real and people share the gift of gab between themselves; some are quick to take the bait.”

The song is Oz Never Did Give Nothing To The Tin Man by the group America. Remember them? Most of the song is a mystery to me but I was always drawn to this first line about being real, you know, the kind of real that happens when you stay up late with a friend or friends and you begin to talk about the things that are in your heart.

Connecting with others and sharing some of our deeper experiences together is a special thing. Lonely people haven’t had too many of these times. These are the times when you have the kind of give and take in a conversation where you go away feeling more whole because you have touched the soul of another person. By the way, I think it more often than not happens late because we tend to let our guard down when we are tired or feeling rummy.

Paul said in Ephesians 4 that we ought to “speak the truth in love.” He promised that if we’d do this we would grow spiritually. He says that we would become like Jesus. Jesus did this, He spoke the truth in love. He told it like it was so that those who listened to Him might benefit. He even spoke that way when the Pharisees were around. He wasn’t intimidated by anyone nor was He swayed by the opinions of others. He spoke what was good for others to hear. Remember the guards in yesterday’s reading? They were so impressed by His words that they just couldn’t arrest Him.

Chapter eight looks like a verbal heavyweight fight. “In this corner, weighing in on the authority of the Law, and living on the traditions of the elders, fighting in the purple trunks with white tassels, from the capital of Israel, the Jews among Jews - THE PHAR-

ISEES! And in the other corner weighing in on His own word, a healer and miracle worker, teaching out of the red corner, from the small peasant town of Nazareth - JESUS CHRIST.” The problem for the Pharisees was that Jesus always had a right hook that couldn’t be stopped. He was always right. They tried and tried to discredit Him but the best they could do was work up a false accusation based on a misinterpretation of what He had said. Interesting, isn’t it, that every cult today does exactly the same thing. Not that they want to directly discredit Jesus, no, they do it indirectly by misinterpreting who He is. Well, the Pharisees had no clue who they were dealing with or sparring with for that matter.

Does Jesus lay it on the line? Listen up:

“You have no idea where I come from or where I am going.”

“You judge by human standards.”

“You do not know me or the Father.”

“You will die in your sin.”

“Where I go you cannot come.”

“You are from below; I am from above.”

“You are from this world; I am not of this world.”

“I always do what pleases Him (the Father).”

I was always told to avoid conflict it is a good idea not to use the word “you.” I guess Jesus feels that in this situation it is the necessary thing to have a conflict so that the truth can be told.

“1...2...3...4...5...6...7...the Pharisees stagger up from the mat, dripping with sweat, bruised and battered, but they are not done. The bell rings; round one is over.”

You and I sometimes, make that most of the time...well, consistently need to hear the truth about ourselves and we need to speak the truth to others. If we love those we rub shoulders with we will tell them what is true. Let’s keep in mind that Jesus could say “you” because he knew what was in men’s hearts.

We need to be more careful before we exclaim some general rebuke to someone or to a group. If we act in love we will not be off target. The crowd that Jesus was dealing with that day were those who were not going where He was going. They were not His sheep; Jesus knew those who were His. We do not always

have the luxury of that information.

In the meantime, let love be the rule and truth the standard.

God’s blessings fall from those who love truth and speak it,

Pastor Steve

**“Daddy Devil”**

May 15 - John 8: 31-59

Godspeed, John’s gospel is about the deity of Jesus. AKA - Jesus is God in human flesh. From the first chapter this point is clearly laid out. You can imagine how opposed to Jesus the Jewish leaders were when it came to His claim to deity. They were against Him and made that clear both privately and publicly.

I can understand why the Pharisees and Sadducees were opposed to Jesus’ claims to deity; that claim would fly in the face of their teaching on monotheism (one God). In their mind there was no way any man could be God. Only their God (YHWH, or Yahweh) was considered to be God. In John 5 we read that Jesus was calling God His Father making himself equal with God. The result was that the people were after Jesus to kill him because they considered Him to be a blasphemer.

In John 8 the confrontational rpm’s are spinning like crazy. Accusations are flying and the fight is on. Jesus is under scrutiny and attack, the Pharisees coming after him like a pit bull latching on to its victim. They accuse him of being born in fornication, an allusion to Mary’s pre-marriage situation. Jesus doesn’t walk away or sidestep the issues. He confronts them head on. He takes them on and answers their accusations with alacrity.

The Pharisees did not accept Him because they

recognized that His words were self-serving. In other words, Jesus pointed to Himself as the object of a person’s faith. This kind of self God-talk was getting under the skin of these religious leaders. They wanted Him dead.

Jesus said, “Why do you not understand my speech? Because you are not able to listen to my word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8: 43,44).

Jesus battled against lies by telling the truth.

He told the truth about who he was.

He told the truth about His Father in Heaven.

He told the truth about where He came from.

He was a truth teller.

Do you tell the truth?

Are you used to telling it like it is?

Do you go to Scripture to verify whether something is right or wrong?

When someone says something that is off base do you correct them in a polite way?

Listen to what Paul told Timothy:

“And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps

will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will" 2 Timothy 2: 24,25.

And Paul says somewhere else that we should speak the truth in love.

Let's be a truth telling people.  
Let's share the truth with others.  
Let's counteract lies and give people the light of God's truth.  
God's blessings come through the truth,  
Pastor Steve



## "If I Could Only See"

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May 16 - John 9: 1-34

**T**his Is God's Day,  
Are you a credit card junky? Is it hard for you to deny an offer for a new card with some fancy scene on the front? Do you collect plastic like bubble gum cards? Have you ever used one credit card to pay another one?

I have to admit, at one time I sort of collected sports Visa and MasterCard. I couldn't help it. When I was rooting for the Green Bay Packers I made sure my card signified that. When I visited a professional stadium like SafeCo in Seattle or the Shark Tank in San Jose or the home of the Minnesota Wild, I'd fill out a credit card application. You know why I did it primarily? I wanted the free stuff they offered for filling out the application. I have hats and a towel and beanies and probably stuff I've forgotten about. Actually I've done pretty well by not putting merchandise on the cards, but the credit is there waiting to consume me like a fire breathing dragon.

Most of us owe, don't we? We know what it means to be in debt to someone. We know how it feels to write that check and feel the weight of having an outstanding promise to pay. Some of you also know what it feels like to have others owe you. You know how it feels to collect payment with interest for a loan you have made to someone. And even if someone doesn't owe money, many people feel that people or government owe them things like their time

or their expertise or their advice. Many of us live as if others owe us and if they do not give what we expect then we cry the blues because we think we are getting a bum rap. Children sometimes expect their parents to take care of them all of their life. Employees sometimes think it's their employers responsibility to give them benefits that are not provided. Husbands and wives sometimes expect their partner to give to them as payment for their giving. "You owe me" is not an uncommon thought or feeling, either spoken or unspoken, that creeps into our mind and plays with our wills.

In the same way many cry out that God owes them a happy life. They figure that if God is as good as the prophets say then He would naturally be more than willing to bend over backwards for them. Often the attitude comes across when people compare their blessings with others and wonder why they have come up so short. "Hey wait a minute God," they reason, "I've been as good as so and so and look at how much easier their life is than mine." "Hey, look at that guy over there; he's uglier than a mud fence, I bet he really made God mad to end up looking like that!"

I read an article lately about a man that really blew my mind. He is graduating from the University of Madison, Wisconsin with a M.D. degree. He's going to be a doctor. He passed all of the tests and performed all of the procedures flawlessly to the delight

of his supervisors. He finished with rave reviews and was liked by his professors and his fellow students as well. This man, Tim Cordes, is blind. Unbelievable! How could a blind man perform all of the delicate procedures that would be required for graduation? He made a way because he was determined and the university was willing to help him along. One of the things I enjoyed about Cordes was the fact that during residency he was more aware of the ins and outs of the hospital than the other students and he would often be stopped in the hallway to give someone else directions. Also, many of his patients did not even realize that he was blind. One boy asked his father why the doctor had his dog along. Cordes is a man who says he is using the skill and talent he has. He is not complaining, making excuses or wallowing in an attitude of self-pity. He lives purposely with what his lot in life is - period.

When the disciples and Jesus see a blind man along the way the disciples wonder who is responsible for his blindness. Were his parents to blame or should they pin the responsibility on the sins of the man himself. Jesus says neither. Jesus instead says that he is blind so that God can show His work in him. In other words, God can be glorified through the blindness. The blindness is not necessarily a sign of punishment but an indication of opportunity. Back in the Old Testament when Moses is bemoaning his speech impediment and complaining that he doesn't want to go to Egypt and represent the Lord, the Lord says to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I,

the Lord?" (Exodus 4: 11). In other words, God wanted Moses to know that He had created him just as he is for a reason and He could use him despite his weaknesses. As a matter of fact, our weaknesses are usually the very point at which God displays his grandeur.

The rest of the story is academic. The man is healed. The Pharisees don't believe Jesus is the healer until they hear the man's testimony, but then they discount Jesus because He did it on the Sabbath. Same old story. I love the part where it seems like the healed man is being a bit cynical with the Pharisees and challenges them in the light of the healing power of the Lord. When Jesus changes your life you just know it and when others make lame excuses for it you know inside that they are just trying to discount what is so real to you.

Are you worried that God cannot use you because of some malady? Do you too quickly make excuses and turn from the road of faith because you do not see how God could work in your life compared to others? Well, remember the man in this story and realize that you too were created just the way you are so that Jesus can work in you what is pleasing to Him. And remember the doctor from the university when you feel like life or God has handed you a difficult path. God has given you just what you need in order to be all that He wants you to be in this world. Put your faith in that truth.

God's blessings are sometimes in the difficult path,  
Pastor Steve

**“If You Hear His Voice”**

May 17 - John 9:35 - 10:21

**Y**ou are unique. Listen how Rick Warren puts it in *The Purpose Driven Life*: “You are not an accident. Your birth was no mistake or mishap and your life is no fluke of nature. Your parents may not have planned you, but God did. He was not at all surprised by your birth. In fact, He expected it. Long before you were conceived by your parents, you were conceived in the mind of God. He thought of you first. It is not fate, nor chance, nor luck, nor coincidence that you are breathing at this very moment. You are alive because God wanted to create you! The Bible says, ‘The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me.’ God prescribed every single detail of your body. He deliberately chose your race, the color of your skin, your hair, and every other feature. He custom-made your body just the way He wanted it. He also determined the natural talents you would possess and the uniqueness of your personality” (p.22,23). On top of all that God desires to speak to you and guide you through life. He wants us to know His will; He will not hide His will from any willing person who honestly comes to Him. Jesus said a bit earlier in John, “If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority” (7: 17).

In John 10 Jesus uses the word picture of the shepherd and his sheep to convey the kind of relationship that He desires to have with us. He comes right out and says that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him. And if someone else comes along, apparently claiming authority to be followed, the sheep stay clear because they do not recognize that voice. In this teaching you are either in or out of the sheepfold depending on the way you desire to enter. If you do not go through the door, Jesus, then you will not make it in. To go through Him means that you will not only be able to enter the protection of the sheep pen but you will be free to meander out into the pasture in order

to feed on the lush grass. The good shepherd knows His sheep and is known by them. But if this is true, then why does it seem like God’s voice is drowned out by every other kind of noise in our ears?

The truth is that sin affects us all of our lives. What happens is we get blinded by our own sin to the point where we think we don’t need to deal with it and move on, but we sometimes even deny that it is a problem. On the other hand, some people wallow in their feelings of guilt and make that the excuse for not being able to get past it and listen to God’s voice. Sin has a way of deceiving us and causing us to trust ourselves and the voices in our own head. So if we lean on our own thinking too much we get conflicting thoughts about God’s direction for our lives. In Hebrews it says, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (12: 1-2). Who is the “cloud of witnesses”? Some may say it is the saints in heaven looking down on us now, but I think it is more natural to see this group as the ones mentioned in chapter eleven who have shown us the way of faith in God. It is through their example that we can follow in and experience the voice of the Lord too. In other words, imitate their faith and you will be on your way to experiencing the same kind of spiritual direction they experienced.

God speaks to us most clearly through His Son in His Word. Keep that in mind when you are thinking about your need to hear God’s voice on some matter you are facing.

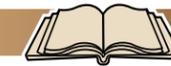
God also speaks through Christian counsel. God will use a friend, pastor, or counselor to point out a

place in the Bible to turn for help.

God speaks as well through His Spirit inside of you. Remember to test everything that you hear by the truth of the Bible before you go public with some new revelation. God has given us all things that relate to life and being spiritual through His precious promises so don’t act too quickly on a thought you hear in

your head. But, also do not hesitate too long when God is prodding you to go and do this or that. If it is a good and loving thing to do and you feel strongly that God is speaking to you to do it, then go.

God’s blessings are heard in God’s voice,  
Pastor Steve

**“Believe The Miracles”**

May 18 - John 10: 22-42

**S**ometimes life can become overwhelming. Things don’t always go our way. The accumulated stress of our day to day lives can bean us when we least expect it. Sudden disappointments will trigger the other hot spots we have been lugging around and all of a sudden we lose faith in family, or friends or even in the Lord. I hope I’m not speaking to you today but chances are that these thoughts will apply to you too.

A great number of people are dealing with stress with a little pill, a little helper. I don’t have a problem with that approach as long as it is viewed as a short-term fix, but to see it as a permanent solution is not healthy. Stresses, according to God’s Word are to be welcomed as God’s friends that will aid us in our spiritual progress. How will I learn patience when I run to an instant solution when I feel the least bit of anxiety? My impatience will only produce more impatience.

What can we hold on to when the roof is caving in and the car is broken down and the kids are out of sorts and things feel hopeless? Where do we turn then? One of my favorite verses is in a pretty obscure Old Testament book titled Habakkuk. It says, “Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the field and there be no herd in the stalls, yet, I will rejoice in the Lord; I

will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; He makes my feet like the deer’s, He makes me tread on my high places” (3: 17-19). Then he ends, “To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.” This statement of faith was sung from the heart in times when it appeared that all was lost. It was to be sung when the mind and the will and the body were tired and didn’t feel like going on. Paul echoes this same spirit when he says to the church at Philippi, “Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice.”

Jesus wants his listeners to know that He and the Father are one. They are equal in every way. Jesus does the very things the Father does or thinks of doing. Jesus is the “radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1: 3). If the people reject Jesus they will be rejecting God, the very God they claim to serve. Jesus says to them to believe the miracles. Who can do that sort of thing, that is, to love people by healing their maladies. It is God! The Jews did not believe though and Jesus says their unbelief is an indication that they are not His sheep.

Those who do believe, on the other hand, are secure in Jesus. He holds His own. He keeps His own. Jesus is the Great Shepherd who attends to the needs of His own. They cannot be snatched from either

His or His Father's hand. They "...by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5). They are the ones who believe in the miracles of Jesus. They think that Jesus is big enough to take care of their business and mold them into the image God has made them to be conformed to.

Some people, even scientists and politicians, do not believe in the miracles of Jesus.

Some people, even scientists and politicians, do believe in the miracles of Jesus.

Some people, even professors and musicians do not believe in the miracles of Jesus.

Some people, even professors and musicians do believe in the miracles of Jesus.

The miracles are what they are - miracles. By

definition they cannot be explained unless you believe the man who raised the dead and healed the blind and walked on water and fed thousands was God made flesh. If you do then you too will be able to believe the miracles. And believing you can overcome the muddled thinking of our age that is bogged down in the muck and mire of humanism with all of its limits and failures. Man cannot save himself. We've been trying for centuries, but the best we can do is pacify the dying and try to prolong the inevitable. Man's days are few and painful and then he is gone. Jesus, contrariwise, is someone to believe in, if not for anything else, for the miracles.

God's blessings are miraculous,  
Pastor Steve



## "Delay"

May 19 - John 11: 1-44

**G**race To You,  
Have you ever been waiting for a package to come in the mail and you just couldn't stand it that it hadn't come yet? Each day you hightailed it to the box to see if it had come and you were either disappointed if it hadn't or ecstatic if it had. Hope is a very powerful motivator. When we think something good is coming we can put up with almost anything else in the meantime.

When our hopes are dashed though, we can reach new lows. I have known people to go off the deep end because of some apparently trivial occurrence, but later I realized that the last thing was merely the straw that broke the camel's back. There were a whole boatload of other stresses in his life that were under the surface. For example, if you have been burned in a significant relationship in the past you may have trouble trusting a future mate. Even if that

person has not given you any reason to mistrust them you can still transfer prior feelings their way.

Disappointment with God is a very real place for some. They think God has let them down because He allowed a certain thing into their life or didn't give them something that they longed for. They may have prayed earnestly for divine help and at the same time tried to do everything right so that, they felt, God would hear their plea. Yet, it all seemed to fall on deaf ears. They didn't get what they wanted or maybe they got what they couldn't have imagined would happen to them.

That was somewhat how the sisters, Mary and Martha, felt when their brother Lazarus got sick. I'm sure they tried every remedy they knew at the time, but nothing was helping his condition. Then they did what we would do, they sent for Jesus. They were sure if they could get word to Him of their problem

then the Lord would quickly come and heal their ailing brother. But the situation reached a desperation level as he worsened. All they could do was sit and watch their brother die before their very eyes. Where was Jesus, certainly by now the Lord must have received word, how could He delay?

Well the Lord had delayed, purposely delayed. He knew the grief it was causing and the disappointment it would bring. He knew the girls would be upset and that their deep loss would be the source of much heartache. But He allowed it anyway. Could Jesus really be expecting them to trust Him even when the circumstances were as dire as they were? Jesus delayed.

I met a lady several years ago who really made an impression on me. She was the most cheerful and uplifting soul you'd ever want to meet. She laughed and joked and kidded and was just a delight to be around. A few years ago she became deathly ill. She was so sick that the hospital staff told the family to come and see her for the last time. And so the family members here in Oregon called the ones from out of state and they came to her hospital room to say goodbye. My wife was one of her nurses at the time. One of the pastors from the church went over to pray with them and so they all gathered around and prayed. The next morning she was sitting up, cheerful as before and well. I'm not kidding, she was good to go - to go home. Her name is Joyce Maxwell so I began to call her resurrection Maxwell. The family made their way

back to their respective out of state homes and Joyce went on living. Two years later it appeared that she was again at the end of the line. She had become frail, bedridden and unable to communicate. At one point she stopped breathing and her daughter performed CPR on her and the medics took her to the hospital and she lived, barely. She came back home and was on hospice care when one day she sat up in bed and began to eat again and could walk to the table and watch the birds outside her window. Resurrection Maxwell was at it again. A few months after this she succumbed to a weak heart. At her service I thought about her smile and laugh and the fact that God wasn't done with her a few years ago. God's timing is not always our timing. God sometimes delays.

Do you have an unanswered prayer that has been delayed?

Do you have a hope that has gone unfulfilled for many years?

Do you have heartache because it feels like the Lord hasn't heard your plea?

Jesus invites us to trust Him even when things look hopeless. He didn't love Mary and Martha any less nor was He punishing them in any way. He wanted them to put their trust in the "resurrection and the life." He wanted them to believe in the face of death.

God's Blessings come to those who trust in the face of the circumstances,

Pastor Steve

**“They Plotted”**

May 20 - John 11: 45-12:11

**P**roverbs, that old sage book filled with jewel after jewel of wisdom and helpful advice says, “The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord,” and “the heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps” (16: 1, 9). Nothing in life can wiggle outside the scope of God’s rule. Nothing? Yes, God has the whole pie in His possession. And this is never more evident than in the life of Jesus.

Psalm two says, “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.’ He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then He will speak to them in His wrath, and terrify them in His fury, saying, ‘As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.’ I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.’ Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.” Why does He laugh? What is it that amuses Him?

The happy Mexican golfer Lee Trevino always said that he wouldn’t hire a coach who couldn’t beat him on the course. Why would he need instruction from someone who wasn’t as good as he is? That didn’t make sense to Trevino. God looks at those who try to thwart His plans and smiles as He sees the futility of their attempt to outsmart the Sovereign Lord. Isaiah said that God “...brings princes to nothing, and makes

the ruler of the earth as emptiness. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when He blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble” (40: 23, 24). God doesn’t need anyone to instruct Him because He knows exactly what He is doing. God is not accountable to man, just the opposite, man is accountable to God.

The rulers of the Jews are getting nervous. They say, “If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him, then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation” (11: 48). They are worried that the Jesus movement will cause a rift between them and Rome. Their prosperity depended on the peace that was maintained in their jurisdiction. If the Romans saw that tensions were high they may come in and remove some of the benefits the Jews had in governing their own nation. Therefore they determined that it would be necessary to remove Jesus. And so they plotted to take His life.

God had different plans. God’s plans were already laid down in Holy Scripture, like Psalm 2. The people could plot all they wished but God’s plan would prevail. God exercises His plans sometimes directly by initiating the events at hand as when He miraculously guided the star over Bethlehem to announce the arrival of the Savior. Sometimes God initiates His plans indirectly by allowing the will of man to appear in control and then He supersedes that will to accomplish His own will as we will see in the arrest and trial and execution of Jesus. Sometimes He works directly in people when they don’t even know it, like in Caiaphas, the high priest who spoke of a substitutionary death when he was oblivious to the ramifications of that declaration. God’s plans prevail. Proverbs very boldly says, “The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble” (16: 4).

God’s plan included the suffering of His Son. His suffering resulted in our salvation. Our suffering results in Christ-like behavior and personality. When Jesus was standing before the Roman governor not a single soul realized that God was working His plan all along. No one stood up and said, “This is God’s plan, He is working His will!” From all outward appearances it looked like God was failing. Isn’t that the way people talk when things go bad for them? “Where was God when it hurt?” “I cannot believe God would allow me to go through this!” “If God were good then stuff like this wouldn’t happen!” But God’s plan often involves suffering and that’s the way it is. If we are going to walk as He walked then we too will feel the

sting of agonies. The good news is that even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death the Lord is still with us, He doesn’t leave us high and dry. He walks with us all of the way. This was Jesus’ confidence too. All along He said that He was not alone because the Father was with Him.

Do you feel like things are out of control - God doesn’t.

Are you having trouble getting a grip on your current circumstances - God has a grip on you.

Does it look hopeless in some way or another - God will give hope.

God’s blessings are under God’s control,  
Pastor Steve

**“Falling Up”**

May 21 - John 12: 12-36

**J**esus said, “Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves Me” John 12:26. Are you a servant or one who is served?

God’s economy and the world’s economy are opposites. In God’s system service is the way to greatness, in the world’s order self-assertion is the way to greatness. It is the difference between being self-centered and Christ-centered.

We are all driven by what is at the core of our beings. If self reigns then you will only be as strong as self. If Christ reigns then you will find strength from Him. That is why Daniel said that those who know their God will be strong and do exploits (11: 32). Knowing God changes your focus from self to Christ.

I spent a lot of years serving self. The purpose of my existence was to please me and make me happy. When I didn’t get my way or felt like things weren’t going as I wanted then I worked even harder to try to make that happen. An ego life is really a frustrating

life because the universe does not spin around one individual. God didn’t design it for that, so there is an immediate frustration when we try to assert our own sovereignty.

How do I move away from ego to Jesus?

Spend some time on your knees, literally bowing before God’s sovereignty.

Begin to treat others as more important than yourself (Philippians 2).

After you read your Bible, put into practice what you are reading (1 John 2:17).

Do the opposite of what you used to do, instead of pampering self, deny self, put up with the inconvenience and follow Jesus (Mark 8).

Share the love of Jesus with someone. It is amazing how we grow when we see others come to Christ and grow too (Matthew 28).

The last part of the verse above is an awesome promise. The Father will honor you if you serve Jesus. Jesus is saying, first of all, that He is worthy to be

followed. He is the Lord and following Him is what the Christian life is all about. If you will put yourself in the place of a server then Jesus promises that you will be honored. What a motivation that is to serve Jesus. The Father will honor you for your simple service. Find ways to be a servant for Jesus.

Have you ever heard someone boast about their boss because of how good they had it at work? He

might go on and on telling you of all the benefits he has and what it's like at the office and what the future there looks like. He is proud of his boss and wants to tell others about him. Jesus wants us to talk about Him like that too. His benefits are out of this world.

God's blessings are experienced in service,  
Pastor Steve



Day 142

### "Spiritual Insight"

May 22 - John 12: 37 - 13:17

**M**ake a Rainy Day a Bright Day, There a number of points in our reading today that will help to give us spiritual insights into following Jesus. Whether you have been following Him for years or months there is always room for improvement. It seems to me that it is dangerous to have an attitude that says "I've already arrived and do not need to make further progress." Spiritual snobs are not fun to be around and the truth is that they are not really growing the way they think they are.

Over the years I have run into more people who thought they had arrived and were God's gift to mankind. Unfortunately for them their know-it-all attitude only ended up bringing them down. The best laid plans of mice and men usually turns sour. The pride of man is so fleeting that it isn't worth highlighting. Those who love the praise of men will end up disappointed or disappointing. Their foundation is built on shifting sand and when the floods come and the rains descend there will be nothing but the sound of brokenness.

---- God shares His glory with no man.

Those who chose not to believe in Jesus in the light of His miracles were blinded according to the Word of the prophet Isaiah. Their eyes saw the works of the Lord but their spiritual eyes were blinded to the

source of those miracles. Even Isaiah, some five hundred years before, saw the glory of Jesus as He wrote into the future about the time when God would show His glory before all nations. Pathetically, the unbelievers reached a point of no return where they were unable to believe no matter what because at that point they were spiritually blinded. The lesson for us is to believe in and trust the miracles of Jesus and to take Him at His word rather than doubt and give in to skepticism.

---- Who are you trying to impress?

Some of the people believed in Jesus but were unable to make any progress because they were intimidated by others who did not believe in Him. They were afraid that they might be socially maligned and this created a feeling of insecurity that drove them to silence. Faith in Jesus is never a silent faith. Anyone who has ever truly been united to Christ cannot keep silent about it. Baptism explains this too. When a person comes to be baptized he is publicly telling everyone present that he believes in the death and resurrection. Before Jesus was crucified and raised, baptism meant turning from a life of sin to a life of following Him. Either way, it made a public statement about your allegiance to Jesus.

Feet washing was an indication of servitude. That

Jesus would wash His disciples feet was quite a shock to most of them and especially Peter. I once went to a church that practiced feet washing as part of their regular routine. There would be a time of singing worship songs and then the men would go into one room and the women went into another room. You'd choose a partner and then one of you would sit near a pale of water and your buddy would wash your feet. It was a matter of putting a foot in the water and then briefly rubbing the foot; then you'd take that foot out of the pale and dry it off. Then you'd switch and have the other person wash your feet. It was a pretty meaningful practice.

Whether we take Jesus' command to do as He did to His disciples either literally or figuratively the end result will still be the same. If we love others we will serve them. We will do the menial things with a good attitude because we have a chance to serve the Lord by serving others. Jesus asked them if they understood what He had done. He wanted them to have this lesson sink in and take root in their own lives so that their future ministries could be marked by love.

What we do in love will be blessed by God. Paul said the greatest is love. It supersedes faith and even hope. If you have love then you are in a position to grow in the Lord. If, on the other hand, your life is marked by turmoil and sarcasm and bitterness, then you will be in for a long lonely ride. It is only in serving others that we emulate the Lord Jesus and grow spiritually. He served, how could we do less and expect to be like Him? He humbled Himself, He served, He gave; He wasn't thinking about Himself, He was thinking about what it meant for Him to serve. Let's go and do the same.

Is someone bothering you, maybe a spouse or one of your kids? Serve them.

Is life hard right now and does it feel like you have no one on your side? Serve instead of complain.

Find yourself saying, "How can I help you," rather than groveling about what others are not doing for you. You are a servant. Pass a towel, would you?

God's blessings will happen if you do what He says,  
Pastor Steve



Day 143

### "As I"

May 23 - John 13: 18-38

**T**eachers who teach for a living are truly remarkable people. I will never forget entering my cousin's third grade classroom for the first time and being mesmerized by the wide array of colors and activities. Her room was like a miniature world waiting for those little minds to explore. I recall that she was big on teaching character qualities like honesty and goodness and faithfulness, etc. She would highlight one of these qualities and teach the kids ways to practice being good.

Teachers are much more than dispensers of knowledge. That is why I am skeptical about some

college classrooms where there may be up to five hundred students. In that setting there won't be much happening but the dissemination of facts. Most learning is caught, not taught. Over the years the greatest compliment I have received was when a former student said that I inspired her to be a lifetime learner. When you develop a thirst for knowledge and want to understand how truth reflects the nature of God then you can say that you are on your way to becoming a good student.

I am sure that one teacher or another has had a very valuable impact on your life. And I am also

**“The Trove: Open Er Up”**-----  
May 24- John 14: 1-31

certain that you developed a love for those teachers that motivated you to learn what they were trying to teach. They probably modeled a love for learning in front of you. So much so that you wanted what they had. You wanted to drink from the same well that they had been used to for a long time. When I was in city college I had an English teacher who taught a class titled Short Novels. When I enrolled in the class I thought we'd be learning to write novels. I was wrong. It was a class where we read them. That ended up being an ok switch. But what I remember about this particular teacher was that his copies of the novels we were studying were so studied that the books themselves looked like they had been through the wash a few times. Passages were underlined and there was writing in almost every margin and there were dog ears and the pages were multi-colored by different highlighters. He was into his craft. That always impressed me. I wished that I could be into something the way he was.

We have the opportunity to be Christ's students. Jesus promised that when the Holy Spirit was given to the church upon His departure that He would be our Teacher. He would live in us and teach us the ways of Jesus. He would be the mouth and the hands and the feet and the embrace of the Lord Jesus. He would give us the kind of instruction where we could see our circumstances and apply the teaching of Jesus to them. He would guide us into the truth so that we could walk in truth and be conformed into the image of Jesus. Romans 8 is chocked full of verses about the Spirit's work in our lives. He brings us close to the Father and confirms in us who we are as children of God and he loosens us from the yoke of the law so that we can have true life through Him. It is the Spirit in us who makes following Jesus a daily adventure. It is learning at the highest level in the school of daily living.

Sometimes I forget that God is at work in my life. I guess I just lazily forget that He is interested in making something out of me. He wants to take a lump of coal and make a diamond out of it. I will be taught by God

through the work of the Spirit in the school of Jesus' ways. The goal of the instruction will be love. That will be what God is looking to produce in me. And to get me there He will bring many unusual people into my life, as well as circumstances, that will force me to trust. I will be challenged. I will not stay in spiritual kindergarten. I will need to move on and learn greater lessons that make me more of a servant. I will never be at the head of the class; I will need to rest content in the headship of the Master and be willing to follow Him even if it means I will go where I am uncomfortable.

In our reading today Jesus tells His disciples, and us, to do as He does. He serves; He washes feet. He simply asks us to follow His attitude. He wants us to take Paul's words to heart: "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2). Humble yourself. Be ok with being second fiddle. Don't need to be first. Let someone else go first. Feel good about someone else being promoted. Be happy when another person is promoted ahead of you. Take up the towel of a servant and serve.

We never stop learning. We can continue to be taught by God. Think today about this verse from the book of Hebrews: "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more" (8: 10-12). We are all taught by God.

Time for class.

Be alert.

Be ready to do what the Master teaches.

Do "as I," Jesus says.

God's blessings are caught from the Master,

Pastor Steve

If you've ever received a gift unexpectedly then you know the excitement that it can create. Eighteen days before my daughter's eighteenth birthday my wife and I gave her one gift each day until her birthday ended. We didn't get her big things but each day there was an anticipation on her part about what she'd get. Giving and getting gifts is one of the nicest pleasures in life. I think this is true because we were made in God's image and God is a giving God. Remember, "For God so loved the world that he gave..."

I sometimes wonder how many gifts God has given to us that we leave unwrapped. We know there is something there in the Bible for us but the distractions of life keep us so preoccupied with the tyranny of the urgent that we do not take the time to unwrap the gifts that God has for us. Wouldn't it be fun to open up one gift each day from now until when the Lord returns? Wouldn't it be a healthy thing to hear ourselves saying "Thank you, God" each and every day for some piece of treasure that we have brought up from His Word? Well, the section of Scripture we are mining today is a treasure trove of spiritual riches. As a matter of fact, all of these middle chapters in John are such pure gold that if we were to meditate on their value for days on end we would not be able to fully appreciate their value.

So what kinds of questions does John 14 answer?

How can I face death?

How can I know that Jesus really cares about me?

If there is an after life can I know something about it?

What is the essential activity in the after life?

How can I know that God is personal?

How can I know I'll end up in a good place after death?

Do all roads lead to heaven? If not, how can I know the right way for sure?

Who was it that Jesus came to reveal to us?

What should I be praying for and how can I know that God will hear and answer my prayer?

What does this section of the Bible say about the work of the Holy Spirit?

If we love the Lord what should our attitude toward God be like?

Does Jesus offer me peace? How is His peace different than the peace the world gives?

There is so much here and it would do us well to spend some time camped on this chapter and the ones to follow. Open this trove and you will be in better shape than Bill Gates.

God's blessings are there,  
Pastor Steve

P.S. Jesus makes the statement "the Father is greater than I." What did He mean, I thought Jesus was equal to the Father? By nature Jesus is equal but since the Trinity chose to limit Himself when Christ became a man the ramifications from that decision will forever affect the position of the Son. He humbled Himself and took on human flesh and thereby purposely limited Himself to a body. That body is now glorified in heaven with the Father but also indicates that He is in subjection to the Father eternally. This will always be a constant reminder to us of the price that was paid for our salvation. He is the Lamb that was slain. And He will be that person forever. For us, by the way. Let's quote a fairly lengthy section of Scripture to help us here: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order. Christ the firstfruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under His feet." But when it

says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that He is excepted who put all things in subjection under Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subjected to Him who put all

things in subjection under Him, that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15: 22-28). Christ's position does not make Him less than the Father but simply obedient to the Father for our sake.



## "Abide In Christ"

May 25 - John 15:1 - 16:4

**I** Hope You Are Having a Great Day,  
I have vivid memories of doing things with my dad as I grew up. My dad was in Korea when I was born, but from the time I was a toddler he was always there for me. I never doubted that I was his son and he was my dad. That was a given. Over the years we have always been connected. That doesn't mean there weren't times when our relationship was strained. That is true of all human relationships. But even during those times I knew I needed my dad's support to cope with the pressures of life.

As we grow up we tend to take on the characteristics of our parents. And I believe boys especially tend to resemble their fathers. We may or may not look like them distinctly but there is always some family resemblance. We also can pick up their habits and values. Think for a minute about some of the ways you are like your father. I know for some that this is a painful exercise because their father may not have been the greatest example, but I'm sure there are some ways in which you see yourself in him. Are you built the same? Do you sound alike? Some people think my son and I sound much alike. Do you think similarly? Do you like many of the same things? Do you have goals that are like your dad's? What is it about your dad that you really aspire to and haven't obtained yet?

The Bible says that we become God's children through faith in Jesus Christ. We will talk much more about this when we get to Romans and then Galatians. But for now I'd like you to think of your relation-

ship with God and ask yourself how you view it. Do you see yourself as God's child? Do you talk to God the way a happy child would talk to a good father? Do you feel comfortable talking to God about anything and everything? Do you have a good sense of trust that God has your best interest in mind even when He allows some difficult things to come into your life? I hope so because that is God's desire for you. He wants you to feel uniquely connected to Him in a loving and caring relationship. He wants you to be able to say that you feel very close to Him and that you look forward to times when He is talking to you through His Word and you are talking to Him in prayer.

Throughout these very important chapters in John, Jesus makes it very clear that His relationship with the Father is the prototype of the relationship He wants us to have with His Father as well. He talks much about His own oneness with the Father and then, almost in the same breath, He talks about our oneness with Him and the Father too. So look carefully at how Jesus talks about the Father and you will see what He wants for you. Therefore, it is no wonder that Jesus' illustration, His metaphor, of the vine and branches is meant to teach about the oneness and connectedness God desires to have with each and every one of us.

As the branch extends from the vine and draws all of its support and nourishment from the vine, Jesus wants us to draw our spiritual strength and life from Him. Apart from Him we will not have any vitality

whatsoever. He is the source of all life and to try and live apart from Him would only bring death sooner or later. That's why Jesus taught elsewhere that men without Him are actually dead men walking. They are physically alive but spiritually dead and separated from the vine, from God.

Knowing that Jesus wants us to be this close to Him we need only to remain in Him. We do not need to ever look elsewhere for spiritual satisfaction. We need only to stay in Jesus. Even if you were to feel like your spiritual life was waning it would be counterproductive to go somewhere else for help. Jesus is the vine, the Father is the vine dresser. Sometimes believers like you and me will be in the pruning process and it hurts and we will feel like finding an easier way, but there is no other road to satisfaction. To stay in Jesus is the only path for spiritual growth. Think about how difficult it was for Jesus. He loved His Father and it is written of their relationship in Isaiah 53 that "it pleased the Father to bruise Him." There are times when difficulties and sufferings will stretch us beyond our limits. It is at these times when we need Jesus the most. It is at these times when it is best to simply abide in Jesus.

In the middle of this great teaching is a verse that really hits home with me. It talks about prayer and the Word. It talks about remaining in Jesus as we

have been saying, but there is a promise to those who allow the Words of Jesus to remain in them. They will be able to ask God for whatever they want and it will be granted. Now that's a promise! Now an interesting thing happens to the person who remains, abides, stays in God's Word. All of a sudden he is not as interested in the things that promote self as he once was. He may start out thinking he is going to abide in the Word so that God will answer his prayer for a nice shiny Cadillac. But his time in the Word tempers that ego drive and need to achieve material prosperity and he finds himself desiring spiritual prosperity first. Then as he prays about the things that make for spiritual prosperity he also discovers that it delights the Father to give him these things.

God is your Father. God is the one who cultivates you in the garden of the vine. Celebrate your relationship with God today, would you? Take some time to let the Father know how much you appreciate your relationship with Him. Fathers like that sort of thing. What they also like is good honest conversation where they can hear you express your heart. Come to the Father. When we do we will create memories that will not be forgotten.

God's blessings are in the vineyard,  
Pastor Steve



## "About Prayer"

May 26 - John 16:5 - 17:5

**T**op of the Day to You,  
Someone called the other day to ask for prayer. I, like usual, went into my counseling mode. He didn't want counseling, he wanted prayer. I said, well, you could do this or do that and if it didn't work why don't you try something else. He just wanted prayer.

I was struck by the heading over John 17 in our Bibles - "Jesus prays for Himself." That couldn't be right, John 17, the "High Priestly Prayer" of our Lord, about Himself? There must be some mistake. What would the benefit be of praying for ourselves? Isn't that selfish? And we know that Jesus wasn't that way. What gives?

So what did Jesus ask? He wanted to glorify the Father. Now that's a good prayer. God will answer a prayer like that. He talks to the Father about eternal life, the very purpose for which He showed up on the planet. And He mentions the presence of God and his desire to once again experience that presence the way He had it before the world came into existence. Weighty prayers.

- 1) Glorify God
- 2) Fulfill my purpose
- 3) Desire God's presence

The interesting thing about those prayers is that Jesus' fulfillment is wrapped up in His relationship with the Father. Later He will pray for us so that we too will experience oneness with the Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Oneness. Think about that. If you have ever experienced oneness with someone you were drawn to them in a very close way. You felt joined to them. You felt committed to them. You felt a love for them that goes way beyond the norm.

This was the kind of oneness that David and Jonathan experienced, even though they were from very different backgrounds. Their oneness was wrapped up in their relationships with God. And so God brought them close together. Oneness with God is God's will for our lives. The closer we are to God and the more of His "eternal life" that we enjoy, the greater the amount of oneness we will experience.

Let's pray for ourselves today like Jesus prayed. Let's ask God to use our lives so that we could glorify

Him. Not ourselves, Him.

"God, work in me today, using me like a jar of clay filled with the glory of God so that you would be glorified by others because of my life. Make me like Jesus, doing things for your glory with your power so that all men may see that and glorify You."

Let's also think about Eternal Life. It was for Eternal Life that Jesus came and gave His life on the cross. Let's dwell on the cross and thank God for what he has done for us.

"God, we are so thankful for what you have done for us by sending Your only Son to die in our place. Thank you for securing eternal life for us. Lord, we could never have done it in our own righteousness because we needed you. When we were weak and helpless, Christ died for us. Thank you so much!"

Let's desire the Presence of God so that we can know God and have the oneness that he desires for us.

"God, with all of our hearts we seek your presence today. It is in your presence that we will have fullness of joy. God, you give us joy and we are so thankful. You are the joy of my life, O God. Fill me now Lord with your presence. I will praise you because of your presence in my life. May your presence in me be a light to those around me."

God's blessings are experienced in prayer,  
Pastor Steve



## "Fuel For Life"

May 27- John 17: 6-26

**W**hat kind of fuel does your car run on? Dumb question, you say, well maybe not. There was a day when you had a choice of leaded or unleaded when you went to the pump. Now, of course, it's only unleaded. But, you have a choice of regular, plus, or supreme. Does it really matter what kind you use?

My wife and I have gone round and round for years over this issue. Isn't it odd what married couples duel over? I have always believed that it was better for your car to have plus gasoline because it would reduce the wear and tear on your engine. My wife says it's cheaper to buy regular, so regular is better. I say you get what you pay for. I had a car that had well over three hundred thousand miles and was going strong on, yes, plus gasoline all along. I suppose one car won't end the argument, but I still hold to my conviction regardless.

God has made us to run on supreme. That is, His supreme rule in our lives. If we try to run on anything else we will find the same result that Solomon discovered centuries ago; we will only discover emptiness and striving against the wind. It will be like trying to run our cars on water. There will be no spark, no life, no mileage and no way we will make our destination. I cannot count the number of times I have talked and counseled with people who were trying to run their lives on an inferior quality of fuel. As much as they try to jump start the engine they fail because the problem is not the engine but the substance that is being used for fuel that actually lacks the kind of substance that will matter.

Jesus prayed that we would be set apart for God's purposes. His prayer reminds us that we are His. We belong to Him. He has chosen us and considers us a personal gift from the Father. Why He has taken us is a mystery. I never think that God got a deal in me. I am a desperate sinner who needs the mercy of God to accept the forgiveness in Christ. Jesus also states that it is the Word of God that acts as the Wrangler who

corrals us and brings us closer and closer to God.

"Sanctify" is from a Greek word from which we get the words "holy," "holiness," "set apart," and "isolate for a special purpose." God uses His Word to bring us to a new place. It's a place where we become more like Jesus and reflect His love and oneness with the Father. God working in you will set you apart from the world's system and transform you into the image of the Son. That is sanctification.

Jesus also said that God's Word is truth. God's Word is the standard, the rule, the final word, the way; "my words are spirit and they are life," Jesus once said; His Word stands. We cannot experience spirituality or spiritual growth or God apart from His Word. His Word is Truth. He Himself is Truth. That correlation is a powerful reality for us to grasp. One Word from the mouth of God can give strength to deal with whatever the devil would throw our way.

What kind of fuel have you been running on lately? Are your valves corroded? Are your spark plugs failing because of deficient fuel? Have you been barely making it from point A to point B? Correcting these problems is only a matter of changing the place where you fuel. Pull into God's station and come under His supreme rule in your life and you will begin to run much more efficiently.

If you've ever gotten bad gas then you know the frustration of trying to run on mixed fuel. It's impossible. It eventually ruins your engine. It needs to be drained and your system needs to be cleaned out and then you can add the real thing.

Jeremiah bemoaned his people's behavior by identifying that they had forsaken the fountain of living water to pursue the muddied water of a broken cistern. They had exchanged the pure for the polluted, the clear for the mucky. Let's not go there.

God's blessings come through God's truth,  
Pastor Steve

**“Listen Up!!”**

May 28 - John 18: 1-24

**H**i Friends,  
Yesterday we stressed Jesus’ words about His words. We talked about the importance of being set apart by the truth. We saw that true spirituality comes when a person submits to the Word of God. It is His Words that feed the deepest needs in our hearts.

We are quickly approaching the half-way mark in our Through the New Testament reading. I’d like for you to take inventory of your attitude towards the Word at this point. I want more than anything for the Word to grab hold of your heart and life and encourage your love for God and others. I hope that the Word has already had an impact on the way you see God.

We have almost made it all the way through the four gospels. We now have an appreciation of Jesus that should surpass where we have been before. It is important to keep thinking about the words and works, and death and resurrection of the Lord, so that we can journey through the book of Acts and then into the letters. Everything else rests on the solid ground of the gospel. You will especially see this when we reach the book of Romans. There we are told the gospel in an interpretive way. We will see again the death of Jesus and His resurrection, but also we will see just how separated man was from God before Jesus came to bridge that gap. We will be told how the work of Jesus has changed our position with God and how we can rejoice in the Lord even in the face of troubles. And then we will be taken down the road of Christian life issues, like how we treat one another and how we fit into our society.

Living in the world’s system is like swimming in polluted waters. The moment you open your eyes under the surface you realize that you are in trouble and

that this way will not be productive or fun in the long run. I have done much swimming in the Pacific Ocean. Most days were enjoyable, but from time to time the waters would be polluted with stinky yuck. It smelled. We still swam though. We were diehards when it came to being in the water, and so we tolerated the stink in order to have “fun.” That’s what happens to us in the world’s system. We acclimate to our environment and make the best of it even though it may be hazardous to us. For example, I can remember days in Southern California when we had to come in early from the playground because the smog alert level was at a dangerous point. We’d come in coughing and sweaty and disappointed that we had to cut our favorite time in the day short. They made us come in because it wasn’t good for us to be out there. The air we were breathing was unsafe. Do you think we would have come in if we had not been commanded? Of course not. We would have made the best of it.

The only way for us to move out of the world’s system and grow closer to God is to stay connected to Jesus’ words.

I invite you to join me today in a renewal of commitment to our daily reading. Let’s all resolve to be readers and doers of the Word. Let’s move into the second half of the year with a pledge to daily be in the Word.

Will you join me?

Let’s charge forward!

Let’s take up God’s Word like a sword and do daily spiritual battle!!

Let’s unite under God’s Word to be of one mind in Christ!!!

God’s blessings encompass those who hold on to His Word,

Pastor Steve

**“What Is Truth?”**

May 29 - John 18: 25-40

**D**ear Friends,  
It is so difficult to live a life driven by guilt or fear or non-acceptance. People who get up in the morning and jump on the treadmill of life feel exhausted by the end of the day because these negative motivators only sap their energy. They do not act as good reasons to get on with it. Instead, they rob you of the vitality that God wants you to enjoy as you grasp the Word and apply it to your life.

I once knew a man, a miserable man, who thirsted for his father’s approval. He worked and worked and worked to try and prove to his dad that he was something special. He wound up being very successful at his job; I recall that he was an insurance salesman. He had a beautiful house overlooking the Pacific Ocean. From all outward appearances it seemed like he had it made. Yet, his life was driven by the bitterness he had toward his dad because he could never seem to do enough to please him. This man died of AIDS, sad, and disillusioned with life.

If you can relate to him in any way I hope that contrary to his experience you will be able to grasp the truth that God accepts you in Christ (if you are a believer), and that you have His approval because of the cross. What a gift God has given us in the cross! Not only are we forgiven but we have an acceptance by God that will extend into eternal life. Therefore, an appreciation of the cross is essential to grasping truth. Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, had no interest in truth. If truth were a snake it could have bitten him, but he turned away and pressed on, driven by fear and anxiety.

There was a great amount of hostility in the political sphere in the days of Jesus. Rome ruled with an iron fist. Tiberius was the ruler at the time. The Jews were always aware of the oppression of their overlords. Some of the Jews gladly cooperated with Rome and others sought to rebel. Chances were that Barab-

bas was in prison for leading some sort of rebellion against them. Throughout most of the Roman period the Jews were allowed to govern their own affairs from their own distinct religious point of view as long as they paid taxes and obeyed the laws of the land. That’s why there was a Jewish council that decided matters related to issues involving their own people. Jesus was handed over to Pilate because the council wanted Him crucified so that He might be publicly humiliated. Pilate was most concerned about maintaining the peace and was therefore nervous about the hullabaloo over Jesus.

Pilate’s conversation with Jesus was brief and to the point. Pilate wanted to know what kind of king Jesus was claiming to be. I have to wonder if Pilate might have thought he had a religious nut on his hands when Jesus stated that His kingdom was not of this world. Pilate interpreted Jesus’ statements in a way that convinced him that He was harmless. And Pilate knew that the Jews had turned Him over out of envy. Another gospel states that. As soon as Jesus brings up truth and says that those who are of truth listen to truth, Pilate has heard enough and carelessly says, “What is truth?” He wasn’t interested in a reply. He, at that moment, wasn’t interested in a philosophical discussion on the subject. So he turned away.

Some people are not at a point in their lives where they want to think about the deeper issues in life like truth. They see themselves as more practical. They are busy achieving or doing their jobs or having fun. For them to stop and contemplate what is true would be a bore. They would rather that the intellectuals debated those subjects, they are too busy enjoying the here and now to worry about the impact of truth on their lives. And so they turn away and seek to cover over the discomfort that truth can sometimes bring to them. Pilate just wanted things to smooth out. He just wanted to get on with life as usual. He

didn't want nor did he need this disruption. He was a practical ruler.

What does the truth mean to you? I have always been drawn to this verse in Ephesians. It says, "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the igno-

rance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ! - assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus" (4: 17-21).

God's blessings are found in the truth,  
Pastor Steve



Day 150

## "I Have Power"

May 30 - John 19: 1-27

It's kind of funny how our view of the world changes as we get older. I have heard people identify life as a digression from infancy to adulthood and back to infancy before death. That is really true for those who suffer from dementia. They eventually lose the ability to reason and take care of themselves, and they are then forced to be cared for like they were as babies. It really is a difficult thing to go through.

I hadn't seen my grandpa for a few months. I had only been married for about four or five months when I decided it was time to take a trip down south to see my grandparents. I greeted my grandma at the front door and went immediately into the kitchen to sit down for a meal of meat and potatoes. Grandpa was sitting at the opposite end of the table but, surprisingly, he didn't greet me when I came in. I got a chilling feeling and felt like I had moved into a fog. What was happening? My grandpa was there but he wasn't there at the same time. I remember, he got up, walked right past me and into the garage, picked up a hammer and began to bang on the workbench. Grandma followed him out there and guided him back inside.

It wasn't long before grandma acquiesced to the idea that he needed to be in a care facility. It just

killed her to do it, even though it was literally killing her to be up with him at all hours of the night when he would do senseless things around the house. Needless to say, this was a very difficult thing in our family. Here was a man, a former Chief of Police, a self-made man, a well-respected man, and he couldn't even tie his shoes. He was once a very powerful man, but now he was dependent on others to make his every decision for him. He wasn't at all what he once was. That experience really challenged my view of the world. Also, it made me think about some of the things I thought about as a kid growing up. Allow me to list a few.

Things I thought when I was a kid:

1. Most of the people in the world were good.
2. My dad could do anything.
3. Life would go on forever.
4. If I did better it would make up for what I did wrong.
5. If my sister didn't bug me the world would be a perfect place.
6. It was important to know powerful people because they could give you favors.
7. Money was the end goal of all achievement.
8. You should stick up for family even when there is a rotten apple in the bunch.

9. Medicine had a cure for every problem.

10. When you died, if you had been good you'd go to a good place and if you had been bad you'd go to a bad place.

Of course, some of that thinking is completely bogus and some of it is sort of true and all of it is wishful thinking. But that is the way a kid thinks, isn't it? Doesn't a kid see life like that? Isn't the world a much bigger place and a safer place for most kids? Then we grow up and realize that we, and others, are not as in control as we once thought.

Finally, Jesus would no longer answer Pilate. Pilate is in a pickle and wants to find a way out so that he can deal with the fear he is experiencing. If Jesus would defend Himself then he'd have reason to release Him. Now the governor is at the point of utter frustration. Then, in my estimation, the most remarkable dialogue in the Bible takes place.

Pilate reminds Jesus that he is the one who has the power to free Him or have Him crucified. But Jesus responds, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above." Now that's a very telling statement. Was Pilate really in control? NO!!!

Jesus was in control of what was happening that day. He was voluntarily laying down His life for His sheep. He was making His way to the cross, not by accident, but by design. It was actually the predetermined plan of God to bring Jesus to the cross for the benefit of those who would believe in Him. Pilate thought much more highly of himself than was the case.

There is a story in Daniel of a king who gloried in his own wisdom and power until God took everything away from him. Then, the Bible says, he ate grass for seven years until he finally acknowledged that God was the ruler of the universe and did what He wanted with His own creation. Ultimately, God is in control, not man. Man may rise for a season and appear very powerful and influential but his time is coming. Science has not been able to save us from the certainty of death. Death is as certain a part of life as being born. Man's days are few upon the earth.

Let's acknowledge the sovereignty of God.

Let's thank Jesus for purposely going to the cross.

Let's look for God's hand in our day to day life.

God's blessings are under God's control,

Pastor Steve



Day 151

## "These Things Happened"

May 31 - John 19:29 - 20:9

How vast is the mind of God? Isaiah says that His ways are inscrutable. They are past finding out. Think about this: God created all things; He made all of the varieties in creation. There are some scientists, I think they are called entomologists, and they spend their entire career studying the habits of bugs. There are people out there with Ph.D's who spend the lion's share of their lives observing insects. Now if a person can spend that much time and still not sound the depth of the bug world, then how can a man think that he will be able to fathom the mind of

God in his lifetime?

Think about this: God knows the end from the beginning. It's kind of like life as we know it is a re-run to God. He is not taken by surprise by anything. Someone might say then, how can God take pleasure in anything if He already knows the end? Well, He is God and how that works in God is probably beyond us. I can remember years ago that my friends, and actually my dad's friends, and I would stay up late on Saturday night to watch a replay of the UCLA basketball game that had already been played that evening.

The big game of the year was always the match with the USC Trojans. One year, I don't know how it leaked out, but somehow I had heard before the replay that the Bruins had defeated SC. That information was a let down because even though I was happy with the result, I thought it would take the fun out of watching the big game. That's not how it ended up for me though. I thoroughly enjoyed the game. At the end of the game I thought that possibly I had received bad information. The Bruins were down by one point with seconds left and the ball would have to be taken out at the other end of the court. They threw in a mid-court pass to a guy named Lynn Shackelford, and right at the buzzer he threw up a long arching shot - swish!! UCLA had won. If I could enjoy a game I knew the outcome of ahead of time why couldn't God enjoy the affairs of man that He is directly involved in even though He knows the end from the beginning?

There are more than three hundred prophecies in the Old Testament Scriptures that predict the events of the life of Jesus. From His birth in Bethlehem (Micah 5:7) to His death (Isaiah 53; Psalm 22), God gave His people a preview of coming attractions. Of course, God could easily do this because He saw and ordained the death of Jesus before the world was made. As a matter of fact, He says this in the book of Revelation: "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast- all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (13:8). God knew that we would fall away from Him so He made a plan to save us before the world was even complete.

When Peter is involved in the healing of a lame man at the temple he sees that a crowd is gathering and says to them, "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power of piety we have made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And His name-by faith in His name- has made this man strong whom you see and

know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He thus fulfilled. Repent, therefore, and turn again that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets long ago" (Acts 3: 11-21).

The early leaders of the church, including Peter, believed the words of the prophets were a guarantee. They put their faith in the truthfulness and accuracy of their predictions. Peter alludes to them as the final authority for the verification of the works and words of the Lord Jesus. Do you put your faith in God's Word like Peter did? Why don't we take God at His Word and begin to talk about the greatness of God and His Word. Don't forget John 17:17.

In our reading today we have the death of Jesus on the cross. If you compare this reading to the Old Testament verses that predicted that dark day, you will see that His death was a direct fulfillment of the Word of the Lord given long before by the prophets. To get a list of these predictive verses put "Old Testament references to the death of Jesus" into your search engine of your computer and you will find some very good links to go to.

Because it was Passover time at the death of the Lamb of God it was necessary to have Him taken down from the cross before nightfall. Because Jesus had, of His own doing, given up His spirit to God, and had died they did not have to break His legs to hurry death. He had already died. And at that time there were many spectators near the execution. Some were friendly and some were hostile. Nevertheless, these "incidental" events were all part of God's predetermined plan which He had given hundreds of years before in the words of the prophets. John writes, "These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled..." (19: 36).

God's Word is miraculous.

God's Word is the best source of hope for anyone who will come to it and read.

God's Word fulfills God's promises.

Take His Word in hand today with a good sort of pride, pride that boasts in the goodness of God for

giving us a clear record of Himself.

God's blessings flow throughout Scripture,  
Pastor Steve



## "Blessed"

June 1 - John 20: 10-31

**G**reetings,  
Let's Think About the Joy of Others Today,  
I'm not sure if the word "blessed" is common enough today to be readily understood by everyone. What do you think? Most modern translations of the Bible use the word "happy" in place of "blessed". I don't think "happy" does the word for "blessed" justice, so let me explain the term and try to make it as practical as possible.

When people say "I am so blessed", what do they usually mean? Haven't they just experienced some unexpected benefit that arouses in them a deep appreciation for the giver? Lovers will often speak of how "blessed" they are since they met Mr. or Mrs. Right. This person is the source of such unexpected happiness that they need a way to describe their fortuitous situation. Some people equate "blessings" with benefits. Psalm 103:2 says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." Here "bless" is synonymous with "praise," and looking to God as the giver of so many benefits.

In our reading today we have, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Blessing here is equated with faith. Jesus is saying that if you trust Him, even if you haven't experienced the physical evidence, like the disciples in the secret room, you will have a satisfaction, a joy, a peace that outdistances that of the first disciples. It is a reference to you and me. Simple faith in Christ is accompanied by blessing from God. Do you believe in Jesus? Then you are one

of the people He was talking about.

I believe "blessing" and "grace" go hand in hand. Blessing is not earned, but bestowed by the giver at no cost. You are not blessed when you get what you deserve. You may be compensated or rewarded for hard work, but essentially you weren't blessed with the reward. Now, when someone gives you something out of the blue and you did not work for it in some way, that is a "blessing."

In Romans chapter four, Paul uses Abraham as an example of someone who was blessed even though he did nothing to earn God's favor. Paul said, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness" (verses 4,5).

So who is the person who is blessed? It's the person who simply receives God's work for him and enjoys the benefits of it. He realizes that God has done all of the work for his salvation and for the energy he will need in his Christian life to do what God wants him to do. So this explains why most people miss out on God's blessing. They approach it the wrong way. They think that they can earn God's blessings by doing good. That would not be blessing then but debt, and the Bible is clear that God is no man's debtor.

Now one more thing about this. If you consider all that you have as a gift from God then you will have no trouble seeing all things in your life as a blessing

from God. For example, you may be very successful at your job, and the work there may be something that you credit God for giving you the energy and talent to do. So not only is the job a blessing, but the skill with which you do the job is reflected back to the loving gifts of God. Make sense?

What do you have to be thankful for today? What

blessings do you have to count? Will you take some time right now to count out at least twenty-five blessings? As you do, reflect on God's gifts to you that are directly related to you obtaining that blessing.

God's blessings bless,  
Pastor Steve

about God's will for others that I forget to pray about God's will for me. Does that make sense? But Jesus put Peter in his place once again. He told him to mind his own business and follow. Don't worry about what the Lord is doing in the lives of others. You follow and God will work out the details.

We cannot live our lives through others.  
We cannot live other's lives.  
We cannot change the outcome of another's choices.  
We cannot follow God for someone else.

Jesus said to Peter, "You follow me."  
We can live our lives.  
We can use the examples of others to inspire us to live well.  
We can make better choices, ones that would glorify God.  
We can follow too.  
Let's get our walking shoes on and walk in Jesus' footsteps.  
God's blessings can be counted individually,  
Pastor Steve



## "Mind Your Own Beeswax"

June 2 - John 21 (the last chapter)

**W**e love a juicy story. Life seems more exciting when there is something out of the ordinary going on. We want to know what so and so did or how they did it or why they did it or how we can do it too. Isn't that true? Inquiring minds want to know.

We are also pretty adept at comparing ourselves with others. How do we match up with our best friend or our worst enemy? Will things work out for us the way they have worked out for him/her? How would my life be better if I could get what he has? Or, I can feel a sense of inadequacy and defeat when I think how far behind this person I really am. Then I begin to use self-defeating terminology to describe comparisons with him. If you've tried to rekindle a sport that you were once very good at, but haven't practiced or played for twenty years, then you know the feeling of frustration associated with that effort.

Think with me about Peter's last conversation with Jesus before the Lord ascended to heaven. Jesus affirms Peter's ministry to the sheep in the church. Peter would be instrumental in teaching them the ways of the Lord. But then Jesus says that Peter would be taken against his will and be led away to crucifixion. An interesting tidbit in this same context is John's statement: "Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God."

Birth and death are two experiences that we do not have any control over. We didn't chose the day of our birth and we will not chose the day of our death. Even those who have used suicide as a way of escape were not always successful. I once knew a man who was unsuccessful at it and lived to be grateful that it didn't work. But regardless, our lives from start to finish are in the hands of the Almighty. As certainly as we were born, it is just as certain that we will die. The question is how we will glorify God between the those events, and even how our death might be for God's glory. Paul said, "For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14: 7,8).

Upon hearing of his destiny, Peter immediately sizes himself up against John. He wants the Lord to tell him what will happen to John. Certainly if Peter would be martyred then John would too. That would be the fair thing. Maybe Peter was seeking some solace in the fact that both of the veteran apostles would be in for the same end. Misery loves company. It is comforting to know that I am not the only person on the planet that has had a hard time. Instead of facing my own situation I, like Peter, am tempted to focus on others. Sometimes I can be so concerned