

John

John 1:1-21:25

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2020-05-24

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Read John 2:13-22

I. Introduction - Background information

I think I about wore out some of you with my background information on Luke. So today, I will lay out the introductory information without trying to prove each point. And we will see how that goes.

I feel no need to prove that the apostle John wrote this book. Only liberals deny it. Both the internal and external evidence is strong. But who was John? John was part of the inner circle of Peter, James, and John who were closest to Jesus, and is explicitly said to be the one loved by Jesus. In other words, John was His closest friend. But He was very close to Peter and James as well.

And I think we can make an application of even this first point - If even Jesus had close friends that He hung out with, confided in, and prayed with, then all of us need friends. And there is nothing wrong with having friends, closer friends, and best friends. And if friendship needs to be nurtured and developed in healthy ways, then what better model for us to follow than Jesus? There are many topical studies you could do in the book of John, but I think one topical study that might be fun for some of you to do is to read through the Gospel and write down everything you can find about Christ's friendship with Peter, James, and John. You will discover that He avoided the kind of unhealthy patterns that some friendships have and He deliberately nurtured friendship in certain ways. It would be a fun study.

And how close was John to Jesus? In John 19, when Jesus is hanging on the cross, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" And He said to John, "Behold your mother!" And verse 27 says, "And from that hour that disciple took her to his own house." There was something very special about their friendship. Jesus was much closer to John than he was to his own siblings. And by the way, he models how he cared for his mother and did not want her to be vulnerable. He took his family responsibilities seriously.

Let's deal with another bit of background information - the date of the book. Since everyone agrees that John was the last Gospel to be written, I don't need to prove that. But the timing of the book helps you to avoid

misunderstandings in the book. So many scholars have accused John of being an anti-Semite because of the 71 times that he calls the enemies of Christ “the Jews.” If he was a Jew, why would he do that? Why would he say, “The Jews did this” and “The Jews did that.” Well, let’s think about the date of the book. It is my belief that the book was written in AD 65. Though the Jewish leadership had persecuted Christians right from the get-go, it was not until AD 62 that the nation as a whole officially entered into a seven year covenant with Rome to destroy Christianity.¹ In AD 30 Rome had taken away the right of Israel to exercise the death penalty, but that was restored to them in AD 62, and they aggressively started using the death penalty against Christians. And if you want proof of that, you’ll have to read the notes when the sermon gets online.

So just as the Council of Trent was the turning point when Rome officially became a synagogue of Satan and no true church, AD 62 was the year that Israel officially became the apostate enemy of Christ. Now, it had acted as an enemy before that. The church had already been expelled from the Jewish synagogues and both Jew and Christian saw themselves as quite different groups. Even though John was raised as an ethnic Jew, the fact that Israel

1 This conclusion is reached from a number of strands of evidence: 1. The right of capital punishment was removed in AD 30. The Talmud declares numerous times that Israel lost the right of capital punishment forty years before the temple was destroyed, or in AD 30 (Sanh. 41a; Sabb. 15a; Aboda Zara 8b; Rosh Hashana 31a bottom; Mechilta de R. Simon p126; J. Sanh. I, 1, 18a; VII, 2, 24b; Nachamanides to Numbers xxxv, 29.). 2. The right of capital punishment was exercised in AD 62 by Anan against James, the brother of Jesus. See Josephus Antiquities, 20:200. Also see David de Sola Pool, Capital Punishment Among the Jews, (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1916) for proof that this was a lawful exercise of capital punishment and not an illegal act. Unfortunately, Pool fails to realize that the seven year period from 62-70 AD constituted a reinstitution of capital punishment and therefore he thinks that the death penalty continued unabated until 70 AD. But the overwhelming evidence (including Biblical evidence - cf. John 18:31) is that between AD 30 and AD 62, the right to impose the death penalty was removed by Rome, and then was reinstituted by Rome. 3. Rabbi Kleazar (who was still a young man in AD 70) witnessed the burning of the high priest’s daughter. 4. R. Joseph, R. Hiyya, and the school of Hezekiah all said that the Roman government allowed capital punishment up to 70 AD, but that after that date the Jewish courts were no longer allowed to do so. 5. Both the Discalpia and Origen state that the Roman government had removed the right of capital punishment in the first century. Didascalica ch. vi, 6; xix, 2. 6. Various church fathers reference a seven year covenant between Vespasian and/or Titus and the Jews. The historical background that they cite has been lost, but they treat it as history that they were familiar with. Andrew of Saint Victor (died around 1175) said, “The Roman emperor Vespasian with Titus his son made a pact of peace with those who ruled among the Jews, or composed a pact of peace with many of the Jews and effected truces for seven years.” Andrew of Saint Victor, Exposition of Daniel, on Daniel 9:27, CCCM, 53F:100. Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Ambrosiaster, Isidore of Seville, Isho’dad of Merv, Andrew of Saint Victor, and Peter of Bloise all reference a seven year period from 62-70 AD. 7. In his history of Herod the Great, Gerard Gertoux shows how in the years leading up to 66 AD, when Rome put the kabash on a lot of Jewish rights, Israel was once again granted the right to execute Christians if they were convicted of the crime of blasphemy, and they could flog those who were guilty of leaving Judaism. Gerard Gertoux, Herod the Great and Jesus: Chronological, Historical and Archaeological Evidence, (LULU, 2015 PhD thesis), p. 134.

had rejected Jesus, embraced the demonic system now known as Talmudism, and had spent the last three years trying to exterminate the church, John treated the Jews as a separate community both sociologically and spiritually, and he treated the Jews as being unbelievers. He certainly did not hold to a Judeo-Christian consensus. There was none. The dating of the book helps us to completely dismiss the false charge that John was antisemitic. Judaism had come to the point where they rejected a person's Jewishness if that person embraced Jesus. This is just a fact of history.

Let me give you a third bit of background information. John was one of two apostles that were commissioned to win Jews to the Gospel. So this balances out the previous point. Despite their persecution of him, he didn't hate them. Though he treated them as being under God's curse, He also loved them and sought to win them to the truth. It was part of his commission as an apostle. John 20:31 says that this was the whole reason he wrote this book to them - to convince them to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He didn't want to see them judged. After all, he was called an apostle to the Jews, and not to the Gentiles. John did not write this book to Gentiles (as so many older writers have assumed and study bibles continue to state). Even liberals like J. A. T. Robinson have now begun to acknowledge that the Jewishness of the audience is undeniable. So you have to hold two things in tension to understand the book. The first thing is that Israel was apostate and under God's curse. The second thing is that John, who is a Jew, is seeking to win those Jews to Christ. But as Jews who embraced Judaism they were outside of the faith and were treated as enemies.

Fourth, the stated purpose of the book in John 20:31 not only shows that the Jews to be enemies, but shows this Gospel to be an evangelistic tool. It's one of the reasons why so many publishers have published Gospels of John with the message of salvation highlighted so that it could be handed out to unbelievers. It is a marvelous Gospel to share with unbelievers. And unlike Luke, it is written in super-easy-to-understand Greek.

But fifth, even though there is a simplicity to understanding the Gospel message of the book, if you want to dig deeper, the Gospel of John is like an onion that reveals layer after layer of sweet and pungent truth. The book is so intricately woven together, that you can find seven different ways of outlining the book. Actually, there have been other attempts to outline the book, but I am not convinced by them. But the seven I will list for you right now are not mutually exclusive. They are layered on top of each other. This is almost as amazingly structured as the book of Revelation is. Before I preach through one of those outlines, let me list the six that could have been

used:

- First, the book outlines very well as a covenant lawsuit against Israel. John Gilmore says, “The Gospel of John is structured after legal interests and studded with sustained legal interaction.”² The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology shows³ how the whole book is a covenant lawsuit against Israel, where Israel is treated as Egypt and the world and the church is being treated as the New Israel. This makes it a logical sequence to Luke. Luke was the defense of Christianity within the Jewish courts. John is now going on the offense and saying that Israel is about to be destroyed if it does not repent. So both books are dealing with legal issues, but Luke is a legal defense that can be used by individuals, and John is a legal lawsuit against Israel. And Revelation builds on the materials in this covenant lawsuit - and explicitly says so. So that is one way of outlining the book.
- Second, a couple of books have been written showing what they call the echoes of Exodus in this Gospel. I developed a three page outline of the book through that lens that you are welcome to have. It shows how Exodus stands behind this Gospel, and how Jesus is God’s glory cloud tabernacling with man and calling Israel out of Egypt (represented by apostate Judaism) and into the promised land. So that is another thematic layer that you see in this book.
- Third, there are multiple chiastic structures in the book - and I haven’t taken the time to see if those are true throughout the book. But several scholars have detected some of the most intricate interweaving structures in this book that make it in some ways parallel to the intricate structures of the book of Revelation - also written by John.
- Fourth, several scholars have shown how every chapter of this book follows the lectionary readings that the synagogue went through in a year. So the sequence in John shows the sequence in the lectionary readings that the Jews would have been super-familiar with. Wow! Knowing what Old Testament Scriptures were behind each section of the book of John opens up the book in a whole new way. So you can see that even though this is a book for babes in Christ, it is a book that scholars still have not plumbed the depths of. It is incredibly rich.
- Fifth, others have simply traced the way the festivals of Israel structure this book. And many scholars have shown how the book is beautifully woven around the Jewish festivals.
- Sixth, you could also show how every chapter is designed to show Jesus to be the

2 John Gilmore, * (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2001), 12.

3 The whole article is helpful, but here is a snippet - “The Fourth Gospel provides the setting for the most sustained controversy in the NT. Here Jesus has a lawsuit with the world. His witnesses include John the Baptist, the Scriptures, the words and works of Christ, and later the witness of the apostles and the Holy Spirit. They are opposed by the world, represented by the unbelieving Jews. John has a case to present, and for this reason he advances arguments, asks juridical questions and presents witnesses after the fashion of the OT legal assembly.” NIDNTT, s.v. “WITNESS, TESTIMONY,” 3:1,048.

Christ, the Son of God. And that's not surprising, because that too was stated to be the purpose of the book in John 20:31. The seven "I AM" statements are a marvelous study in Jesus being Yehowah. "I AM" is the root meaning of the name, Yehowah. I wish we could touch on the seven signs and the seven I AMs, but we can't. And there are many other ways in which John shows that Jesus is the Son of God incarnate.

- And then seventh, several scholars have shown how John wove the whole book around the tabernacle of Moses and its furniture. And I basically flipped a coin and decided to use this last outline as a way of giving an overview of the book. No one outline captures everything, so there are aspects that this outline will leave out. But I think it is helpful in capturing at least one facet of what the book is about.

II. Looking at John through the lens of the tabernacle

The passage I read just before the sermon declared Christ's body to be the temple. But chapter 1 uses the word found in Exodus for the tabernacle to describe Jesus as being God's glory cloud tabernacling in the flesh. It is very God of very God dwelling among men as a man.

A. The tabernacle being set up - God tabernacling among men (1:1-28)

I want you to imagine that you are an Israelite with Moses in the wilderness. What is the first thing that you would notice as you got out of your tent in the morning? Well, since the tents all faced toward the tabernacle, you would have been confronted with the tabernacle every time you opened your tent flap. And the most prominent detail about that tabernacle was the huge, bright white cloud that came out of the Holy of Holies and went up into the sky. You couldn't miss it. At night it was a fiery pillar and during the day it was a bright cloud. According to Exodus 40, for forty years, twenty four hours a day the Israelites knew that God was in their midst because of the light from the tabernacle.

That is where John starts this Gospel; God tabernacling with man with the brightness of His glory. He doesn't wait for you to find out that Jesus is God. He has no problem with spoilers. The very first verse declares "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And it goes on to say that this Word came down out of heaven and lived among men. And the words that describe Him are all allusions to the tabernacle and glory cloud in the wilderness. The word light occurs in verses 4,5,7,8 and 9. The words glory, tabernacle, fullness, testimony and witness all hark back to that tabernacle. Look at verse 14 for example: "And the

Word became flesh and dwelt among us” [The Greek literally is “tabernacled among us.” One version has, “pitched His tent among us.”] “and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John starts by describing God setting up a new tabernacle or temple for Israel - and that temple was Christ; and the glory cloud was God the Son come to earth to dwell among men.

And John describes it in a way that makes you want to fall down and worship Jesus just like the believing Jews at the time of Moses fell down to worship God as He was manifested in the tabernacle’s glory cloud. But certainly this covenant lawsuit is going to make it clear that when Israel rejected Jesus and declared war on Jesus, they were rejecting God Himself and declaring themselves to be Egypt, not Israel. And so two of the other outlines layer over this one. But let’s move on with this outline.

B. The doorway - the issue of faith (1:1-51)

If you were in ancient Israel, you would notice that this tabernacle had a wall around it that excluded people, and it has a door at the front which included people. It wasn’t enough to be an Israelite facing this temple. Hebrews tells us that many of those Jews saw the glory cloud and yet they died in unbelief. They never entered through this door by faith. That’s one of the central messages of this book - you must enter the door by faith; you must have faith in Jesus. Anyway, the same unbelief that was present at the time of Moses was witnessed by the apostle John. Though Jesus tabernacled among men as the light of men, verse 5 says “the darkness did not comprehend it.” Verse 10 says, “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.” It is not enough to know about Jesus. You must know Him experientially and be united with Jesus by faith. And so verses 11-13 say,

He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in His name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And this whole chapter speaks of those who were sought by Jesus and who entered in by faith. They came through the door.

C. The brazen altar for sacrifices - meeting Christ our substitute (1:29-51)

But (and here is the third point) the moment you do enter that tabernacle, you are confronted with the altar for sacrifices; you are confronted with the realization that even though you have faith (in other words, you have come

through the door) you still need the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ. The closer you get to the holiness of that Shekinah Glory, the more you tremble and realize your own unholiness. And this is where Jesus represents the tabernacle sacrifices. Look at John 1:29:

The next day John sees Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! Verse 36 says, And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

Jesus was represented by the sacrifice, the priest and the altar all rolled into one. In verse 51 Christ alludes to an even earlier altar and an even earlier house of God that Jacob experienced in Genesis. Look at verse 51:

And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

If you know your Old Testament you will recognize this to be a reference to exactly what happened to Jacob in Genesis 28. Jacob slept on the ground with his head on a rock and God gave Him a dream of a staircase with angels ascending and descending from heaven. And Jacob treats this rock as both the house of God and the altar all in one. He offered a sacrifice on the stone and said, "this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You." The stone altar was the house of God and therefore the stone altar was the only stair case to heaven. This whole section revolves around the altar as the only approach to God.

Now here is an important point. Jews did not approach this altar only one time in their lives when they got saved. Every time they needed guidance; every time they needed something from God; every time they sought restored fellowship, they had to go by way of the altar. It represents repentance and cleansing. The tabernacle was arranged in such a way that it was impossible to approach God for any reason without first going past the brazen altar. We are saved through Christ's sacrifice, and every return visit to the tabernacle we must live by the power of the cross.

D. The brazen laver of water - cleansing and spiritual renewal by Christ (John 2-3)

Well, the next stop you would make as you walked into the tabernacle was the huge brazen laver of water. It was a huge water reservoir that sat on a high pedestal and had water faucets all around it where you would cleanse yourself ceremonially. And I think the order here is significant. You couldn't get to this place of cleansing and refreshing without first passing by the brazen altar that we just talked about. And Galatians 3:13-14 applies that - it says that the Spirit (represented by the water) couldn't be given apart from

the death of Christ (represented by the brazen altar). And even for believers there is no cleansing, refreshing or empowering apart from forgiveness. This is a routine that we must have in our lives. We go to Christ for forgiveness and then go to the Holy Spirit for His empowering.

In the Old Testament there were a large number of baptisms or washings of purification. Every time you sinned there was some type of purification. All of them pointed to the work of the Holy Spirit. And chapters 2-3 are preoccupied with the fulfillment of these types. Let me direct your attention to a few of the references to water purification in this section. Chapter 2:6:

Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim.

Since this was describing the turning of water into wine John could have just said that they were water pots. But he emphasizes the fact that they were water pots for ceremonial purification. He is connecting it to the ceremonial law. So that's how he layers this outline upon another layer of seven signs of Christ.

Let me give some other examples. In verses 13-22 we have the familiar cleansing of the temple. Then in chapter 3:5 Christ says, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Look at chapter 3, verses 22-26:

After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. For John had not yet been thrown into prison. Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified - behold - he is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!"

I think you can see how purification plays a key role in these two chapters.

Well, all of that represented the new life and the ongoing cleansing by the Holy Spirit. There are other themes in these chapters too, but the changing power of the Spirit is clear. Before you can enter into the Holy Place in order to have communion with God, you must come through the door, sacrifice on the altar, and be cleansed at the laver. Perhaps you have grieved God this morning and you are hoping for the power of the Spirit in your life. You will have to backtrack your steps to the altar before that will happen.

Before we can find the illumination of the candlestick or the nourishment of the table we must first get right with God. The point is, don't ever justify or rationalize your sins. It will hinder your coming close to God's glory cloud.

***E. The table of shewbread loaded with 12 cakes and chalices
- spiritual nourishment from the living bread (John 4-7)***

Let's move on to the next part of the tabernacle, which is the table of shewbread that is loaded with 12 cakes of bread and chalices of wine, which represent spiritual nourishment. This is all of chapters 4-6. Now chapter 4 might appear to continue the water theme, but any water that is mentioned here is for drinking, not for purification. It's nourishment that He is talking about. Verse 14 says,

Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life. Verse 32 says, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." There is mention of wine in verse 46. The story of chapter 5 occurs in the context of a feast day. The whole of chapter 6 is preoccupied with Christ as the living bread and the need for disciples to eat His flesh and drink His blood. Chapter 7 is laid in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles. In 7:37 He says, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

All of this points to spiritual nourishment, growth, fellowship, feeding at God's table. If you look at the illustration of the tabernacle in your outline, you can see that the table of shewbread is in the Holy Place. Communion was a time of special closeness to God. And the priests ate from 12 loaves and drank from the wine poured out before the Lord while the people ate outside. But I think the name that is given to the bread is interesting in its parallel to John. It is called in the KJV "shewbread." It is literally rendered: "the bread of your presence." The bread of your presence! Jesus was pointing out that His work ushers us into the presence of God. And in His presence is satisfaction and fullness joy.

Now if you have never experienced that kind of fellowship with God; or that kind of joy; or that sense of His presence, then you may want to retrace your steps and see where you have gone wrong. There were many disciples who abandoned Christ in chapter 6. There was something wrong with their faith. Perhaps they had bypassed the bronze laver where there is death to self and the taking up of the cross of Christ; or they had bypassed the power of the Spirit represented in the laver. Fellowship, communion, nourishment, strengthening is all the heritage of God's people. But we can't ignore the way we get to the Holy Place.

I hope that this picture helps you in a concrete way to grasp at least one facet of the theology of John. There was a logical order of approach to God. And even though the book is a covenant lawsuit that is declaring Israel to be

about to be judged (in fact, the judgment would begin to fall during the next year - AD 66), he is still holding out hope to the remnant. He is showing them the way, using imagery they would be familiar with.

F. Candlestick - spiritual illumination by Christ the Light (John 8-9)

But you know, the same was true of the approach to the candlestick. The next section (chapters 8-9) is marvelously illustrated by the candlestick. It deals with spiritual illumination by Christ the Light. You could not get to that candlestick without first going through the previous furniture.

Why do many Christians lack light, wisdom, guidance? Because they are not in fellowship with God. And we find the same to be true in chapters 8-9. The concept of light pervades the next section. In chapter 8:1-12 light is used as conviction and exposing of sin. And some people think, “Oh, I don’t like that kind of light.” But we can’t ask for guidance of the candlestick in one area of our lives and reject the candlestick in another area. He ends the section by saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” He is saying (in effect), “I am what was symbolized by the candlestick.” In verses 13-20 Christ shines by means of bearing witness. In verses 21-29 by conforming to God’s will. In verses 30-59 by making us free. Chapter 9 deals with the opening of physical eyes and spiritual eyes. Right while Christ is healing the blind man’s eyes He says in verse 5, “I am the light of the world.” Chapter 9 then goes on to speak about the spiritual illumination that Christ can bring to His own and contrasts that with the blindness of the Pharisees. When you are in fellowship with Christ, He opens your eyes; He gives guidance; and He helps you to walk in the light. And the closer you draw to the Lord, the more the confusion and ignorance begins to vanish. We are not talking about something academic here. Because God inhabited the temple, the priests knew that what they were doing was more than routine ritual. It was relationship that changed them, sustained them, and guided them.

G. The Mediator - Christ as Shepherd, Priest, King, and Servant (John 10-13)

The next section of John (chapters 10-13) gives all four aspects of Jesus being our Mediator. It shows Him as Shepherd, Priest, King, and Servant - all of which are tightly connected to the temple. Just as God described Himself as the Shepherd in the Old Testament, Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd in chapter 10. I won’t take the time to develop all the parallels, but

chapter 11 presents him as the Life Giver whose death is being plotted. And of course the only way that Christ could give us life was by being offered up as a sacrifice in our place. Chapter 12 presents Him as priest and then as King. And of course the temple was His very throne room. And His ongoing intercession, rule and ministry to us is intimately tied up with the next two pieces of furniture.

H. The altar of incense for prayer - teaching disciples to pray in the name of Christ (John 14-16)

The altar of incense stands behind chapters 14-16. It represents the prayers of Christ, and according to Revelation 5:8, the golden bowls of incense, which were lit by coals off this altar, represent our prayers. So our prayers don't work without the coals of Christ's prayers. This means that every aspect of our life and of our approach to God is tied up with Christ. Jesus said, "Without Me you can do nothing."

And chapters 14-16 talk about how we can approach the throne of God. He gives a great deal of teaching about prayer, the indwelling of the Spirit, the guidance of the Spirit and the boldness with which we can ask. Take a look at chapter 14:13.

And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

Isn't that incredible? If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. Ephesians 1 says that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Every prayer request you will ever offer up for the rest of your life is already in the bank account in heaven. Your prayers are simply drawing checks on your bank account. In fact, there are riches that you will fail to ask for (but could have asked for) that are already stored up for you and ready to be distributed, but you will not get them because you do not pray. The reason we live like paupers is that we have not learned the ministry of praying in the Spirit that is symbolized by this altar of incense. In Revelation 5:8 the incense of praying in the Spirit opens that which cannot be opened. In Revelation 8:1-6 the incense of praying in the Spirit brings about revolutionary changes upon the earth. John 14-16 speaks of the privilege of access to the Father which so few Christians avail themselves of. And I don't have time to teach all of these principles of prayer, but chapter 14:15-31 tells us to pray in the power of the Spirit. In 15:1-8 He tells us to abide in Him. "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." (v. 7). And He lays out other conditions for an effective prayer life.

Prayer is to be a regular part of all who are in the household of faith. And as

we pray we can be encouraged that Christ prays for us within the Holy of Holies. And His prayers are always heard. Praise God! That means that when you link your prayers with His prayers by praying according to His will, your prayers will always be heard. But your prayers must be linked with His. That's what the altar of incense teaches us. And that's what these chapters teach us.

1. The ark of the covenant - High Priestly prayer (John 17)

As you keep moving forward you actually enter into the throne room of God; into the Holy of Holies. In the Old Testament, only the High Priest was allowed to enter this room, and He entered there to pray for Israel and sprinkle blood on the mercy seat once a year. This room was so holy that the High Priest always had a rope tied around his leg so that the other priests could drag his body out if God killed him. Ultimately, only Christ was holy enough to enter the heavenly holy of holies, and the only reason we can enter there boldly is because God sees us as holy in Christ. Christ had taught His disciples about prayer in the earlier section, but He said, "No one comes to the Father except through Me." I didn't put it into your outlines, but this Gospel actually shows Jesus to be the curtain. The reason our prayers can be effective is because Christ intercedes on our behalf. And chapter 17 is Christ's High Priestly prayer.

Much could be said about this wonderful prayer. But I want to emphasize the security that we have in His prayers - The Father always hears Christ's prayers. That's why we are secure. And people might say, "Well, what about those going to hell? Obviously the Father wasn't able to answer those prayers." Well, Jesus didn't pray for the non-elect; never has, never will. Every person that he prayed for on the cross - "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," was saved. God always hears Christ's prayers, and that's why they were forgiven. If Christ had come to die for all the sins of all the world He would have prayed for all. But when Christ prays for those that He is about to pour His blood out for He says in verse 9,

I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. This is as clear a proof of limited atonement or definite atonement as you could get. The reason Christ's prayers are so comforting is that we know the Father always answers them. There is no one going to hell for whom Christ prayed. If He were to pray for the world, the whole world would be saved and there would be no hell. But He prays for the elect, and God protects and keeps the elect. If you desire the security promised in Christ Jesus, then you must be one of those who has put his trust in Christ. In verse 20 Christ says,

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word.” And so chapter 17 is a reference to the High Priestly work of Christ in the Holy of Holies.

J. The mercy seat - the blood of Christ applied (John 18-19)

Praise God that Peter had someone to pray for him that his faith fail not. Praise God that Christ is now in the Holy of Holies always offering up intercession on our behalf. His prayers are effective because His death was effective. The next two chapters (18-19) speak of His sufferings; the offering up of His life to the Father; the sprinkling of the Mercy Seat with His blood. And you might say, “Well, that’s actually happened on the altar didn’t it?” And its true that the altar pointed to the cross. But the blood that was shed at the altar was carried into the holy of holies to atone for the sins of the people. And that’s what John is seeking to portray. Jesus took what was offered on the altar, and sprinkled it on the Mercy Seat.

K. The priest exit the holy of holies to declare that the sacrifice has been received by God and to pronounce peace and forgiveness of sins to Israel - Christ’s exit, declaration of God’s peace, and restoration of disciples (John 20-21)

But I want to end with the most encouraging section of all. Just as the High Priest of old would come out of the Holy of Holies and declare that God had accepted the blood atonement, and declare peace to the people, those were the first words from Christ’s lips after He had sprinkled his own blood on the mercy seat. Look at chapter 20:19.

Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

Those were the words of the High Priest when his job was finished - peace be with you. Hyper-preterists who say this didn’t happen until AD 70 have it all wrong. In the rest of the chapter He restores His disciples, including doubting Thomas. In chapter 21 He graciously restores Simon Peter who had denied Him. And that was the picture that the tabernacle taught: full restoration with the Father. That is what Christ actually accomplished: full restoration of believers with the Father.

Isn’t that a wonderful message? It is message that ought to change us. The more we recognize the terribleness of our alienation from God; the terribleness of our sin that we have been saved from, the more we will recognize the wonder of our salvation and of His grace. In a couple minutes we will be singing about the wonderful grace of Jesus. Christ had earlier

said, "He who is forgiven much will love much." He asks Peter, "Do you love Me?" And of course Peter was filled with love and awe at the Christ who could forgive and restore the one who had shortly before denied Him.

Do you know what the evidence of Peter's love was? It is captured in three phrases: Verse 17: Feed my sheep; Verses 18-19 dying to self and Verse 19: "follow Me." Feed My sheep, pick up your cross, follow Me. And those same three things are evidences of your own love - serving others, being willing to lay down your life for Christ, and following Jesus wherever He leads you.

It is only when we have a restored relationship with God that we can do that. It is only when we are in fellowship with God, that we can invite others into this house of God. And that was the passion of John - to invite people into the tabernacle; into union with Jesus. He said, "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

That is how this same apostle ends the last book of the Bible. He pleads with unbelievers not to find themselves forever excluded from the temple of God. In Revelation 22:15 He says, "But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolators, and whoever loves and practices a lie." But in verse 17 he says,

And the Spirit and the bride say "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

May each one of us enter into God's household provisions so richly that we are strengthened to lay down our lives and our own agendas, to follow Christ and to serve others. Amen.