

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 19

John – Part Nine

The Passion

I. INTRODUCTION

As we discussed last week, John 14–16 has the last discourse that Jesus gave his apostles prior to the Passion. At the last supper, Jesus set forward the prophecies about the coming Holy Spirit that we discussed in the last lesson. In addition, Jesus set forward the final indications of the impending crucifixion. We start our Passion lesson there.

In John 14:1-7, we have a segment from Jesus that I believe to this day is often misunderstood by much of Christianity. The passage begins with Jesus stating:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Historically, Christianity has often cited this passage in support of the idea that Jesus has left earth to go work on our “heavenly mansions.” In fact, the New International Version lends support to this reasoning by inserting a word that is not found in the original Greek text. The N.I.V. reads, “I am going *there* to prepare a place for you.” The word “there” is an insert. Jesus merely said, “I go to prepare a place for you.”

I suggest the insertion and the “mansion-building idea” fail to do this passage justice. Jesus tells us that there are already many rooms in the Father’s house. Jesus’ is not going to heaven to engage in eternal carpentry work! Jesus was explaining his walk through the atonement of Calvary when he said “I go now to prepare a place for you.” The emphasis is on Jesus preparing a place for us in the Father’s house. He did so, but not by building rooms already built. He did so, rather, by atoning for our sins so that where he was (in the presence of the Father), there we could be also. Indeed, this ties in to the statements of Jesus that Jesus is the way, truth and life, and no one could come to the Father but through Jesus.

In other words, the very purpose of Jesus' journey (through Calvary, the tomb and the resurrection) is to prepare a place for his followers at the Father's house where there is already room to spare. The mansion is there; the rooms are there; but unless Jesus goes through the crucifixion and resurrection, we are powerless to go.

II. THE PRAYER (John 17)

John sets out a prayer Jesus offered prior to Judas's betrayal in John 17. The prayer has several notes that command our attention as we strive for biblical literacy. First, the structure of the prayer itself is important. Jesus spends the first five verses praying for God to bring the end of Jesus' ministry to fruition. Jesus then spends verses 6–19 praying for his disciples. The final verses (20–26) are spent praying for us!

Verse 20 records Jesus praying, "My prayer is not for them [the apostles] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message." The "those who will believe in me through their message" is us! Christians today come to faith through the message secured and proclaimed by the apostles.

All Christians should pause and give serious import to the fact that Jesus offered up prayer on our behalf to God the Father. The very Son of God, before leaving his earthly mission, paused to pray specifically for us. What, then, was so important that he would pray for us? That we "may be one," or as Jesus prays later, that we "may be brought to complete unity."

Unity is contrary to our fallen nature, especially in American culture and society! We live lives in competition where we rise over others rather than rise together. In America, we live in a capitalistic system where every one looks out for number one, where economic growth is premised on getting ahead, where even in politics we have two parties that pit "us" versus "them." We grew up in schools where we would get A's for being correct and F's for being wrong. We then spend our lives thriving on being "correct" as opposed to being wrong. And if we are "correct" and others do not agree, by definition, the others are "wrong." How could we ever be expected to unite with those who are wrong???

Yet, this is the prayer offered by the Messiah for you, me, and all the rest of his followers. So, how do we find this unity? The key must lie, in part, in understanding what the unity is. I suggest the unity is NOT one of form, but one of substance. In other words, the unity is not all belonging to the same church or even same denomination. That reduces the unity and

church affiliation into club membership. Different churches and different denominations offer different people better chances to understand and walk with God as individuality might dictate.

So, if form is not the key, what is? The substance of unity is the following: we may go to different classes, different churches, different denominations, but in Christ we who are God's children are one. We share, we love, we help, we build up, we nurture, we minister, we encourage, and we show the world our family love for each other. That unity in itself will provide a testimony to the world that proclaims the reality of Jesus and our faith.

This portion links well with a portion of Jesus' prayer that preceded the prayer for us. In verse 3, Jesus noted in prayer, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." This simple statement offers a plain and profound truth about eternal life. To do it justice, however, we need to understand the Greek word translated "know." The word is γινωσις (*gnosis*). The word means more than intellectual knowledge. The Greeks would use this word to refer to an intimate relationship. The Hebrew word for knowledge carried the same meaning. In fact, that is the word used in Genesis 4:1 referring to the sexual union between Adam and Eve. The Old King James translated the passage as "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain."

So, Jesus is stating that eternal life is found in intimate relationship with God the Father and Jesus. There is no higher calling for mankind than to "know God." J. I. Packer has written a book entitled Knowing God that should be primary reading for Christians. This passage and others are dealt with in wonderful, life changing detail in that book.

III. THE ARREST

The climax and point of John's whole gospel lies in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. John writes it in a very factual manner, offering details and information that were not available to readers of the synoptic gospels. John fills in some useful blanks consistent with the overall picture John is painting. John's account of the Passion stresses the control and mastery Jesus had over the situation. The events were not controlling Jesus; Jesus was in control over the events. In other words, John wants everyone to understand that Jesus was crucified by happenstance. Jesus chose to walk in fulfillment of God's purposes.

We see in John's account that the soldiers coming to arrest Jesus are awed by his majesty. Jesus does not flee from the soldiers or attempt to evade arrest. Jesus gives himself up and rebukes Peter for the swordsmanship effort to stop the seizure of Jesus.¹

IV. THE TRIAL

The trial took two stages. There was the first stage with the Jewish powers and authorities followed by the Roman trial before Pilate. Jesus appeared before Annas and then Caiaphas. Annas had been High Priest before Caiaphas and carried still the title among some and the dignity that went with the office. Caiaphas was Annas's son-in-law.

While Jesus was before Annas, Peter denied Jesus for the first time. This was in the courtyard before a "charcoal" fire (a detail John offers as an actual witness that was left out by the other gospel writers.) Annas confronted Jesus and then sent him to Caiaphas. The beatings begin in front of Annas, and will continue each step of the way for Jesus.

While Jesus is before Caiaphas, Peter denies Jesus two more times. Jesus is then sent on to Pilate. John gives the events before Pilate in much greater detail than the other gospels. It would seem that after the denials, Peter (the source for Mark) went away. John apparently followed Jesus, as we will see John even at the foot of the cross.

The Jews would not go into Pilate's residence (the "Praetorium") because it was considered unclean to go into a Gentile's house. The irony that the Jews were concerned about such potential uncleanness affecting their participation in the Passover festivities while working to see that Jesus is unjustly killed is plain.

The confrontation of Jesus before Pilate reads powerfully in John. Here was the Roman ruler over the province, the Supreme authority who had the army of the mightiest military at his disposal, and before him was a beaten Jewish peasant who happened to be the one Supreme God Almighty made flesh. Pilate seems to have control as he questions Jesus. John quickly shows that Jesus was in fact in control. Pilate himself sought multiple times to release Jesus. Ultimately, though, Pilate gives in to the "locals" and hands Jesus over to be flogged and crucified.

¹ John tells us that Peter cut off the right ear of the servant of the High Priest. While it is not absolute, assuming that Peter was facing the servant and using normal swordsmanship, this would indicate that Peter was left-handed!

V. THE CRUCIFIXION

John describes the crucifixion of Jesus in one word. Like the other gospel writers, he does not dwell on the emotional heartstrings as he graphically detailed gore and torment. Instead, he paints clear facts and lets the power and historical truth of the deed carry the weight of the narrative.

While Jesus is dying, the soldiers gamble for his clothes. Jesus tends to Mary, his Mother, with words of kindness and love. Jesus assigned John the task of taking care of Mary. History has shown us that John did this to the end of Mary's days. Jesus' last words on the cross are, "It is finished." These words conclude the purpose of Jesus on earth. Jesus has triumphantly taken the sins of the world to the grave.

Jesus has his side pierced with a sword and is taken from the cross. Joseph and Nicodemus see to Jesus' burial.

VI. THE RESURRECTION

John details the resurrection and again offers us some details and stories that were not included in the synoptic accounts. In addition to the finding of the empty tomb, John gives us four appearances by Jesus.

The first is a loving appearance to Mary. In John 20:17 while Jesus is talking to Mary, Jesus says, "Do not hold on to me." Many have taken this verse to mean, "Do not touch me," some believing that Jesus must have been in some mystical state because he had not yet "returned to the Father." That is not what was happening, however. The Greek construction is called a "Present Imperative with a negative." The right way to understand the statement is not "do not start doing something." Rather, it should be understood as "do not KEEP doing something." In other words, Jesus is saying, "Let go! I'm not gone yet!"

From there, Jesus makes a visit to the Apostles. Judas is not there, of course, and neither is Thomas. Jesus blessed his Apostles with his peace, shows them his wounds, and confirms their purpose.

When Thomas hears of the visit, Thomas refuses to believe it. Jesus then appears to Thomas who falls down in awe and belief.

The final chapter of John has Jesus appearing to most of the apostles while they were fishing. Jesus calls out fishing advice helping them catch a miraculous load of fish. Once the apostles get to shore and realize it is Jesus, a personal encounter with Peter occurs. Jesus asks Peter three times whether Peter loves Jesus. Peter answers his love those three times. Jesus then gives Peter three charges to feed Jesus' sheep.

Two matters of note in the account of Peter and Jesus: First, we should notice the repetitions. Peter has denied Jesus three times. Jesus restores Peter three times, once for each denial. Peter is given three opportunities to confirm his love for Jesus. Similarly, Jesus takes three opportunities to give Peter his responsibilities to Jesus.

Second, the way John recorded the story, Jesus used the word *agape* in the first two instances of questioning, "Peter, do you love [*agape*] me?" In the first two answers, Peter says, "Yes, I love you." But, the word Peter uses for love is *phileo*. These words carry a different emphasis in the Greek. *Agape* means a selfless, giving, divine love. *Phileo* denotes a friendship, brotherly love. Some scholars make much about the difference between what Jesus asked and what Peter answered. The third time Jesus asked Peter about his love, Jesus changed and used Peter's word *phileo*. Peter answers with the same word. Other scholars make the argument that there is no real difference in what John is conveying. Either way, certain things are clear. Jesus goes to great lengths to restore his relationship with Peter. Peter has a love and devotion to the Lord that will drive him to ultimate death rather than ever denying Jesus again. And, Peter has a charge to keep before Jesus.

John ends his gospel with a personal note about how long John is set to live – a long time, but not forever! Reading it conveys a real sense that the gospel was being written late in John's life.

VII. POINTS FOR HOME

1. Jesus died for us.
2. In doing so, Jesus prepared his Father's house for us.
3. Jesus chose this.
4. He seeks to restore that which is broken.
5. No less for us than for Peter