



Who does He say He is?



Developing our picture of God



Connect Season 4

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Who does He say He is?

Jesus asked His disciples the question: “*Who do you say I am?*” It’s a question we all have to answer. We answered it when we first professed faith in Christ. We acknowledged that He was saviour – *our* saviour. We received Him as Lord of our lives.

Sadly, many Christians stop there. They know that Jesus is Lord. That He is Messiah. That He is the Son of God. And that He is their saviour from sin. However, if we really want to grow in Christ, we need to ask the question: “*Who does He say He is?*” As we seek to find biblical answers to that question our knowledge of God grows – and we grow too!

Why is that?

Firstly, Jesus reveals God to us. Jesus said in John 14 that if we have seen Him, *we have seen the Father*. We can’t know God without knowing Jesus. We can’t have a growing relationship with God without a growing knowledge of Jesus. In Paul’s words *the Son is the image of the invisible God* (Colossians 1.15).

Seven of these studies are based on the *I am* sayings of Jesus. All of the *I am* sayings can be summed up in what Jesus says in John 8.58: “*Before Abraham was born, I am.*” Jesus is claiming to be God. The term “*I am*” picked up the same language God used to reveal Himself to Moses in Exodus 3.14.

Secondly, the way we see God affects the way we see ourselves and others around us. If you have really come to know the God of grace revealed to us in Jesus Christ, you see yourself differently. Someone who sees God as simply an angry judge will have a very different perspective on life to someone who sees him as a loving father. It is

through the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord that our lives are filled with His grace and peace (2 Peter 1.2).

You might be wondering where the Holy Spirit comes into all of this. The answer is that He is the One who enables us to grasp *any revelation from God* (1 Corinthians 2.9-12).

So I hope that by the end of this season your picture of God will be enlarged. I pray that any distortions that the enemy has tried to introduce into your picture of God, might be corrected. And that through your increased knowledge of Jesus, you might be full of grace and peace.

I have no doubt that as you grow to know Him better, you will grow more and more confident in your relationship with our God and Father.

The Lamb of God

“The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” John 1.29

Reading: John 1.19-37

Jesus did not refer to Himself as the *Lamb of God*. It was John the Baptist who used this title to refer to Jesus.

Many of the people of John’s time had speculated that he was the Messiah. John rejected this idea, explaining that someone greater than he was coming. That greater one was of course Jesus.

One day as Jesus came walking towards him, John exclaimed: *“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*

What did John mean when he referred to Jesus as *“The Lamb of God”*? No doubt he was pointing to the sacrifice that Jesus would make on the cross.

Sacrificial lambs have a long history in the Bible.

Accepted by God

Back in the book of Genesis, Abel brought a lamb as an offering to God. His sacrifice was accepted by God (Genesis 4.3-5; Hebrews 11.4). Hebrews 9.27 explains: *“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”* Christ is our sacrificial lamb. Because of His shed blood we are forgiven. We are accepted by God.

Protection

In the book of Exodus we have the record of how God delivered the people of Israel from Egypt. On the night of the first Passover, Moses

commanded every family to kill a lamb, sprinkle its blood on the doorposts and lintels of their homes and eat the lamb.

When the angel of death passed over Egypt all the Israelites were spared. They were protected by the blood of the lamb (Exodus 12.12-13).

Deliverance

And through the blood of the Lamb their rescue from Egypt and from the Egyptian king Pharaoh began (12.29-32).

A new beginning

In Exodus 12.2 the Lord says to Moses *“This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year.”*

The sacrifice of the lamb marked a new beginning for the people of Israel. A new season. New hope. A future.

In 1 Corinthians 5.7, Paul refers to Christ as *our Passover lamb*.

The lamb was God’s provision for Israel to protect them and rescue them from Egypt. Jesus, the *Lamb of God* rescues us from sin and from Satan. And just as the blood of the lamb protected the Israelites, so we are protected by Him.

And He gives us new hope and a new beginning. In the words of Peter, Christians are *redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors...with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect* (1 Peter 1.18-19)

Victory

In the book of Revelation, Christ is referred to as *the Lamb, thirty-one times!*

Revelation is all about the victory of Christ and the kingdom of God. It is also about how God's people ultimately have victory through Christ.

Revelation 12.11 says: *"They triumphed over him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."*

John's picture of Jesus as the *Lamb of God* reminds us that through Jesus' shed blood we can walk in victory over the enemy in this world.

God has provided Jesus as His sacrificial lamb for the whole world. By doing this, He reveals that He is a God who accepts us, protects us, delivers us, gives us a new beginning and enables us to walk in victory.

The picture of the *Lamb of God* gives us an incredible insight into the heart of God and what He has done for us in Jesus.

Questions for reflection

Accepted by God

Why do you think many Christians find it hard to believe they are accepted by God?

How does understanding that Jesus is the *Lamb of God* help us to believe God really does accept us?

Protection

How can understanding that the blood of Jesus protects us help us in everyday life?

Deliverance from sin and Satan

Why is it important to believe that not only has God forgiven our sins, but also that He has delivered us from the power of sin and Satan?

How does that change our perspective on life?

A new beginning

How does the *Lamb of God* give us a new beginning?

How can that fill our lives with hope?

Victory

How can knowing that Christ has broken the power of sin and Satan help us to walk in victory?

What does it look like to *overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony?*

Declaration

Thank You Father that You have provided Your Son Jesus as *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*.

Thank You that You provided Him as the perfect sacrifice for me.

I declare that in Him I have acceptance before You. My sins are forgiven (1 John 1.7). You do not look at what I have done but at what *He has done*. His sacrifice is accepted by You.

I declare that because of His shed blood, I have protection from the enemy. Because of what He has done, I will live confidently and I will not live in fear.

Because of His sacrifice, I am delivered from the power of sin and Satan (Romans 6.1-14; Romans 16.20).

And thank You that I have a new beginning and new hope because of the *Lamb of God*. I am redeemed from an empty way of life (1 Peter 1.18-19).

Thank You that the blood of the Lamb enables me to walk in victory. I will not give in to the temptation to despair. I will believe Him in every situation. I declare that whatever I am facing, even though it seems impossible, I know that all things are possible for those who believe (Mark 9.23)

The enemy is not more powerful than the blood of Jesus. He cannot overcome the blood of Jesus and the word of my testimony. I am more than a conqueror through Him (Romans 8.37).

Thank You Jesus that You are the *Lamb of God*. You are the *Lamb of God* who gives me forgiveness and acceptance, protection, deliverance, a new beginning and the ability to walk in victory. Amen.

The Bread of Life

“Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’” John 6.35

Reading: John 6.25-59

The feeding of the five thousand is one of the most famous miracles that Jesus performed. All of the gospels record this miracle. But only John’s gospel records the conversation between Jesus and some of His followers after the event.

Clearly they had been impressed by the miracle. They had been impressed by Jesus. And they wanted more.

They wanted more food. And they wanted to make Jesus king.

But somehow they had missed it. They had missed what Jesus was really all about. They had missed what God was doing.

Of course He cared about their material needs. He wouldn’t have fed the five thousand if He didn’t care. But He cared about more than their need for food. He cared about their need for relationship with His Father.

In explaining all of this, Jesus referred to Himself as the *bread of life*.

The people of His day knew well the story of how God had provided manna for the people of Israel when they were hungry in the desert.

Jesus said that He was the *true bread that came down from heaven*. In other words, He was the real thing.

How? What picture do Jesus’ words about being the *bread of life* tell us about God?

A God who promises to meet our deepest needs (v.35)

Firstly, they reveal that God wants to *meet our deepest needs*.

Jesus says that whoever comes to Him will never go hungry or thirsty.

We live in a world where there are hungry and thirsty people all around us. They try to feed their hunger in many ways. Pleasure. Leisure. Relationships. Substance abuse. Retail therapy. Even religion.

But none of these satisfy our hunger. Only the *bread of life* can do that.

A God who provides us with eternal life (vv.47, 50)

Secondly, Jesus paints a picture of a God who *provides us with eternal life*. God the Father sent Jesus into the world so that we would *live and never die*. He has promised to *raise us up at the last day*.

It is hard to find real meaning in life if all reality is confined to this life. Paul said that if there was no resurrection we might as well *eat and drink for tomorrow we die!* (1 Corinthians 15.32) People who have no belief in God or eternal life, might live a good moral life, but they have no reason to.

We can live with confidence and purpose in this life because we know that there is a life to come. And we can have confidence for the next life because of Jesus.

A God who has actively planned for us to come to Him (v.37)

Thirdly, Jesus paints a picture of a God who has *actively planned for us to come to Him*.

John 6.37 is a mysterious verse. One part of the verse suggests that salvation is all about what God planned. The second part of the verse suggests that we came to Him of our own accord.

Both aspects are true. God actively planned our salvation (Romans 8.30; Ephesians 1.4). You didn't become a Christian *just* through your own choice. It wasn't just something random. You were on God's mind before He was on yours. It was His idea!

A God who will never push us away (v.37)

Finally, Jesus reveals that those who come to Him *He will never push away*.

We are eternally His. He does not let us go. He does not walk away.

When Jesus revealed Himself as the *bread of life*, He painted a picture of a God who has provided everything that God is for us in this life and has promised us a place in His life to come.

Questions for reflection

A God who promises to meet our deepest needs

Why do you think that the people Jesus was speaking to in the passage found it hard to understand what He was saying?

In what ways do you think people today try to meet their deepest needs?

How does what Jesus says about those who eat the bread of life never hungering or thirsting affect the way you think about God?

A God who provides us with eternal life

How does knowing that we have eternal life change the way we see this life?

How can we help each other keep an eternal perspective on things?

A God who actively planned for us to come to Him

Do you think most Christians believe that their salvation was *God's idea*?

What does this tell us about God?

How does this make you think about what God thinks about you?

A God who will never push us away

Why do you think Christians feel that God has abandoned them? Do you think that He does abandon us?

How does the picture of a God who never pushes us away give us confidence in life? How does it strengthen our faith?

Declaration

Heavenly Father I thank you that sent Jesus, the bread of life, into this world (John 6.32-33).

Thank you that He has revealed You as a God who meets our deepest need. Because You promise that those who come to Him will never hunger or thirst, I declare that I will never hunger or thirst (John 4.14; 6.35; 7.37-39). I will find my satisfaction in Him. I thank You that I can live free from any kind of addiction. Thank You that I do not need to become a slave to popularity or peer pressure. And I can live free from the slavery of religion.

Thank You that You have given me eternal life (John 3.16; 6.47,50). Therefore I declare that I can live confidently. I can live with purpose. I can live free from fear because I know that when this life is over, there is still a life to come with You.

Thank You that You planned all of this. You actively planned that I should come to know You (John 6.37). I did not choose You, but You chose me (Ephesians 1.4). I was on Your mind before You were on my mind. I am Your gift to Your son Jesus. Therefore, I am confident in my relationship with You – because it was Your idea! You drew me (Romans 8.30)!

And thank You that You will never drive me away (John 6.37). I am forever secure in Your love (Hebrews 7.25). You will never abandon me (1 Timothy 2.13). You will never let me go.

Thank You Jesus that You really are the *bread of life*. I will feast on You all the days of my life. For no-one and nothing satisfies the way that you satisfy. Amen.

The Gate for the Sheep

"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.[a] They will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." John 10.9-10

Reading John 10.1-10

In our next study we will look at Jesus *the good shepherd*. In this study we are going to look at Jesus *the gate for the sheep*.

Jesus self-description as the *gate for the sheep* might seem very odd to us. For a start, most of us aren't familiar with shepherding. In addition, most of our images of shepherding are western rather than eastern.

There is some dispute as to what Jesus meant when He referred to Himself as *the gate for the sheep*. The most likely explanation is found in the eastern practice of the shepherd forming what we might call a "human gate" at the entrance to the sheepfold. The shepherd would lie across the entrance to the sheepfold. The sheep *came in and out through him*. And any predator had to disturb him in order to enter the sheepfold.

Jesus is therefore painting a picture of how He enables people to become part of His flock, how He protects them and how through Him they are able to flourish.

God's flock (v.9)

We become part of God's flock by entering *through the gate*. This describes perfectly salvation. There is no other way that we can be saved, except through Jesus.

Jesus talks about those who came before Him being *thieves and robbers*. Throughout history there have been people who have promised paradise but delivered only pain and misery. From evil dictators to financial scammers to religious charlatans, history is full of people who were thieves and robbers. It was no different in Jesus' day.

It is only through Jesus that we enter God's flock or to use a different picture, God's family.

It's important to recognise that salvation is not just about booking our own ticket to heaven. When we are saved God joins us to His flock, His family, which we know as His church. We are part of something much bigger.

And God is still adding to His flock. There are people who today are not part of His flock but one day they will be, because Jesus is still *the gate for the sheep*.

This reminds us how open hearted God is. His heart is for *whoever* – "*whoever enters through [Jesus] will be saved.*"

A healthy flock (vv.9-10)

"*Come in*" and "*go out*" picks up language used in the Old Testament. Psalm 121.8 says: "*the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore*". This is a reference to the entirety of our lives. His presence is with us throughout our lives.

The sheep go in and out through the gate and *find pasture*.

Shepherds are concerned that their flocks are healthy and flourishing. Sheep will only flourish when they are able to graze and drink safely.

Once again, this recalls a picture used in the Old Testament:

“He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, 3 he refreshes my soul.” (Psalm 23.2-3)

This picture of Jesus as the gate is a reminder that God wants us to *flourish*. He wants us as a flock (church) to flourish. And He wants us as individuals to flourish. He came *that we might have life, and have it to the full*.

That thought was on Paul’s heart when he wrote to the Colossians:

“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, 10 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God...” (Colossians 1.9-10)

God wants us to flourish. God wants you to flourish. Through Jesus we are able to flourish.

A secure flock (v.10)

Wherever sheep are found there are always threats. Jesus contrasts Himself in John 10 with thieves who come to *steal, kill and destroy*. Satan is the master thief. He comes to bring terror and destruction to God’s flock, God’s church.

Peter describes Satan as a lion:

“Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5.8)

Jesus is our security. In verse 28 Jesus explains just how secure we are in Him: *“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no*

one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one.'"

And Paul says that nothing can *separate us from the Love of God that is in Christ* (Romans 8.35-39).

Questions for reflection

God's flock

When Jesus describes Himself as the *gate for the sheep*, what sort of picture does this paint in your mind?

What does this tell you about God's heart?

How does being God's flock make you think about church?

A healthy flock

How do we *go in and out and find pasture*?

Why do you think it is important to understand that God wants us to flourish?

How can this give us confidence in life?

A secure flock

Do you think most Christians really believe that Satan can never snatch them away from Jesus? Why?

How does knowing that we are secure in Him affect the way we think about our life in this world?

Declaration

Father I thank You that Your Son Jesus is the gate for the sheep. Thank You that we are saved through Him. Through Him we have become part of Your flock (John 10.9).

Because we are part of Your flock we enjoy all of the benefits that go with that.

Thank You that You came that we might have abundant life (John 10.10) You want us to flourish. You want us to flourish individually and collectively as Your church (Colossians 1.9-10). We are able to *come in and go out and find pasture* (John 10.9). I declare that I will live confidently because You create the conditions in which I can flourish. I declare that Your church will flourish because You ensure that it will have all that it needs to flourish.

I thank You that You watch over my *coming and my going*. Therefore I will go about my life knowing that You are watching over me at all times (Psalm 121.8). You are with me.

Thank You that You are my protector. You guard me against the thief. I will stand against all the devil's attempts to steal, kill and destroy (10.10), knowing that You are with and that You are my protector. I will not be afraid. No-one and nothing can ever snatch me out of Your hand (John 10.28; Romans 8.35-39)

Thank You Jesus that You are the gate for the sheep. Thank You that through You I am part of God's flock. Amen.

The Good Shepherd

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (John 10.11)

Reading: John 10.1-18

In the last study we saw how Jesus promised *life to the full*. He was, He said, the *gate for the sheep*.

Jesus now refers to Himself as *the good shepherd*. The word translated *good* often has the meaning of *admirable*. He is a shepherd who can be *trusted*.

So what picture is Jesus painting when He calls Himself *the good shepherd*.

Leader (v.11)

In the Old Testament, the leaders of Israel were often referred to as *shepherds*. Usually they were characterised as bad shepherds (e.g. Ezekiel 34, Zechariah 10). Both Moses' and David's leadership was described in terms of *shepherding* (Isaiah 63.11, Psalm 78.72). And of course, the Lord is referred to as a *shepherd*, most famously in Psalm 23.

So Jesus is drawing on an image that those listening to Him were very familiar with, not just from everyday life, but from the Old Testament scriptures.

So when Jesus presents Himself as a *good shepherd*, He reveals Himself as a *leader who can be trusted*.

The leader who lays down His life (11-12)

We saw in the last study how shepherds in Jesus' time would form a gate by sleeping at the entrance to the sheepfold. Jesus now develops this image further. The good shepherd *lays down His life for the sheep*. That doesn't simply mean that He *risks His life* for the sheep. Throughout John's gospel when the word translated here as "for" is used, the reference is to sacrifice.

Once again, Jesus is speaking in a figurative way about His death on the cross for the world.

Jesus is not just a great leader because He has great leadership skills. He is not just a great leader because He is a person of integrity. He is a great leader – the greatest leader – because He loved us enough to lay down His life for us.

The leader who protects His sheep (v.12)

That kind of shepherd / leader does not abandon His sheep when the enemy attacks. He owns the sheep, and unlike someone who is a "hired hand", He will not run away, He will fight for His sheep.

Jesus still continues to fight for His sheep. He is at the right hand of God interceding for us in heaven (Romans 8.34). His intercession is one that is ongoing (Hebrews 7.25).

Jesus is praying for us. His church. Your group. You as an individual.

He knows us – and we know Him (vv.3-5)

Just like an Eastern shepherd knew his sheep and led them to places where they could pasture, so Jesus knows us and we know Him

He is not a detached shepherd / leader. He knows us. Notice what He says about His relationship with us and our relationship with Him:

- The sheep listen to his voice (v.3)
- He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out (v.3)
- When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice (v.4)
- But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognise a stranger's voice (v.5)

This speaks of a very close relationship between the Lord and His followers, an intimate relationship. We can know His voice. He treats us as individuals – *He calls His own sheep by name*. We can have confidence that we can recognise His voice and not be hoodwinked by strange voices. This fulfils what Jeremiah prophesied about the new covenant (Jeremiah 31.33-34; Hebrews 8.8-12)

Now here's the amazing thing: the relationship that we have with Jesus is *as close as the relationship Jesus has with the Father* (vv.14-15).

A bigger flock (v.16)

Jesus still has sheep to add to His flock. Some of those sheep are your friends and mine. Let's keep our hearts open – like His heart is open – to His flock increasing in number.

Questions for reflection

The leader

How does the picture of Jesus as your leader change the way you think about Him?

What does it mean / can it mean to follow Jesus as our *good leader*?

The leader who lays down His life

Not many leaders are prepared to give up their own lives for their followers. Jesus gave up His life for those who were not His followers. What does that tell us about His heart? How does this give us confidence in His leadership?

The leader who protects His sheep

How does knowing that Jesus protects His flock strengthen your faith?

How does Jesus as our protector help you when you see the church being attacked or persecuted?

He knows us and we know Him

In verses 3-5, Jesus gives us a very intimate picture of what it means for Him to know us and for us to know Him. How does that give you confidence in your relationship with Him? How can these verses give us confidence that we can hear His voice and find His direction in our daily lives?

Jesus says that our relationship with Him is just like His with the Father. Does that surprise you? How could this revolutionise your relationship with God?

Declaration

Thank You Father that You sent Jesus into the world as *the good shepherd*. And thank You that He laid down His life for His sheep.

Thank You that *the good shepherd* is a leader like no other leader. He protects us as His church. He intercedes for us at God's right hand in heaven (Romans 8.34). His intercession for us is continual (Hebrews 7.25).

Because He is praying for His church, His church will survive every attack of the enemy. The enemy can never destroy God's flock, God's church.

And Jesus is interceding for me. I can face any fear, face any challenge because He is praying for me.

Thank You that He knows us by name (John 10.3). He knows us and cares for each of us and leads each of us as individuals.

Because He says that we know His voice, I believe that I can hear and recognise His voice (John 10.4). I can be confident that He will guide and direct me. And He will guide and direct His church.

My relationship with the *good shepherd* is as close as the relationship between Jesus and His Father (John 10.14-15)!

The *good shepherd* wants His flock to increase. Increase is on God's heart. He cares about the sheep that are not part of His sheepfold. I too will open my heart to those sheep who have not yet found the *good shepherd*.

Thank You Father for this amazing picture of the way You have reached out to us and revealed Yourself in Jesus. Amen.

The Resurrection and the Life

Reading: John 11.1-44

"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die." (John 11.25-26)

The resurrection of Jesus sets the Christian faith apart from every other faith or religion. Christians believe in a resurrected Christ who is alive today. They believe that when Mary and her friends and Peter and John went to the tomb on the first Easter Sunday, it really was empty.

Paul was so convinced that Christ had been raised from the dead that he claimed that if it was not true, following Jesus was a waste of time:

For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15.16-19)

He even referred to God as the *One who raises the dead* (2 Corinthians 1.9).

Jesus' statement about being the *resurrection and the life*, is made when He is faced with the death of His friend Lazarus.

Some of the Jewish people of Jesus day believed in the resurrection of the dead. Clearly Mary did (v.24). Amongst the Jewish religious leaders the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection, but the Pharisees did (Matthew 22.22-33; Acts 23.6-11).

However Jesus claimed something more than the truth of a resurrection at the end of time. Jesus claimed that *He Himself was the resurrection*.

What did He mean by this? And what does that mean for us?

Hope for the future

First of all it means that because of Jesus we have *hope for the future*. That hope is not restricted to this life, but it is *hope for the life to come*.

When Jesus meets Mary He says: *“The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.”* (vv.25-26)

Notice two things here. Firstly, if someone believes in Jesus they will live *even though they die*. Eternal life begins *now* (“*they will live...*”) and eternal life continues in spite of physical death (“*even though they die...*”).

Jesus makes a second point here. It is like the first one but he comes at it from a different angle. Someone who believes in Jesus *lives* and they will *never die*. In other words physical death is counted of little consequence because the eternal life that Jesus gives means it has no lasting power.

Because Jesus is *the resurrection and the life* death has no final hold over those who believe in Him. Death is not to be feared. It has no ultimate power over us. It is more like a transition into a glorious life to come.

Hope for this life

When Jesus first heard about Lazarus' illness, He explained that it was an opportunity for *God to be glorified*:

"This illness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." (v.4)

And that was exactly what happened, even though Lazarus died (vv. 11-14), Jesus goes to Bethany and brings him back to life.

Throughout this whole episode Jesus gives hope and encouragement to Martha and Mary (vv.21-27; 33-35; 40).

Jesus' raising of Lazarus demonstrated His power over death. It revealed God's glory. It would be hard to argue that, because Jesus raised Lazarus, we should attempt to raise every dead person. Even Jesus didn't do that. The apostles didn't do that when Stephen was killed (Acts 7.60-8.2). But it *does show us* that we can face hopeless situations in this life and see God's glory revealed because Jesus is *the resurrection and the life*.

The heart of Jesus

Sometimes we can read about Jesus' great miracles and it can appear as though He just uses raw power to achieve the result.

The raising of Lazarus paints a very different picture.

Jesus is described as being *deeply moved in spirit and troubled* (v.33) and weeping (v.35).

Deeply moved translates a word that has the idea of being *angry* or *indignant*. Jesus was angry at what Satan had done to His friends.

And the words *Jesus wept* (v.35) show how Jesus entered into the suffering of His friends. Jesus knows, understands and cares (see what Hebrews says about Jesus as our High Priest, Hebrews 4.15). *We can cast our anxieties upon Him, because He cares for us* (1 Peter 5.7).

Unlocking resurrection power

Even though Lazarus had been dead for four days, Jesus encouraged Mary and Martha to *believe* and they would *see the glory of God* (v.40).

Paul said that he wanted to *know Christ and the power of His resurrection* (Philippians 3.10). So can we. And we know His resurrection power as we believe Him.

The resurrection and the life paints a picture of a God who is for us in this life, in death and has a future for us beyond this life. It also paints a picture of a God who loves us, is concerned for us and is moved by the things that trouble us.

Questions for reflection

Hope for the future

Why do you think what the Bible teaches about the resurrection is so important? How does what Jesus says about being *the resurrection and the life* make you think about death?

How does what Jesus says about eternal life make you think about this life?

Hope for this life

In what ways does Jesus as the *resurrection and the life* give you hope for this life?

How can this story of Jesus raising Lazarus give us hope when we face difficult or seemingly impossible situations?

The heart of Jesus

What does Jesus' reaction to the death of Lazarus and the grief of Mary and Martha (vv.33-35) show us about God's concern for us?

Know His resurrection power

"Then Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?'" (v.40)

How could this scripture apply to us today?

Declaration

Thank You Father that You sent Your Son into this world as *the resurrection and the life* (John 11.25).

Thank You that because He is *the resurrection and the life* I have eternal life. Even though I will die, I will live forever. Because You are the God who raises the dead (2 Corinthians 1.9), You will raise me. Death has no final power over me. Therefore I will not fear death. I will not be afraid of any threat to my life or anything that the enemy would throw against me.

Thank You that because Jesus is *the resurrection and the life*, I have confidence to face seemingly hopeless and impossible situations. If Jesus can bring back to life a man who was dead for four days, He can do anything!

Thank You that I can know His resurrection power (Philippians 3.11). And thank You that, like Mary and Martha, I can see the glory of God if I believe (John 11.40).

And thank You Father for Your concern for me. When Jesus was *deeply moved and troubled* (John 11.33) because of His friends' grief, He revealed Your heart for us. I know that You care for me. You are concerned about the things that concern me. And I can cast my anxieties upon You (1 Peter 5.7).

Thank You for the amazing picture that You painted for us, when Jesus revealed Himself as *the resurrection and the life*. Amen.

The Way, the Truth and the Life

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.’” (John 14.6-7)

Read John 14.1-31

Jesus’ words about being *the way, the truth and the life* are spoken to His disciples just before His betrayal, in a section of John’s gospel known as *the upper room discourse* (John 13-16).

His disciples are troubled and Jesus’ words are intended to help them overcome the strong emotions that they are feeling (v.1). Jesus reassures His disciples by emphasising that their future destiny is secure and that one day He will return for them (vv.2-3).

But two of His disciples don’t get it. Philip wants Jesus to show them the Father (v.8). And Thomas is puzzled as to exactly where Jesus is going (v.5)!

The answer to both their questions is to do with the Father. Jesus responds to Philip that anyone who has seen Him has seen the Father (v.9). And His answer to Thomas is our theme for this study, namely that Jesus *connects us to the Father* (v.6).

Before we move on to consider what *the way, the truth and the life* means, it is worth noting that Jesus sets out *knowing the Father* as the key to prevailing in times of trouble and uncertainty.

Jesus could simply have said that if His disciples believed Him then they believed the Father as well (John 5.24; 10.37-38). He doesn’t do

that however. He says that He is *the way, the truth and the life*, and that *no-one comes to the Father except through Him*.

Notice too that He says the He is *the way* to the Father. The *only* way. And this way is not just *to God*, but specifically to *God the Father*. Christians don't just believe in God, but in God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit.

Jesus is the way

What does Jesus mean when He says He is *the way*?

In the early years of the church, Christians were known as belonging to or followers of *the Way* (Acts 9.2;19.9, 23; 22.4; 24.14,22).

The word *way* simply means *road*. Roads bring connection between different locations. They enable us to travel between different locations. Jesus is the road that takes us to the Father. He is the road that connects us to Father God.

How do we know the Father? Through Jesus. That was why He died for our sins and rose again from the dead (Luke 24.45-47).

We saw above how God reveals Himself as *Father*, not just *God*. That is important for our understanding of God. It is also important for our understanding of *ourselves*. If God is our Father then we must be His *sons and daughters*.

So because Jesus is the road to the Father, those who take that road become sons and daughters. John says as much at the beginning of his gospel (John 1.12). This is what is known as *sonship* or *adoption*. Paul states this truth on numerous occasions in His letters (e.g. Romans 8.14-17; Ephesians 1.4; Galatians 3.26).

Sometimes people “divide” Father and Son. They say things like they are comfortable with Jesus but not with the Father! There might be reasons for their discomfort with the term “father”. But to make that kind of division robs them of the comfort and security that comes from the Father’s love.

Jesus is the truth

Jesus is also *the truth*. Jesus didn’t just tell the truth or preach the truth, He is the truth. We might say He is the real deal. He can be relied upon.

In John’s gospel, Jesus says two things about *truth*:

Firstly, *truth sets us free*.

Jesus said: “*If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*” (John 8.31-32)

Jesus spoke these words to religious people who had been deceived by Satan. The only way to break out of the lies that had enslaved them was a commitment to Jesus and His teaching. The *truth* would then break the chains of Satanic deception in their lives.

Jesus *the truth* sets us free from the lies with which Satan tries and has tried – sometimes successfully – to fill our minds.

Secondly, *truth sanctifies us*.

In His great high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed: “*They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth*” (John 17.16-17).

Sanctify simply means to *make holy*. How do we live the kind of life that pleases God – a *sanctified life* - in a world that has a completely different value system? Through knowing the truth.

As we keep our eyes on Him in troubled times, Jesus *the truth* keeps us from being deceived by the lies of Satan and enables us to live a holy life in an unholy world.

Jesus the life

Throughout John's gospel, Jesus is pictured as One who *gives life* (e.g. 1.4; 3.16; 5.39; 10.10).

He gives life because He *is the life*.

The life that He gives is *eternal* life (3.16). It is *abundant* life (10.10).

He promised a Samaritan woman inner life that would provide ongoing refreshing:

“Jesus answered, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’” (John 4.13-14)

That is the kind of life that Jesus promises even – perhaps especially - in troubled times. And that permanent inner refreshing is brought about by the connection that He has made between us and His Father.

Jesus gives us a picture in this passage of a connection to the Father that brings both His truth and refreshing into our lives.

Questions for reflection

Jesus the way

How is Jesus *the way* to the Father?

Why do you think that it is so important that we know we have a secure connection with the Father, especially in troubled times?

Jesus the truth

How does knowing Jesus as *the truth* enable us to silence Satan's lies?

What kind of lies does Satan tell Christians to try to damage them?
How can we help each other combat those lies?

Jesus the life

The word *life* in connection with *eternal* life appears in John's gospel over thirty times. What do you think John is trying to tell us about Jesus?

How can we make sure the *well of water springing up to eternal life* (John 4.14) doesn't get clogged up?

Declaration

Thank You Father that You sent Your Son Jesus into the world to connect us to You.

Thank You that You are my *Father* and I am *Your child* (John 1.12; Ephesians 1.4; Galatians 3.26). I can have confidence in You whatever my background, whatever my past, because You are a perfect Father.

Thank You Jesus that You have secured my connection to Your Father, because You are the *Way*.

Thank You that You are *the truth*.

Because You are *the truth*, I can live in freedom (John 8.32). I do not need to be captured by Satan's lies. By Your grace I will walk in freedom because You are *the truth* and You set me free.

And because You are *the truth* I can live a life that pleases You. I declare that I will walk in Your truth, because the truth sanctifies me. It sets me apart and enables me to live for You in a world that has a different set of values and priorities.

Thank You that You are *the life*. Through You I have *eternal life* (John 3.16), I have *abundant life* (John 10.10). I have a *spring of water welling up to eternal life* within me (John 4.14). I will draw on that source day by day. I will draw on Your life in me day by day.

Thank You for this amazing picture of Your provision of *the way, the truth and the life*, through Jesus, who connects me to You, my Father in heaven. Amen.

The True Vine

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener...5 ‘I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15.1,5)

Reading: John 15.1-17

The first seventeen verses of John 15 are all about *fruitfulness*. How do we produce the kind of fruit that pleases God?

The answer Jesus could be summed up as “A branch of a vine produces grapes because it is connected to the vine. In a similar way, stay connected to me – and you will produce fruit.”

A person, not just principles

As we will see, Jesus teaches His disciples how they can bear fruit that will last (v.16). It is important to stress from the outset that we bear fruit because of a living relationship with Christ, not simply because we obey a set of principles.

In the Old Testament, Israel was compared to a vine – sometimes one that bore bad fruit (e.g., Isaiah 5.7; Jeremiah 2.21). Jesus says that the focus is no longer on the nation of Israel and its religious system, but on *Him*. It is through knowing *Him* that we bear fruit, not by participating in a religious system.

The process of bearing fruit (vv.1-4, 6)

The role of the Father (vv.2,6)

Jesus is the true vine, His Father is the gardener. The Father “cuts off” unfruitful branches and prunes the fruitful branches so that they are even more fruitful.

Most of us understand the image of pruning. Just as branches are pruned so that they can bear more fruit, sometimes God the Father “prunes” us, He takes things out of our lives that are obstacles to spiritual growth.

The Father *cutting off* unfruitful branches is more controversial. Does it mean that if we are unfruitful we lose our relationship with Jesus? Some think so.

However, the word translated *cut off* can also mean to “lift up” or “prop up”. In the ancient world, if a vine was trailing the ground, the gardener or viticulturist would lift it up and set it on a stone. This was to allow it the breathing space to bear fruit the next year.

This interpretation would make sense in the context. Over the next fifty-three days there would be very little fruit in the disciples’ lives (they would desert Jesus and then lock themselves away in fear), but the Father would *prop them up*.

Such an interpretation gives hope to those who aren’t seeing much fruit and seems to fit better with what Jesus taught elsewhere in John’s gospel (e.g. 6.37; 10.27-28).

The need to remain in Christ (v.4)

A second part of the process is our need to *remain* in Christ. We can’t bear fruit on our own. It only comes through developing our relationship with Him, through *remaining in the vine*.

Branches that don’t remain do not fulfil their purpose – God’s purpose. They are like a branch that is thrown away and withers and eventually is burnt up. The point is not about whether you lose your relationship with Christ or not, it is simply that people who don’t have a growing and developing relationship with Christ become

unfruitful and don't fulfil God's purpose. It is fruit that shows we are followers of Jesus (v.8).

The promise of bearing fruit (vv.5, 7-10)

Jesus goes on to explain that if we remain in Him we *will bear fruit* (vv.5, 8; see also v.17). It is a *promise*. That's important. Fruitfulness is a *promise*. This promise is made real *through prayer* (v.7). How can we have the kind of prayer life that we receive whatever we ask for? The answer is along the lines that, if we have a growing relationship with Christ, we know how to ask according to His will. When we ask according to His will, our prayers are answered.

When we know that fruitfulness is a *promise*, it can deliver us from striving and even help us avoid spiritual burnout!

God wants us to be fruitful.

So how do we *remain in Christ and therefore bear fruit*?

Remaining in Him (vv.9-17)

Jesus says that we remain in His love by *obeying His commands* (vv.9-10), and then sums those commands up as *love one another* (vv.11,17).

Loving one another is something we can't do on our own. We need community. We need each other.

You can't *remain in Him* and bear fruit to God's glory *on your own*. It's something that we accomplish *together*.

As we obey His commands we develop *friendship* with Christ (v.14). Our friendship with Christ, like any friendship, has to be developed. It's not achieved by a one off decision in a meeting.

As we develop our friendship with Him, He reveals Himself and His plans to us (v.15).

Recognising God's purpose for us (v.16)

Jesus brings His talk on bearing fruit to a close with the assurance that *He has chosen and appointed* His disciples to bear lasting fruit.

This applies to us as well. Paul says in Romans 7.4 that Christ's work on the cross was so that we might *bear fruit for God*.

You were chosen and appointed by Jesus *to bear fruit for God*.

What does that fruit look like? Anything in our lives that brings glory to God! In the context of John 15, it is to do with people coming to know Christ (see also John 4.35-36). In Galatians 5.22-23, it is connected to Christian character.

The picture that Jesus paints by revealing Himself as the *true vine*, is one of a God who has chosen us to be fruitful and has shown us how we can bear lasting fruit.

Questions for reflection

The process of fruitfulness

How do you think some Christians understand *bearing fruit to God's glory*?

What do you think God's *pruning* looks like? Why should *pruning* encourage us?

The promise of fruitfulness

How does knowing that fruitfulness is a promise keep us from burning out?

How can we help each other to keep believing the promise and keep developing in prayer?

Remaining in Him

How is *loving one another* such an important part of remaining in Christ?

“He chose us and appointed us to bear fruit” – how does that statement, based on John 15.16, impact your expectation of bearing fruit for God?

Declaration

Thank You Father that Jesus is *the true vine*. Thank You that through remaining in Him, I can bear fruit to Your glory (John 15.8).

Thank You that You chose me and appointed me to bear fruit that would remain – just like you chose and appointed the original disciples (John 15.16). That means that You are totally committed to me. You have determined that I will be fruitful.

Thank You that You remove from my life things that prevent me being fruitful. I will trust You even when it feels as though you are removing things that are good. I can be confident that when you remove things that are good, it is to make room for things that are better.

I will believe Your promise that by remaining in Christ I will bear *much* fruit. The fruit of Your Spirit will be displayed in my life (Galatians 5.22-23). And I will expect the fruit of lost people finding Christ (John 4.35-36). And this fruit will bring You glory.

I will love my brothers and sisters in Christ and so remain in Christ's love. And as I remain in Him, I will grow in friendship with Him and discover more of His will (John 15.11,17).

Your promise of an effective prayer life will become a reality as I pursue my relationship with Christ (John 15.7,16).

Thank You that I can be confident of living a fruitful life without striving or burning out by remaining in Christ. Thank You for the revelation of Jesus as the *true vine*. Amen.

The Light of the World

“When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” (John 8.12)

Reading: John 1.1-9; 3.19-21; 8.12; 9.5; 11.9-10; 12.35-36, 46)

The themes of *light* and *darkness* run throughout John’s gospel.

Jesus is presented as *the true light* (John 1.9). In his letters John picks up this theme of *light* and refers to Jesus once again as the *true light* (1 John 2.8).

We will unpack below the meaning of Jesus as the *light*. Before we do that, it is important to note some of the background to this theme, especially the way it is used in the first chapter of John.

John is making a huge statement. He is saying that it was through Jesus that the world was created. He was the *light shining in the darkness*. John 1 is therefore the New Testament counterpart of Genesis 1. Genesis 1 reveals how God created the world through His word. John 1 reveals that the word was a person, namely the Son of God who became incarnate in Jesus. Once again, Jesus is presented as God and at the same time as revealing God to us.

So how are we to understand these sayings about Jesus being the *light*?

The Light overcomes darkness (John 1.5; 11.9-10)

Perhaps the most obvious quality of light is its ability to overcome darkness. When a light is lit or switched on, the darkness vanishes.

Light was one of the first things that God created (Genesis 1.3). John explains that *the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it*.

What is true in the natural is also true in the spiritual. Jesus overcomes the darkness. In John's gospel, darkness symbolises sin or evil (e.g. John 3.19). We do not overcome the darkness by trying to "switch it off", but by switching on the light. We overcome spiritual darkness by "switching on the light" of Jesus.

The Light is dispersed to everyone (John 1.4,9)

The light of Jesus isn't restricted to one group of people. The light of Jesus is for *everyone*. He is a *light for revelation to the gentiles* (Luke 2.32). In other words Jesus is the light for the whole world – even for those who are currently far from Him.

In John 16, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit is at work in people's hearts "switching on the light" (vv.7-11)

It's good to remind ourselves that it's *His light* that dispels the darkness in the lives of lost people. Our job is simply to let the light shine!

The Light brings direction (John 8.12; 12.46)

Jesus said that, because He is *the light*, those who follow Him will never walk in darkness. They will *have the light of life*.

When we follow Jesus, we never enter darkness. Even when we are not sure of the way, He promises to guide us. Our priority is to follow Him.

Following Him means that we are protected from the enemy's schemes (*walking in darkness*).

And, positively, it also means that we will have *plenty of light to live in* (8.12, *The Message*).

In his first letter, John teaches us how we can live in the light:

“Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble” (1 John 2.10).

In the previous verse he says that if we claim to be in the light, but hate our brother or sister we are in darkness.

Living in the light of Jesus involves healthy relationships with one another.

The Light gives us a new identity (John 12.36)

Jesus says that by believing Him we gain a new identity. We become *children of light*:

“Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.” (John 12.36)

Paul makes this point in Ephesians:

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.” (Ephesians 5.8)

Sometimes we can feel so overwhelmed by darkness that we think we are part of the problem! But we’re not! We are part of the solution. We are *children of light*.

Jesus extends this image even further in the sermon on the mount. He says that *His disciples* are the *light of the world* (Matthew 5.14). Those who follow Jesus become so like Him that *they* become – like Him - the *light of the world*. God’s people, His church, are the *light of the world*.

Jesus as the *light of the world* reveals to us that God wants us to know Him as one who gives us direction and a new identity. He *wants* to guide us in ways that do not cause us to stumble. And He wants us to see ourselves as defined by His light, not darkness.

Questions for reflection

The light overcomes the darkness

In what ways do people try to “switch off the darkness” rather than “switch on the light”?

How can we help each other to “switch on the light”?

The light is dispersed to everyone

How does knowing that the light of Jesus is for everyone give us confidence in our witness?

The light brings direction

How can Jesus promise that those who follow Him will never *walk in darkness* (John 8.12), give us confidence in our walk with God?

How does our love for each other help us to walk in the light? (1 John 2.9-10)

The light gives us a new identity

In what ways can knowing that we are *children of light* encourage us in our walk with God?

What does it mean to *live as children of light*?

What does Jesus description of Himself as *the light of the world* reveal to us about God?

Declaration

Thank You Father that You sent Your son Jesus into this world to bring light to all of humanity (John 1.4).

Thank You that His light has shone into my life and the darkness has not overcome it and never will overcome it (John 1.5).

I am no longer “of the darkness”. I am a child of the light (John 12.36; Ephesians 5.8). I am part of Your solution, not part of the problem.

Help me to live as a child of the light. Help me to love my brothers and my sisters so that I might remain in the light (1 John 2.9-10).

And I am part of Your people, Your church, which is filled with Your light and is the light of the world (Matthew 5.14). Help me to play my part in letting the light shine.

I believe that as I follow Jesus the *light of the world* (John 8.12) that I will never walk in darkness but will have *plenty of light to live by* (John 8.12, *The Message*).

Thank You that by revealing Yourself in Christ as *the light of the world* you paint a picture of Yourself as a God who wants to overcome the darkness in this world. A God who wants to provide us with reliable direction. And a God who wants our lives to be filled with His light, so that we might influence the world for His glory.
Amen.

