

Salvation by Grace in John 5-6

NKJV — John 5:1-47

¹ After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ² Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. ³ In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. ⁴ For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.

Speculations as to what feast this refers include Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. From the time of the Passover to the harvest were about four months, as Jesus had said (John 4:35). If this is the Passover, then John mentions four Passovers in Jesus' Ministry (John 2:13&23; 5:1; 6:4; 12:1), extending His ministry to three and one half years.

The sheepgate is mentioned in Nehemiah (3:1, 32 12:39). Sheep for sacrifice at the temple were brought into the city through this gate.

The pool here may have been a bath for unclean persons, including diseased persons.

Bethesda means "a house of mercy" or "grace" or "goodness," and many miserable persons received mercy here. John may be connecting the name Bethesda with it having five porches. The Hebrews associated the number five with grace, and they may have deliberately arranged five porches here in order to reflected this, and John may himself be calling attention to the name and the number so as to point to the multi-layers of God's grace portrayed in the events he hereafter describes.

Sick and weak persons are an emblem of persons who have become self-aware of their enslavement to sin, their entanglement in sin, and their powerlessness to do anything about it in themselves.

[Mark 2:17] "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." [Compare Matthew 9:12-13; Luke 5:31-32]

By the expression "those who are well," Jesus does not refer to those who have been healed from their sin, but to those who do not sense and are not aware of the incurable sickness of sin in themselves. By the expression "those who are sick," Jesus does not refer to everyone without exception – for we are all "sinners" in one sense – but Jesus refers to those who do sense and have become aware of the incurable sickness of sin in themselves.

[Psalm 6:2] Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I *am* weak; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are troubled.

[Psalm 41:4] I said, "LORD, be merciful to me; Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You."

[Psalm 107:9] For He satisfies the longing soul, And fills the hungry soul with goodness.

[Psalm 146:7] Who executes justice for the oppressed, Who gives food to the hungry. The LORD gives freedom to the prisoners.

[Psalm 147:3] He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.

Jesus applies the principle that only the sick needing physicians.

[Mark 2:17] "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." [Compare Matthew 9:12-13; Luke 5:31-32]

By the expression "the righteous" Jesus does not mean those who have "experienced" being "saved" and "justified" and who therefore are no longer in need of justification. Rather, He means those who feel no need for repentance.

[Luke 15:7] "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. [That is, self-righteous persons who feel no need in themselves of repentance.]

[Luke 16:15] And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

[Luke 18:9-14] ⁹ Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. ¹² 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of

all that I possess.' ¹³ "And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' ¹⁴ "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

[Romans 10:3] For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

[1 Timothy 1:15] This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

[2 Timothy 3:5] having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

[Revelation 3:17] "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' — and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked —

[Proverbs 30:12] *There is* a generation *that is* pure in its own eyes, *Yet* is not washed from its filthiness.

[Isaiah 65:5] Who say, 'Keep to yourself, Do not come near me, For I am holier than you!' These *are* smoke in My nostrils, A fire that burns all the day.

There is a sense where God calls all men to repentance.

[Acts 17:30] Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,

A criminal ought to confess to the truth of the law and of his crime against that law, and he ought to repent of and repudiate everything about himself which brought about the crime. Should he do so, does this save the murderer or the thief or other such criminal from judgment? Not at all.

In the same way, all men must repent of their sins in Adam and of their personal sins in themselves, and they must believe the truth God's Word, including the truth of the gospel, and they must do so without any mercenary motivation for acquittal in repayment or consideration for their confession of faith in the law and repentance of their sin against it. This is only a part of what they owe — what they ought to do — regardless of whether they can or will ever do it. And so God has a just claim of repentance and faith from every man totally apart from any notion of salvation.

There is another sense where Jesus never calls self-righteous persons but only self-aware-sinners to repentance. What is the difference of sense between these two calls?

[Luke 1:53] He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty.

[Luke 6:21, 24-25] ²¹ Blessed *are you* who hunger now, For you shall be filled. Blessed *are you* who weep now, For you shall laugh. ... ²⁴ " But woe to you who are rich, For you have received your consolation. ²⁵ Woe to you who are full, For you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, For you shall mourn and weep.

[Mark 2:17] ... "I did not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

The literal sense here is, "I came not calling (i.e. actively discouraging) the righteous, but calling (i.e. actively encouraging) sinners to repentance." An understanding of this simple, fundamental, and frequently repeated truth serves to explain many things about the words and ways of John the Baptist and Jesus and His apostles.

[Matthew 18:11] "For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost." [Compare Luke 19:10.]

Most people in this world never become lost, but until a person first becomes lost, he can never be saved.

My purpose for this little excursus has been to lay a foundation for understanding the following story of the healing of the lame man.

Apparently a stirring in the water of this pool signaled to those watching that an angel of the Lord had gone down invisibly into the pool, and after this stirring, the first person to enter the pool would be healed of whatever infirmity he had. We are not told how they knew these things, so we may suppose that they inferred them from observing what had happened many times before.

We do the same thing. After we have been made aware of our sin-diseased nature, we begin to observe the stirring of God at certain seasons in the pool of our own souls, and when we are finally enabled to respond to the stirring, we are healed, then we go back and infer what happened. But if our observations are incomplete or our inferences are either insufficient or else go beyond the observable data, our conclusions may be misleading.

⁵ Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been *in that condition* a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" ⁷ The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me."

We do not know how old the man was, only that he had been in this condition thirty-eight years. Verse 14 suggests the possibility that his sickness may be connected with some sin he had committed.

The sick man in this story is unable to do anything for himself about his sickness, and we are unable to do anything for ourselves about our sickness. We cannot obey, honor, and glorify God or do anything good in His sight, nor can we atone for our sins, nor can we redeem ourselves from the curse.

It was obvious the man was there to be made well, so why did Jesus ask this man if he wanted to be made well? Sometimes we ask the obvious in order to set things into motion. It focuses the man's attention on obtaining a cure – after all, he did need someone else's help, as he explains. But Jesus knew exactly what his explanation would be, and Jesus would indeed help him into the pool for healing – only not this pool, but the pool of divine grace which flows from Jesus' mouth.

This poor man had no servant nor friend. He knew all too well his helplessness, yet he remained by the pool side, for he had no other hope of being cured. And God brings every man whom He saves into precisely this same state of mind, and sometimes keeps him there for a while as He strips away every hope from the flesh in order to magnify His glory and their joy when finally He reveals Himself to them as God our Savior.

There are many who would hurry this whole process along, but they only cheapen the grace and produce inauthentic substitutes which never endure the testing.

⁸ Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." ⁹ And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath.

The invisible creative word of God is spoken, and the miraculous healing occurs. The outward audible word from Jesus which immediately follows – or maybe it is simultaneous, who knows, it doesn't really matter if it even precedes by a few seconds, just so long as it – calls attention to what God is doing. It might be easy for someone to misinterpret what happened, and to suppose that Jesus' audible words had some power in them – like a magician or a sorcerer might claim. But Jesus will explain more about this later.

When Jesus called Lazarus to come forth from the grave, He had already awakened Lazarus from the dead so as to enable Lazarus to hear Jesus call him. Lazarus spent no time debating whether to accept Jesus' offer of awakening from the dead. He had no choice. And having been awakened from the dead, who would be so dead to the grace he had received as not to choose to obey the voice of Him Who raised him? Of course, Lazarus freely chose to come forth on Jesus' command. But none of the others in the tomb who might happen to have been named Lazarus would have been able to come, for Jesus spoke only to the one whom He had made able to hear His voice and come forth, while they had been given no ears to hear.

But, oops, this happened on the Sabbath Day. The healed man didn't seem to argue the matter of the work of Jesus healing on the Sabbath, or the work of his carrying his bed on the Sabbath. Regulations should be designed to serve a legitimate function, but some things may momentarily overrule that function. Jesus reasoned elsewhere (Matthew 12) that if mercy overrules ceremonial sacrifice, and if ceremonial sacrifice overrules observing the Sabbath (e.g. by the priests), then mercy overrules the Sabbath. That's logic.

¹⁰ The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry *your* bed." ¹¹ He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.' " ¹² Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" ¹³ But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in *that* place.

There is a group of persons whom the apostle John keeps calling "the Jews," and by this term he does not mean just ordinary everyday ethnic "Jews" as we commonly might use the term, but he means the ruling class, who might have made a big deal about how they were the authentic "Jews."

Well, these Jews are ever on the watch, and they immediately notice there was something wrong with this picture – "Hey you! Are you forgetting yourself? 'Bed carrying' is on the forbidden list for Sabbath observance." (See Nehemiah 13:15, 19; Jeremiah 17:21-22.)

The man answered, "I have an excuse from my doctor. He seemed like an 'in charge' sort of guy, with authority to order this therapy, and who was I to question Him after what He had done for me?"

The Jews asked, "Just who is this doctor of yours?"

The man thought he might be in trouble, because he didn't have a signed prescription for his therapy.

The thought never seemed to occur to the Jews that this doctor may actually have had a full license to practice any way He chooses.

It is likely that Jesus' order for this man to take up his bed and carry it was for the purpose of showing that this man was indeed cured.

Anyway, the doctor had given them all the slip – that is, He had slipped away – so the matter cannot be immediately resolved.

14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." **15** The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. **16** For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath.

Jesus knew right where to find the man, for he had gone to the temple to return thanks to God for the great mercy he had received.

The disease of sin is original, natural, and hereditary, not one man escapes its effects, and every function and ability of the soul are corrupted by sin so that we do all of the right things – all of the categories of behavior created in Adam – but we twist them all in the wrong direction – aiming them everywhere except exactly at the glory of God. The arrow always falls short.

It is those who have been made conscious of their condition, and those alone, who set themselves in search of the only physician who can heal them. Once they have received sufficient healing, they want to continue to obey the doctor's orders. The full cure (the life to come in the resurrection) comes only to those who have begun the cure (the small beginning of the new obedience in this life).

Those who live only once will die twice; those who live twice will only die once.

Of course, the Lord knew that no converted man can continue in this life without sinning. When He tells the healed man to sin no more, He means that he must not indulge himself in sin as the world does. If a man returns to indulge himself in sin, then he is like the swine that is outwardly washed, but he returns to wallow in the mud because his inward nature was never changed. At some point, a man's wallowing in the mud of sin weighs heavily as evidence against his ever having been anything more than superficially washed.

[Titus 2:11-14] **11** For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, **12** teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, **13** looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, **14** who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

The grace of God always teaches men to deny sin and to live righteously. Nevertheless, it is fitting to give warning, because true believers have an ongoing struggle with sin, may falter for a time, and are chastised by the Lord in many ways, including illness. However, this truth cannot be reversed to say that illness necessarily indicates a chastisement. God may send illness for many purposes, including simply manifesting His glory in it (John 9:3; 11:4).

The man then left and told the Sanhedrin who it was that made him well. He apparently did not yet discern their plotting attitude against Jesus, and they did not reveal it to him yet, lest it keep him from supplying them with sufficient incriminating details. How often are we helpful to others when in fact we should have suspected more guile? He may even have been hopeful that they would revise their understanding of the Sabbath in view of this man's work. The man certainly intended that Jesus should get the glory.

The reaction in the Jews was quite opposite. The Sabbath issue was an excuse for their hatred of Him – but to them it was a pretty good one. Breach of the Sabbath was punishable by death. They would eagerly do their duty toward Him, as they saw it. This made them even more righteous in their own eyes.

17 But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." **18** Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.

The passage suddenly jumps to Jesus being brought before the Sanhedrin and charged with Sabbath-breaking. Jesus responds to the charge with a simple theological point – God never stopped working. He rested from His work of creation in the midst of His work of continually upholding the existence and governing the providence of all that He had created. Whether Jesus might have gotten away with this argument is debatable, but then He added that He continued working like His Father. By claiming to be doing the same, equivalent, or co-extensive works as His Father, Whom He inferred was God, Jesus thereby claimed to be equal in nature with God. This drove the Jews berserk, and by berserk I mean they felt themselves justified in beginning to suspend the rules wherever needed from this point forward.

19 Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. **20** For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.

In Jesus’ testimony here before the Sanhedrin, He does not deny, but wholly affirms the charge of the Jews that He makes Himself equal with God. The words “most assuredly” are literally, “amen, amen.” A single “amen” may mean that what follows is generally true, but a double “amen” always means that what follows is absolutely true – that nothing is more certain.

All persons alienated from God – Satan, demons, natural men apart from grace – are able to will and are able to act contrary to the nature and expressed will of God; but the Son cannot do so, because He has the same nature as God the Father, and cannot act separately from or contrary to Him. The Son is not capable of acting alone, separate from His Father. He was in His human nature genuinely tempted to act so, but He in His Person will always endure such temptation, for His divine nature will always move Him to freely say, “Not My will, but Thine be done.” This is not a weakness or lack of power in the Son, but on the contrary, it is His very strength. Jesus is meek, but not timid. He is meekly subservient to the divine will, and bold to do it. (Notice, Jesus has absolutely no free will here. There is no free will within the Trinity.)

Jesus does what He sees the Father doing. Not that He apes the Father, but that He is privy to all of the eternal counsel of God, and His every act is a self-conscious fulfillment of that very counsel – a counsel which He Himself participated in forming. He could not act in perfect harmony with the divine mind if He was not of the same nature and equal with His Father. Jesus does nothing except in perfect reflection of the divine mind in respect to knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Jesus works with the same authority and power as the Father.

At this point, Jesus really needs a good Lawyer. Well, actually, He has the best.

The Father shows the Son all things, but not as if the Son is otherwise ignorant. Rather, the Son and Father are equal, and they communicate in love on an equal basis. The Father and Son do everything together.

Jesus has cured a man. Greater miracles are yet to come. Jesus will raise from the dead Jairus’s daughter, the widow’s son, and Lazarus. The Sanhedrin will marvel and be confounded. These miracles will work to confirm His testimony and to expose them as liars and murderers.

21 For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to *them*, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.

By these words, Jesus is speaking of His creative and irresistible power to raise the dead, and opens a description of the different senses of “raising the dead” – materially in this life, spiritually in this life, and altogether transformationally in the resurrection of glory.

One general principle is that the Son raises whom He pleases from death to life – just as the Father.

22 For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, **23** that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. **24** Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

Jesus does not mean that the Father does not judge. The Father is Judge of the whole earth, Governor of the world, and Ruler over every circumstance of providence in the universe. He condemned the world before the flood. But in context, Jesus means that the Father judges no one apart from the Son. The Father has committed to the Son the entire execution of the Father’s judgment. Again, perfect equality.

[Romans 2:16] in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

Why does He do this? So that men will give to the Son the same honor and glory due to the Father.

[Isaiah 42:5-9] ⁵ Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, Who gives breath to the people on it, And spirit to those who walk on it: ⁶ "I, the LORD, have called You [the Son] in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people [the Jews], As a light to the Gentiles, ⁷ To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison, Those who sit in darkness from the prison house. ⁸ I am the LORD, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images. ⁹ Behold, the former things have come to pass, And new things I declare; Before they spring forth I tell you of them."

[Isaiah 48:11] ... I will not give My glory to another.

The Lord does not share His honor and glory with another, yet the honor and glory of the Father must be ascribed also to the Son.

[Isaiah 45:21-25] ²¹ Tell and bring forth *your case*; Yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? *Who* has told it from that time? *Have* not I, the LORD? And *there is* no other God besides Me, A just God and a Savior; *There is* none besides Me. ²² "Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and *there is* no other. ²³ I have sworn by Myself; The word has gone out of My mouth *in* righteousness, And shall not return, That to Me every knee shall bow, Every tongue shall take an oath. ²⁴ He shall say, 'Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength. To Him *men* shall come, And all shall be ashamed Who are incensed against Him. ²⁵ In the LORD all the descendants of Israel Shall be justified, and shall glory.' "

[Romans 14:11] For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God."

[Philippians 2:9-11] ⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So to deny the Son the honor and glory due to Him is to deny the same also to the Father.

With another double "amen," Jesus delivers a formula for discernment. I have added in brackets what I think are the necessary connectors.

he who hears Jesus' word and who believes in the Father Who sent Jesus
has everlasting life

and [therefore] shall not come into [everlasting] judgment

but [instead, because he has everlasting life] has [irreversibly] passed from [spiritual] death
into [everlasting and spiritual] life

In other words: If someone hears and believes, then he has already irreversibly passed from spiritual death into everlasting life, and whoever has passed from spiritual death into everlasting life has already irreversibly skipped past the everlasting judgment.

Or, as Jesus might be paraphrased in the modern lingo, "What part of 'everlasting' don't you understand?"

Are there any conditionals here? Well, if there are any conditionals, they would be found in whatever sense Jesus means by the terms "hear" and "believe."

Does Jesus mean outwardly hear the word of Jesus and outwardly believe the word of Jesus in a mere notional or historical sense? That can't be. The devil and his host, and many persons of dubious character have heard the word and believed it to be true – and hated it. The things described here do not necessarily connect with a mere outward hearing and believing.

Whatever Jesus means here, His meaning penetrates beyond mere outward hearing and believing. So the conditional would be just how – in what sense – someone hears and believes.

There might also be a conditional in what Jesus' word is, because that is what is being heard and believed. Whatever this word is, when it is heard, it generates faith in the Father Who sent the Son.

So the things to watch in the following discussion are "hearing" "believing" and the "word."

To hear Jesus' word is to spiritually understand it, to have an experiential knowledge so as to like it and to love it and to approve of it, to distinguish it from what is not Jesus' word, to sense the power of it in the heart and to yield believing obedience from the heart to it.

To hear Jesus' word is to trust in Jesus, for if we do not trust in Him, we will not hear His word.

To trust in Jesus is to trust in the Father, for these two Persons are One in Essence and equal in everything.

[John 12:44] ... "He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me.

[John 14:1] ... you believe in God, believe also in Me.

[1 John 2:23] Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

The same effects follow the one as follow the other. In other words, again, the two are equal. In logic, this equality would imply a bi-directional "if and only if" statement.

To "have" everlasting life means to have the claim of right to everlasting life, to have the principle of everlasting life in himself – which principle is the grace of God, and which produces the beginning of everlasting life in this life, which is the evidence of the earnest and pledge of the Holy Spirit.

So it is not hearing and believing Jesus' word which secures everlasting life, but it is the having everlasting life which secures the hearing and believing Jesus' word.

[Ephesians 2:8-9] ⁸ For by grace **[unmerited favor]** you have been saved through faith, and that [faith] not of yourselves; it [i.e. that faith] is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

[Philippians 1:29] For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him ...

[2 Thessalonians 2:13-14] ¹³ But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, ¹⁴ to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[Acts 13:48] Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

The only way we can pass from death to life is to pass safely through the judgment for our original sin in Adam and our actual sins in natural life. The only way we can pass safely through the judgment is to have a Mediator appointed for us Who can, as our Representative, take our sins upon Himself and pass through the judgment in our place. The only way we can have such a Mediator appointed for us is for us to have been chosen in that Mediator before we were created and fell in Adam. Those chosen in Christ have been provided a Mediator so that when they fell in Adam, they fell on Christ, Who alone could bring them through the judgment by sheltering them from God's wrath through bearing their sins personally in His body and suffering in their behalf. Those who fell in Adam outside of Christ fell without an appointed Mediator. Without this pre-arranged relationship, salvation is simply not possible. But with this pre-arranged relationship, salvation is certain. This describes some of the mechanics of salvation. But the point is not the mechanics. The point is that all of the glory is due to God alone. We have nothing with which to boast – no works of merit, including decisions which merit; no better self-inclination than others, including making an improvement on circumstances better than others. We have nothing in ourselves which in any way contributes to our salvation. The only thing which makes us differ from those who are lost is the grace of God's provision for us in Christ.

[1 Corinthians 4:7] For who makes you differ *from another*? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive *it*, why do you boast as if you had not received *it*?

[1 Corinthians 15:10] But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was* with me.

[2 Corinthians 3:5] Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency *is* from God,

[Romans 9:15-18] ¹⁵ For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." ¹⁶ So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." ¹⁸ Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. **[God says that His glory is most clearly seen when we observe His sovereignty in extending mercy toward whomever He chooses, thereby softening them. (And by necessary logical extension, His glory is most clearly seen when we observe His sovereignty in withholding mercy from whomever He chooses, thereby hardening them.) This is the sovereign free choice and work of God without consideration of**

anything whatever in, on, or about the creature (Exodus 33:18-19). The glory of God is that He is God.]

[Isaiah 46:9-10] ⁹ Remember the former things of old, For I *am* God, and *there is* no other; I *am* God, and *there is* none like Me, ¹⁰ Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times *things* that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,'

So salvation is by God's grace alone. He alone gets the glory. We owe everything to Him. It cheapens the gospel to add to it any price or any work, including a work of faith. The gospel is absolutely free, yet it costs you all that you have – which is worthless. If you're not willing to pay the price of all of your own righteousness, then you have no part in the righteousness of Christ.

[Romans 11:6] And if by grace, then *it is* no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if *it is* of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

[Ephesians 1:4-5] ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵ having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

[Ephesians 2:4-5] ⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

[Ephesians 2:8-10] ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

[1 Thessalonians 1:4] knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.

[2 Thessalonians 2:13-14] ¹³ But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, ¹⁴ to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 Timothy 1:9] who has saved us and called *us* with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,

[Titus 3:5] not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

Jesus only saves sinners. If you're not a sinner, Jesus is not in the market for you.

[1 Timothy 1:15-16] ¹⁵ This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. ¹⁶ However, for this reason I obtained mercy [literally: received mercy], that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

Paul declares that his life serves as a pattern of those who would believe. What is this pattern? Paul was as righteous a man as there was on the planet. But Paul says he received mercy. The Lord blinded him, then opened his eyes. The Lord moved him to discard all of his own righteousness for the righteousness of Christ alone. And the Lord did this to Paul over all of Paul's objections. Nobody ever came into the kingdom of heaven kicking and screaming against the goads like Paul did – but in the end, he had no choice. Once the Lord changes a person's heart and makes him spiritually alive, his begins to make choices in the direction of the glory of God, and eventually those choices build up into a full blown conversion.

The death of Christ is the only security against all condemnation; whoever believes in Jesus has faith that He has already passed through the judgment of death and can never be made to pass through it again. There is no double-jeopardy with God. The death of Christ is what has secured faith and repentance.

Only He who has been regenerated can hear, and when he hears, he has already passed from spiritual death to spiritual and eternal life, his conscience which before was bound to dead works is now made alive to faith, and he becomes justified in his conscience – not by his own works, but by Christ's works on his behalf.

²⁵ Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.

This might be understood to refer to the bringing of natural life back into the human body. As a matter of fact, the voice of Christ would audibly utter the words "Talitha Cumi", damsel arise, and Jairus's

daughter would return from death, and “young man arise,” and the son of the widow of Naim would return from death, and “Lazarus come forth,” and Lazarus would return from death. But such things are actually only token representations in the natural world of what Jesus is actually referring to here.

Jesus is speaking of those who are inwardly brought to life by the inward irresistible call of Jesus – a creative call causing a spiritual resurrection from spiritual death. Later, Jesus will speak of a future physical resurrection (John 5:28-29), but the resurrection He is speaking of here is present, not future.

Only those dead who are enabled to hear the voice and call of Jesus, the Son of God, will come to life. These cannot be all of the spiritually dead without exception, for that surely never happened. Either these are those chosen in Christ who are spiritually dead and are made alive by Jesus’ creative word, or else these have just been made alive by Jesus’ creative word and who therefore sense their deadness, which, of course, means that they are still in their grave clothes, though they have just been made alive and aware, and Jesus’ outward call to those who are spiritually ill and blind and deaf and dead (because that is their experiential state) startles them to full awareness and moves them to respond to His outward call – His personal call, or the call of anyone else serving to deliver Jesus call and are enabled to speak as His voice with effectual power. Actually, these two calls may be separated in time, but they come as a package and are never far separated. Whenever Jesus creatively – without any outward means – inwardly calls the spiritually dead to life, He also always sends an outward call – with outward means – to outwardly move those awakened to their spiritual deadness to begin to walk in newness of life. Eternal life begins from the instant of the inward creative call, and the Christian life begins from the instant of the response to outward call – not the outward call to repentance and faith, which is every man’s duty whether he obeys or not, and he will not apart from the grace of God; but the special call to come to Christ, which is addressed only to those who have been awakened, enabled, and moved by the grace of God to believe and repent.

26 For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, ²⁷ and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.

The life shared by the Father and the Son is eternal life. Those who live in Him live by Him.

[1 John 5:11] And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

Jesus is speaking of His power and authority over each person, in accordance with the eternal counsel of God, either to call to him to eternal life, or to leave him under eternal judgment.

28 Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice ²⁹ and come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Jesus is speaking of His final general call to physical resurrection from the grave. Whatever is meant by “His voice,” the point is not what it might sound like, but what the certain effect of it is.

No child of Adam, in himself, is able to do any good. So it is certain that every man without exception, in himself, deserves to be numbered among “those who have done evil” and therefore belongs in “the resurrection of condemnation.”

However, not everybody is in himself. The unregenerate do absolutely no good works. However, the regenerate do good works, though not absolutely. The regenerate have two natures, and they fight an inner battle to subdue the natural inhabitants in the old man of Canaan with the spiritual forces of the new man in Christ. They are the only persons who have done any good – though the good is by grace, and not of themselves. Nevertheless, they are among “those who have done good” and therefore they belong in “the resurrection of life.” Yes, they have done evil also, but that evil is erased from their accounts by the virtue and benefit of Christ.

There is not unfairness or injustice here. After fairness and justice have been completely satisfied, then grace goes beyond fairness, and mercy goes beyond justice.

30 I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.

Up to this point, Jesus has been speaking of the Son in the third person – he, him, and his. Now He directly applies what He has been saying to Himself in the first person – I, me, my.

Jesus does nothing by Himself. When Jesus says “as I hear” he means as He is thoroughly acquainted with all of the Father’s purposes and counsels and judgments, so He executes His Father’s will perfectly.

The irony here is that Christ is standing before a council of judgment – the great Sanhedrim – and yet He is speaking as if He is the one doing the judging. He claims to be the true impartial judge, for He does

not seek to satisfy His own will, but only the will of the Father, Who is the Grand Judge. He pursues no private goal or advantage. His antagonists could claim no such impartiality, for they were moved by envy.

31 If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true.

Jesus has made His argument for equality with God before the Sanhedrin, and now He moves on to call forth valid witnesses in His favor.

Apparently this procedure must be some kind of informal hearing before the Sanhedrin, for nothing comes of it, and Jesus will continue His ministry for two more years.

He begins by disqualifying Himself as a legally valid witness, which is correct according to Mosaic law and Jewish legal procedure. Of course every word He ever uttered was truth penetrating to the heart and core of existence, but that fact did not and should not make His testimony valid legal procedure.

The irony is that in His final trial, the Sanhedrin will not convict Jesus on the testimony of others – for all human witnesses against Him substantially contradicted one another. Instead, they convicted Him on His own testimony, which was illegal, unlawful, and outrageous. God so ordained events and circumstances that they were allowed no cloak for their sins, but their naked envy was so openly displayed that even Pontius Pilate could discern it.

32 There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true.

33 You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. 34 Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. 35 He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light.

Jesus' first witness is John the Baptist. The Sanhedrin had already secured the testimony of John the Baptist.

[John 1:19-34] ¹⁹ Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." ²¹ And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." ²² Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" ²³ He said: "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Make straight the way of the LORD,' ' as the prophet Isaiah said.'" ²⁴ Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. ²⁵ And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶ John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. ²⁷ It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose." ²⁸ These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. ²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' ³¹ I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water." ³² And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. ³³ I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."

John was still alive, though in prison. Nobody dared to impugn the testimony of John the Baptist.

[Luke 20:1-8] ¹ Now it happened on one of those days, as He taught the people in the temple and preached the gospel, *that* the chief priests and the scribes, together with the elders, confronted *Him* ² and spoke to Him, saying, "Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things? Or who is he who gave You this authority?" ³ But He answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, and answer Me: ⁴ "The baptism of John -- was it from heaven or from men?" ⁵ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' ⁶ "But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us, for they are persuaded that John was a prophet." ⁷ So they answered that they did not know where *it was* from. ⁸ And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." **[Compare Matthew 21:23-27; Mark 11:27-32]**

Yet Jesus is willing to set aside this human testimony. Why?

[1 John 5:9] If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater ...

That principle is repeated in different forms throughout Scripture. We do not build genuine faith on human testimony. That does not mean that human testimony is not important or useful, but only that it is never decisive. Jesus cannot build His Messiahship on mere human judgment. Unless the Lord speaks inwardly to the heart, the mere words are simply the testimony that God has given regarding His Son – a testimony for which everyone is accountable, but believing it only in a notional and historical sense does nothing in the way of converting the soul.

[1 John 5:10-12] ¹⁰ He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. ¹¹ And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹² He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

So now we should understand more deeply what Jesus was getting at when he spoke of hearing His word and His voice.

Then why did Jesus even bring up the testimony of John? The legitimate function of human testimony is to point to the truth. If anybody is inwardly moved to get looking, then he can begin to follow the light – or, to change the metaphor – to read the signposts. The woman at the well was a signpost to the Samaritans. John the Baptist was a signpost to the Jews. Their testimony was a light or a signpost which made clearer the way of the greater testimony.

It happens that some men who at first are celebrated, are in the end rejected. At first the Jews rejoiced at John the Baptist, until they found out he was not the Messiah, he would not bring in a millennial kingdom, in fact he warned that they would soon be entirely ruined. So in the end, they despised John's baptism, rejected his word, and said that he had a demon.

36 But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish — the very works that I do — bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.

So Jesus moves on to greater witnesses. First are His works: If He walks like the Messiah, and He talks like the Messiah, and He does works like the Messiah, He is probably not just an ordinary guy, and though these things do not absolutely prove He is Messiah, they are part of the necessary credentials, so that without them, Jesus could be dismissed as a fraud. But we may be able to take this witness one step further. Some of these works – particularly the fulfillments of prophecy – were so clear and extraordinary in their nature that they had the same force as spoken words, and were clinchers to anyone able to pay attention.

[Acts 2:22] "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know."

[Hebrews 2:3-4] ³ how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, ⁴ God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

[Luke 7:19-23] ¹⁹ And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to Jesus, saying, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" ²⁰ When the men had come to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'" ²¹ And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight. ²² Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. ²³ "And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

[Matthew 14:25, 33] ²⁵ Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. ... ³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."

[Matthew 27:54] So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

If these works did anything, they showed that the Father had sent Jesus.

[John 10:30-38] ³⁰ "I and My Father are one." ³¹ Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. ³² Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?" ³³ The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God." ³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods" ' ? ³⁵ If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture

cannot be broken), ³⁶ do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? ³⁷ If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; ³⁸ but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father *is* in Me, and I in Him."

[John 14:11] "Believe Me that I *am* in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves."

So this amounts to a strong witness that Jesus and the Father are one in nature and equal in power and glory.

³⁷ And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. ³⁸ But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe.

At Jesus' baptism, the Father spoke from heaven with an audible and understandable voice.

[Matthew 3:17] And suddenly a voice *came* from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." [Compare Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22]

This also happened to the inner circle among the apostles.

[Mark 9:7] And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" [Compare Matthew 17:5; Luke 9:35]

A similar incident would happen again after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

[John 12:28-30] ²⁸ "Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came from heaven, *saying*, "I have both glorified *it* and will glorify *it* again." ²⁹ Therefore the people who stood by and heard *it* said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him." ³⁰ Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake.

But this is not really what Jesus is talking about here. These Jews do not listen to the voice of God or recognize the hand of God in Jesus.

Jesus speaks the words of God (John 3:34).

[John 8:47] "He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God."

He who has seen Jesus has seen the Father (John 12:45; 14:9).

[John 12:37-40] ³⁷ But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, ³⁸ that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?" ³⁹ Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: ⁴⁰ "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with *their* eyes, Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."

[John 8:17] "It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. ¹⁸ "I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me." ¹⁹ Then they said to Him, "Where is Your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also."

Quite simply, these Jews were spiritually blind.

[John 9:39-41] ³⁹ And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind." ⁴⁰ Then *some* of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, "Are we blind also?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains.

[Jesus is saying that those who experientially admit that they are "blind" — which actually means that they have begun to see — they will be given sight — that is, their spiritual ability to see will grow; but those who say they "see" — which actually means that they are completely blind — they will go on "seeing" they way they have always "seen" — that is, their spiritual blindness will grow. Jesus never heals the seeing. He only heals the blind. Those who say they are seeing will just have to go on following their blind sight into hell.]

These Jews had the Word of God "abiding" in them like no other persons who have ever lived, live today, or ever will live. But they did not have the Word of God abiding in them in the sense which Jesus means.

They were spiritually blind and deaf, and they only had a notional and historical sense of the Word abiding in them. All the light in them was darkness.

[Matthew 6:23] "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great *is* that darkness!"

[1 Corinthians 1:18] For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

[1 Corinthians 2:14] But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

³⁹ You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. ⁴⁰ But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. ⁴¹ I do not receive honor from men. ⁴² But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. ⁴³ I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. ⁴⁴ How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that *comes* from the only God?

These Jews were walking concordances and encyclopedias of the Scriptures. They thought their knowledge of Scripture was itself eternal life. As a matter of fact, it was their life – their natural life. But with all of their knowing, they did not know the Author of the Scriptures.

[1 Peter 1:10-11] ... the prophets ... who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, ¹¹ searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

[Revelation 19:10] ... the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

[Acts 13:27] "For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled *them* in condemning Him.

They were not willing to come to Christ – inwardly come to Christ – so that they may have spiritual and eternal life. Us beggars who have been given a taste for life are always willing to come, for we know where the bread – the source of life – is. We may use the Scriptures, but we come to Christ, not the Scriptures.

[John 6:35] ³⁵ And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

[John 6:37] "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."

[John 6:44-45] ⁴⁴ "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me."

[John 6:65] And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."

[John 7:37] On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.

Salvation is coming to Jesus – not to the Bible, not to religion, not to church, not to friends and fellowship, not to programs, not to songs, not to good times and feelings – but to Jesus. And though Jesus does call all men indiscriminately to repent of their sins and to believe the truth of the gospel, He never calls anyone to come to Him except by addressing him by name – i.e., by the character of one who is set on seeking Him.

[John 7:37] On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.

Is your name thirsty? Then He's calling you. The Greek language is that of a command. He's not saying, "Hey, everybody has to come, like it or not." He's not saying, "Hey, if you're thirsty, you can come if you happen to want to." Nope. He's saying, "If you're thirsty, I'm telling you to come now." And if you're thirsty, you are happy to hear Him command you to come, and you have all the assurance of Jesus that you are welcome to come. This is all you've been looking for and waiting for and all you ever wanted. You're not interested in any cheap substitutes. This is the real thing, and you know it, and nobody is going to stop you or get in your way. All you need is to hear the word, and you are coming.

But these Jews couldn't get moving toward Jesus if He lit a fire under them – which is exactly what Jesus will do in A.D. 70.

But they aren't invited. Only thirsty people are invited. Only thirsty people feel their need to come. Only thirsty people sense the sufficiency of Christ alone to satisfy their thirst. These Jews do not see themselves as thirsty. They have no need to come to Jesus.

All men should honor Jesus. And Jesus does receive honor from men. Indeed, all men one day will honor Jesus as they do the Father. Jesus' point here is only that He does not do what He does in order to receive the honor and applause of men, to set himself up in pomp and circumstance, to become a king and receive the homage and subjection of men. His kingdom is not of this world. He does not seek the world's applause or approval. The world's honors are not His honors.

Jesus knows the thoughts of men's hearts, and He knew that these Jews had only natural hearts and fleshly minds and that they were at enmity with God, and could not be brought under subjection to the law of God. In a word, they did not have the love of God in them. The love of God is the fruit of regeneration, the making new of the heart and the mind, the turning toward God, and these men had no such fruit.

Jesus came in His Father's name – by His Father's power and authority – and they wanted nothing to do with Him. Other false Messiah's they might embrace, but never the true one. Why? The false Messiahs might have something which attracts them, but Jesus repulsed them because the Father repulsed them.

These men were ambitious. They wanted great honor and high positions for themselves. They wanted nothing to do with a Messiah who did not seek what they sought, and who would not bring them an earthly kingdom.

45 Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is *one* who accuses you — Moses, in whom you trust. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

Jesus dismissed Himself and John the Baptist as human witnesses. He brought forth three divine witnesses: (1) His works, (2) the Father, and (3) the Scriptures. The Jews would dismiss all of these witnesses. But now He accuses them with the one witness He knows they cannot dismiss – the Scriptures of Moses. The Jews made their boast in the Law of Moses.

[Romans 2:17-24] ¹⁷ Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law ... ²³ You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? ²⁴ For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," ...

And of what does Jesus accuse them? Jesus accuses them of not believing Moses, which amounts to base inconsistency and hypocrisy. Moses wrote extensively about Jesus – for example, the seed of the woman who was to come, the seed of Abraham who was to come, and most pointedly, Moses wrote about the prophet who was to come like Moses, to whom the people of Israel must hearken.

The only reason that they could not apply Moses' writings to Jesus is because they did not believe Moses' writings. In rejecting Jesus, they condemned themselves.

Comments on the next chapter will be less detailed.

NKJV — John 6:1-71

1 After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is *the Sea of Tiberias*. **2** Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased.

These persons were motivated by seeing signs. This is never a good sign. [Pun not originally intended.] A true believer acknowledges signs (presuming they are genuine), but never believes because of signs. He believes because of the doctrine which ministers the words of eternal life and the good which is brought to men's souls. Instead, these persons would gratify their mental curiosity and their emotional sensationalism and their physical needs. In verse 26, Jesus supplies His commentary on the ultimate motivation for their actions.

3 And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. **4** Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. **5** Then Jesus lifted up *His* eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" **6** But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. **7** Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for

them, that every one of them may have a little.”⁸ One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him,⁹ “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?”¹⁰ Then Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.¹¹ And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed *them* to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted.¹² So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, “Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.”¹³ Therefore they gathered *them* up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.¹⁴ Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.”¹⁵ Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.

They couldn't escape the meaning of the sign, but a godly response escapes them. The will of this multitude was to take Jesus by force in order to make Him an earthly king – not altogether unlike what Satan had tempted Christ with earlier (Matthew 4:8-9; Luke 4:5-7). Many Christians have succumbed to this temptation. A Christian can be a worldly ruler, but he cannot rule as if his worldly jurisdiction is the kingdom of heaven and as if the people he rules are Christians – even if many of them are.

¹⁶ Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea,¹⁷ got into the boat, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them.¹⁸ Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing.¹⁹ So when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near the boat; and they were afraid.²⁰ But He said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.”²¹ Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.²² On the following day, when the people who were standing on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, except that one which His disciples had entered, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with His disciples, but His disciples had gone away alone —²³ however, other boats came from Tiberias, near the place where they ate bread after the Lord had given thanks —²⁴ when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.²⁵ And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did You come here?”²⁶ Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.

The multitude originally followed Jesus because of the signs (verse 2), and now they have found what they were really looking for – what they could get out of it for themselves – bread from heaven, as it were. Many “believe” for what they can get out of it.

²⁷ Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”

The food which endures to everlasting life is truth and righteousness and holiness – food for which the natural man does not genuinely hunger and thirst. But if one “labors” in his heart for this food, then he is in the way of the kingdom.

²⁸ Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?”²⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”

Belief is a work, but it is the work of God, as Jesus will more emphatically declare in a moment.

³⁰ Therefore they said to Him, “What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?”³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

They still see belief in only a notional and historical sense.

³² Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.³³ For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

Moses didn't give any physical bread to the ancient Israelites, God did. But even that is not the “true” bread. Notice, Jesus says God gives life to the world. Not that He tries to give life to the world, or that He

gives life on a conditional basis, but only that He gives life. "The world" here is used in a more generic sense, just as we commonly use the word. The world is going after Obama. Well, people everywhere are doing it - though I am not among them. Likewise, God gives life to people everywhere.

34 Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always."

They still don't get it.

35 And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

What are these conditions, "he who comes to Me" and "he who believes in me"? They are the conditions of salvation. But they are not conditions in the sense that someone must work to fulfill them, but they are the conditions in the sense that someone must have this work in them. Jesus will make it plain in a moment that nobody comes or believes on his own.

36 But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe.

Wait a minute. They actually do believe in some sense. Just not in the sense that Jesus means it here.

37 All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.

"All" is qualified by "that the Father gives Me." This "all" will come to Christ. This "all" is secure.

38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. 39 This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.

If even one of the "all" whom the Father gave [that's election] to the Son is lost, then Jesus is not God, He has sinned against the Father, and He has subverted the very character of God. But Jesus is the second Adam Who does not fall or fail those for whom He is appointed before time as their Mediator and Representative.

40 And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Everyone who sees – not literally, but with genuine eyes of faith – the Son and therefore believes in Him, has "everlasting" or "eternal" life.

So the conditions of coming and believing [verse 35] are fulfilled in those chosen by God and given to Jesus. Whoever has these conditions fulfilled in him has been given eternal life.

41 The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven."

42 And they said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

They seemed to have "believed" until Jesus started getting technical with them.

43 Jesus therefore answered and said to them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. 44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

No man is able to come to Jesus in genuine confidence and reliance of faith (John 6:35) unless the Father "draws" him. The Greek word [ἑλκω ἔλκω] translated "draws" literally means "to cause something which cannot move itself and which resists all movement – to cause such a thing to be moved by overwhelming force (pushing or pulling)" – it might be translated "forcefully drags."

Of course, this is speaking in terms of moving someone from spiritual death to spiritual life, which is the radical force of creation or regeneration itself. On the other hand, the conversion experience is moving from inward regeneration in heart and nature to the outward expression of this regeneration in one's walk of life. It, too, may appear a forceful drag, or it may move more gently and slowly.

Here are all of the places in the New Testament where the Greek word above translated "draw" is used.

[John 12:32] "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." [All peoples = not just Jews. Gentiles would also be made willing. Acts 13:48; 14:1; Romans 3:29-30; 4:9; 9:24]

[John 18:10] Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. [Apparently the sword was sticky in the sheath — unwilling!]

[John 21:6] And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find *some*." So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish. [The net was unwilling because it was filled with fish who were unwilling!]

[John 21:11] Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken. [I cannot imagine 153 fish caught in a net being willing to go where some man wants them to go!]

[Acts 16:19] But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. [Unwilling!]

[Acts 21:30] And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut. [Unwilling!]

[James 2:6] But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? [Unwilling!]

No man is able to come to Jesus unless the Father moves him by a force so overpowering that it overcomes the willful resistance of death. That would be the force of regeneration, the power of the resurrection, the making of someone to be spiritually alive who was dead, changing one's nature from enmity toward God to friendship with God.

[Ephesians 2:5,8-9] ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ... ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me. ⁴⁶ Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father.

Everyone to whom the Father speaks and teaches comes to Jesus. The Father makes them alive and opens their eyes and ears, and they are drawn with an irresistible force to their Father through His Son.

⁴⁷ Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.

He who believes in Jesus already has everlasting life. Belief is not the cause or the means or the instrument for obtaining everlasting life, but belief is the fruit of everlasting life. He who is breathing is physically alive, and he who is believing is spiritually alive.

⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. ⁵⁰ This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

Run that by me again. "...one may eat of it and not die. ... If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever." Now this is a clear violation of "free will." A person partakes of Christ of his own "free will" must be able of his own "free will" to not partake of Christ – whether in this life, or after the resurrection. People in heaven should be able to freely decide to go to hell – oh yeah, and people in hell should be able to freely decide to go to heaven. Otherwise it wouldn't be fair. The same with angels. Do we let God decide anything?

This is a vicarious giving – He gives His life for the world. Not for every man, head for head and soul for soul – that scope of things isn't even in view here, and besides, Jesus has already intelligently excluded any such concept. If He gave His life for every single man, head for head and soul for soul, then every single man without exception has passed from judgment into life, and nobody can be lost.

The expression "world" may mean many things. For example, one regular way that it is used in Scripture is to refer in a general way to those nations which are not Jews – not necessarily meant to include every single Jew in the category "Jew" nor every single Gentile in the category "world."

[Romans 11:12, 15] ¹² Now if their [the Jews as a nation] fall is riches for the world, and their [the Jews] failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! ... ¹⁵ For if their [the Jews] being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

[Luke 12:30] "For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things.

Of course, there are many other senses of the expression "world," but the contrast between Jews and the Gentile world is quite likely what Jesus means here/ The Jews taught voluminously that the Gentiles had no part in the Messiah, but Jesus declares that He gives His life, not merely for the Jews, but indeed for the world.

Even the expressions "the whole world" and "all the world" cannot mean everyone everywhere.

[Romans 1:8] ⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. [All seven continents, throughout the seven seas, in every culture, by the A.D. 60's?]

[Acts 11:28] ... there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. [Nowhere on the planet escaped the famine?]

[Acts 19:27] "... the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship." [Nowhere on the planet failed to worship Diana?]

[Colossians 1:5-6] ⁵ ... the word of the truth of the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as *it has* also in all the world ... [The gospel made it to every place on the planet by the A.D. 60's?]

One of the most offensive things to the Jews was that the Messiah was for both the Jews and the Greeks.

[Romans 9:24] even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles

[Romans 10:12] For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.

[Acts 19:17 Literally] Now this became known to all — {that is,} both to Jews and to Greeks — those dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

If we take "world" in this text to mean every man without exception everywhere over all time, then the text would mean that Christ gave His life in vain, for His death could not secure any man's salvation, but at most could only make some men's salvation possible - the determining factor would not be Christ's death, but would be something in the individual men who are saved, which would necessarily mean that they individually in themselves possessed something which merited salvation which others did not merit. But the point of this text and many other texts is that Christ's death is the determining factor, and that Christ's death is not some abstract amorphous thing to be somehow applied to certain individuals on certain conditions, but that Christ's death is concrete and specific, that the sins of individual persons were laid upon or imputed to Him, and that those sins were indeed absolutely atoned for in His death.

⁵² The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this *Man* give us *His* flesh to eat?"

This seems like derogatory mocking to me. The Greek emphasis goes like this, "How can this {Man} give us {His} flesh to eat?" Spiritually dead men apparently think too highly of themselves to be really interested in finding out about any food from this fellow. The woman at the well was interested in the water, but these fellows would rather bite the hand that feeds, even if the hand is not feeding them.

⁵³ Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. ⁵⁶ He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread which came down from heaven — not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹ These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.

Verse 53 uses aorist tense verbs - eat and drink. Verse 54 uses present tense verbs - is eating and is drinking. Once you begin to eat and to drink, verse 53, then you continue to eat and to drink, verse 54.

Jesus' flesh and blood is literally food and drink - but not in the course way that they are thinking. Those who partake of His suffering and death are sustained by their partaking. Eternal life comes from a relationship to the Son.

⁶⁰ Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this*, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" ⁶¹ When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶² *What* then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?"

The translation says "who can understand it" but literally it is "who can hear it," and more probably the sense is, "who can tolerate it." Why is this such a hard saying for them? Because the idea that they should be dependent upon Jesus for life was ultimately offensive to the pride of their natural minds.

63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.

Just words give no life. Only the Spirit has the power to give life. Jesus is speaking of the inward creative irresistible spiritually regenerative call, and He is distinguishing this from any mere outward call in the flesh.

The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

Switching gears slightly, Jesus declares that His words are spirit and life. His sense must be that His words minister spiritual life to those who have been given life. Those who eat and drink will keep on eating and drinking.

64 But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. 65 And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."

Without faith, Jesus' words minister only judgment to the hearers. Jesus did not operate under any delusions about the power of His words. They are spirit and life only to those who have spiritual life. Others will not believe - at least not in the sense of eating and drinking in life. He doesn't try to pry and coax and urge and beg and trick them. The notional faith of some was fading. Others will appear to believe for a while longer, but will eventually betray Him. But Jesus knows that faith is the gift of God - nobody can come to Him by faith unless it has been granted to him by His Father. He operates with full confidence in the Father to bring all of His chosen to faith.

66 From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

[Luke 5:32] "I have not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

Though much has been said about the ministry of Jesus and His apostles in actively calling and encouraging sinners to repentance, there is much in Scripture on the other side of that balance - how Jesus and His apostles actively discouraged the righteous from coming to Christ. Here is an incident of this latter sort. Their mission was never to try to get as many as possible saved, as if it depended on man. Their mission was always to

[2 Corinthians 2:15-17] ¹⁵ For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. ¹⁶ To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life. And who *is* sufficient for these things? ¹⁷ For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

67 Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" 68 But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 "Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus tests His apostles with His question. Jesus' words were spirit and life to the living, and eleven of the twelve apostles had this life, so they fed on the sincere milk and the meat of His words. Their faith led them to confess Jesus while others were denying Him. They were now addicted to the words of eternal life, and they could go nowhere else, for nobody else had these words.

70 Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" 71 He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve.

Jesus could not know who did not believe and who would betray Him without also knowing who would believe and confess Him. He doesn't know because He looked into some sort of cosmic crystal ball which knows all things outside and independent of Him. He knew because He was intimately involved in the eternal purpose, counsel, and decree of the Godhead.

Why did Jesus pick someone whom He knew was a figuratively a devil and who would betray Him? Because that was His purpose. Judas played a necessary role in the whole drama, and served the Lord's purposes in all that He did. By mentioning that one of the twelve was a devil, Jesus sets a precedent of warning - betrayers emerge from the midst of the faithful.