



Goodbye Farewell & Amen

JOHN 13-17

9 STUDIES FOR GROUP OR PERSONAL USE

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Series Overview

This series of studies focusses on what is commonly referred to as 'the farewell discourse'. Occupying chapters 13 to 17, this section of John's Gospel takes place in the one location on the one night: a private room where Jesus and his disciples share a meal (i.e. Passover) on the night before his crucifixion.

The section contains very little in terms of narrative 'action' (i.e. events). With the crucifixion imminent, the focus is on Jesus' need to *prepare his followers* for the dreadful yet glorious moment, and for what will eventually follow. Thus, as the term 'discourse' suggests, John 13 – 17 mostly contains Jesus *talking*: teaching, instructing, and praying for his disciples before he 'leaves' them at the cross.

Authorship

The author of the Fourth Gospel is traditionally understood to be the disciple John: one of the twelve, brother of James and son of Zebedee, and author of the NT letters 1,2 and 3 John, as well as the book of Revelation. While there's not scope here for a comprehensive defence of apostolic authorship, there is good reason to hold to it, from internal evidence (e.g. the more 'intimate' encounters that are included, such as the wedding at Cana and Lazarus' resurrection, not to mention the farewell discourse itself) to external evidence such as early church witnesses (e.g. the church father Irenaeus' writing in *Against Heresies*. 3.1.2.).

Certainly, the overall thrust of the Gospel fits well with its author being a direct (and close) eyewitness to events who desires to communicate the profound identity of Jesus to those would listen. This is perhaps best expressed in the 'purpose' statement of **20:30-31**.

Purpose and Structure

John's overarching purpose is the demonstration that the Messiah/Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus. This is achieved by his weaving together of several narrative strands. The Gospel itself can be broadly broken up into four sections: two main *body* sections bookended by a *prologue* (1:1-18) and an *epilogue* (21:1-25).

In the first half of his narrative (1:19 – 12:50) John gives evidence for Jesus' messiahship in the form of seven selected 'signs' (miracles that point to Jesus' true identity). In the second half, which includes the farewell discourse (13:1 – 20:31), John shows how *Jesus ensured the continuation of his mission by preparing his followers for their mission*. This, therefore, is how we ought to approach our study of this part of John.

Throughout both main sections John also includes Jesus' seven "I am" sayings, two of which are found in the farewell discourse ("I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life" and "I Am the True Vine").

Themes and Relevance

One of the most profound themes found in John 13–17 is Jesus' teaching on the Holy Spirit – the revelation that Jesus' departure is actually a benefit to the disciples because instead of having God *with* them they would have God *in* them! And not just the original disciples, but *all* who would subsequently follow Jesus – that means us! Other themes include: the hope and reality of heaven; God's triune nature (the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and its implications for human relationship with God; and what it looks like to follow Jesus in a world fundamentally opposed to him.

All of this has deep relevance for us as God's people today, as we continue to live in a world hostile to Jesus and to those who worship him. In these five chapters Jesus reminds every follower of every age that he is with us, that he is ultimately victorious and exalted over sin and death, and that by his power and grace he will preserve us for eternity. Amen!

STUDY 1 | Predicting Denial

John 13:31–38

1. In the drama series *The West Wing*, a character is accused of not coming through with a political promise, made years earlier, to protect certain American jobs. At the end of the episode he says, “My mistake wasn’t breaking my word. My mistake was making a promise I couldn’t keep in the first place.”

Have you ever had that experience? What are some of the things that cause us not to want to keep our word, or cause us to realise we never really could – that we’d *overpromised*?

READ | John 13:31–36

2. What do you think Jesus means when he speaks of being “glorified”? In what sense is this glorification “now”?

3. What seems to be the relationship between the Son’s glorification and God’s (i.e. the Father’s)?

4. Why does Jesus tell his disciples that where he is going, they can’t follow? What might he be talking about?

5. Let's unpack the "new commandment" of **vv.34-35**.

- i. Why is it "new"?
- ii. What's its connection with Jesus' going away (**v.33**)?
- iii. What's its goal?
 - What's most powerful about this commandment?
 - What's the biggest challenge of this commandment for you?

READ | John 13:37 – 38

6. What do you think of Peter's pledge? Is it reasonable? Why/why not?

7. Consider Jesus' response. Rooster prediction aside, what do you notice about it?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

8. What does commitment to Jesus look like for us? Do you worry about 'doing a Peter'? Why/why not?

9. What might the connection be between commitment to Jesus and love for others? What might this look like in our personal lives and the life of our church community?

STUDY 2 | The Way, the Truth, the Life

John 14:1–14

1. Think of some things that, as far as you're concerned, can/should only be done 'one way'. Why is this so? What are the consequences of their being done a different way?

READ | John 14:1–4

2. Consider what Jesus says about "my Father's house". How does this help us to understand what heaven will be like?

- How would this have been a comfort to his disciples (whose hearts were "troubled")? How is it a comfort to you?

3. What is most striking to you about Jesus' description of "the place where [he is] going"?

READ | John 14:5–10

4. In response to Thomas's protest that "we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?", Jesus gives a famous reply. In what way is **v.6** an unexpected response to Thomas's comment?

5. Consider Jesus' declaration in **vv.6-7** closely. What is Jesus actually saying about himself?

- In what way is this confronting to you?
- In what way is this a comfort to you?

6. What other claims about himself does Jesus make in this passage?

READ | John 14:11–14

7. What does Jesus point to back up his claims about himself and the Father?

- What has John recorded elsewhere in his gospel that backs this up?

8. What do you think Jesus means when he says that those who have faith in him “will do even greater things than [my miracles]”?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

9. How does the cross help us to understand Jesus' words in **v.6** about Jesus being "the way, the truth, and the life"?

10. What difference does this make to:

- How you think about and relate to God?
- How you think about and relate to others?

STUDY 3 | The Counsellor's Coming

John 14:15 – 31

1. When you think of the Holy Spirit, what comes to mind?

READ | John 14:15–21

2. What do you think is the link between love for Jesus and obedience to his commands (v.15)?

In his Gospel, John has recorded several prior mentions of “the Spirit” (1:32-33; 3:5-6, 8, 31-34; 4:23-24; 6:63; 7:37-39). However, the following section is the first explicit description of the Holy Spirit’s nature and work. The connection between the Spirit’s ministry and Jesus’ imminent departure should not be overlooked.

3. Look closely at vv.16 and 17. What does Jesus say about the Spirit? How is the Spirit described? If it helps, make a list.

- How does this description compare with what usually comes to mind when thinking of the Spirit?
- In what ways are you encouraged by this description of the Spirit’s nature and work? In what ways is it challenging to you?

Perhaps one of the most important contributions of Jesus' teaching here about the Holy Spirit is the revelation that the Spirit is not an impersonal force, but a person. Jesus describes the Spirit's nature and work in personal terms ("he", "counsellor"). The original Greek word (*paracletos*) meant 'one who is called alongside', and conveys the idea of an encourager in the sense of a legal consultant. Just as Jesus had encouraged and assisted his disciples, the Holy Spirit would be there for them – and for us.

READ | John 14:22–31

4. Consider the language of "the world" (v.17, 19; Judas' question in v.22; Jesus' comment in reply in vv.27, 30-31). What do you think it means? What clues are here in Jesus' words that might help us understand what is meant by "the world"?

5. Who is "the prince of this world" (v.30)? What might Jesus mean when he says that he "is coming"?

6. Jesus says in vv.25-26 that the Holy Spirit will carry on teaching Jesus' followers in his absence. How can we be sure that a teaching is from the Holy Spirit?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

7. We all know what it's like to feel troubled and afraid. How then should we understand Jesus' promise in **v.27**, "my peace I give you"?

- Does this promise encourage you? Why/why not?

8. What difference does the personhood of the Holy Spirit make to:

- Your prayer life?
- Your gospel witness?
- Your Christian fellowship?

STUDY 4 | Vines and Branches

John 15:1–17

1. Do you have experience with gardening activities such as grafting and pruning? What would you say is the point of them? What difference does doing/not doing them make?

READ | John 15:1–8

2. What do you think Jesus means by “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener”? (cf. **Psalm 80:8-19; Isaiah 5:1-7**)

3. In light of this, why does Jesus urge his disciples to “remain in [him]” (**v.4**)?

- What might this look like? (cf. the language of “pruning”/“cleaning” in **vv.2-3**)
- What can we do to ‘remain’ in Christ?

4. What does Jesus say will be “[his] Father’s glory”? In what way will this bring glory to the Father?

READ | John 15:9–17

5. Consider **vv.12** and **17**, and compare them with **13:34-35**. Why do you think Jesus keeps returning to this theme?

6. Jesus describes the greatest way this principle is expressed: in the laying down of one's life for his/her friends (**v.13**). This, Jesus effectively says, is the expectation I have of all my followers (**v.14**).

Is Jesus justified in 'commanding' this of his disciples/us? Why/why not? Consider Jesus' words in **John 10:14-18**.

7. What do you make of **v.16**? Can Jesus' followers ask for whatever we want?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

8. Have you experienced "pruning" (or "cleaning") as part of the vine?

- What was hardest about it?
- What helped you get through it?
- What has been the benefit of it?

9. It's all well and good to know that Jesus calls us to "love others" (repeatedly, it turns out). It's another thing doing it.

What do you find hardest about it? What helps/has helped you to do it faithfully?

STUDY 5 | Facing the Haters

John 15:18–25

1. In the Pixar classic *Toy Story*, Rex the dinosaur, when effectively asked to pick sides in a dispute, memorably cries out, “I don’t like confrontations!”

Is that you? If so, what is it about ‘confrontations’ don’t you like? The confrontation itself? Whether you’re in the right/the wrong? Whether you have support?

READ | John 15:18–21

2. Take note of how this section begins in **vv.18-19**. Bearing in mind that this is all one discourse, compare it with what Jesus has just said in **v.17** (and **vv.9-13**, too).

What strikes you about it? What is the effect of this contrast (think about what Jesus says concerning ‘love’ and ‘hate’, and how/to whom he applies them?)

3. What do you think Jesus means when he says in **v.20**: ‘No servant is greater than his master’?

4. Do you think this language of the world’s ‘hating’ Jesus’ followers is a bit extreme? Why/why not?

- In what way has this been part of your experience, or the experience of someone you know/know of?
- If the world doesn't 'hate' us, have we failed to follow Christ fully?

READ | John 15: 22–25

5. To whom do you think Jesus is particularly referring in **v.22** (cf. **vv.24-25**)?

- In what way is this also addressed to us as twenty-first century non-Jews – indeed, to all people (cf. **John 20:30-31**)?

6. Lots of people who 'hate' Jesus and his followers would argue they have a reason/many reasons for their hate. What might some of those reasons be?

- In light of this, in what way is Jesus' quotation/declaration in **v.25** still accurate?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATIONS

7. The day after this conversation the world's hate of God's One and Only Son would manifest itself most devastatingly in Jesus' arrest, abuse, mistrial, and crucifixion. In light of the cross (i.e. Jesus' death), consider again Jesus' words in **vv.18-21**.

- In what ways can this be considered a real possibility for us, here in Western Sydney?

8. What difference does this reality make to:

- Your prayer life?
- Your Christian fellowship?
- Your gospel witness?

STUDY 6 | The Counsellor's Work

John 15:26 – 16:15

1. Think of a difficult time when you needed help and support, and someone provided it. Why did you need it? What difference did their support make? Was it the person or what they did – or both?

READ | John 15:26 – 16:4

2. Jesus returns to the subject of the Holy Spirit, reintroducing him in almost identical terms to **14:16** (the 'Counsellor'; given by Jesus; from the Father; the Spirit of truth). Here, however, Jesus says an additional thing about what the Spirit will do.

What is it? And how does it connect with the disciples?

3. Consider Jesus' sketch of the disciples' future (**vv.2-4**). What about it was particular for their circumstances?

- In what ways does it apply to us and our circumstances?

READ | John 16:5–15

4. Considering how great an experience it was having God with them in the person of Jesus, why does Jesus say that “it is for [the disciples’] *benefit*” that he go away (v.7)?

5. How do you think the Counsellor “convicts the world about sin, righteousness and judgement” (v.8)?

6. Who is “the ruler of this world” (v.11)? In what way, at the point of time Jesus is speaking, has he “been judged” (cf. 12:31-32)?
 - What encouragement would the disciples have taken from this? What encouragement do you take from this?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

7. Consider Jesus’ words in v.13. What do you think he means when he says the Holy Spirit will guide Jesus’ followers “into all the truth”, and that he will continue to speak after Jesus’ departure (“declaring [...] what is to come”)?
 - In what way is this a comfort to you? In what ways is it a challenge?

8. What difference does the work of the Holy Spirit make to:

- Your Christian fellowship?

- Your gospel witness?

STUDY 7 | Grief Turned to Joy

John 16:16 – 33

1. Grief and joy are universal human experiences; the longer we live in this world the more we experience of both.

Consider: why do we grieve? What does it indicate – and is there any value in it? Likewise, consider joy: why do we rejoice? Can grief and joy ever be linked? Have they in your experience?

READ | John 16:16–22

2. Look closely at **vv.16-19** – at John’s reportage of Jesus’ words and the disciples’ words. What phrases keep coming up? What does this suggest to us?

3. When Jesus speaks of his being unseen “in a little while” then seen again, also “in a little while”, what do you think he might be talking about? Why?

4. The lack of understanding on the part of the disciples is notable. Why do you think this is?

5. What seems to be the fundamental point of Jesus' childbirth analogy?

- How does the idea of 'necessary pain leading to great joy' sit with you? Does that resonate at all with your experiences? Is it the best way to understand Jesus' teaching here? Why/why not?

READ | John 16:23–33

6. In vv.23-24, 26 Jesus makes some big promises about what the disciples can expect if they ask the Father for something "in my name". What can we expect when we pray 'in Jesus' name'?

7. The word in v.33 translated "suffering" in the Holman can also variously be translated "trouble" (NIV) or "tribulation/distress" (ESV). As we well know, living in this world means all people at one time or another experience suffering, trouble and distress of various kinds.

What do you think Jesus means when he tells his disciples "you will have suffering/trouble/distress in this world"?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

8. What do you think it means for Jesus to say "I have conquered the world"?

- What difference would that have made to the disciples?

 - What difference does it make to you?
- 9.** How can we respond (and so experience “peace”) when facing suffering/troubles/distress from ‘the world’?

STUDY 8 | Father and Son

John 17:1–5

1. Can you think of a relationship in which you experience/have experienced complete, mutual joy? Why do you think that is/was? What is/was the key to that relationship?

READ | John 17:1–5

2. What are some of the things we learn about the relationship between the Father and the Son? If it helps, list them down. In particular, what role does 'glory' play in the relationship?

3. Consider the language of "all" in v.2. Is Jesus talking about the same "all" each time? Why/why not?

- What are the implications of this for your understanding of salvation?

4. How does Jesus define 'eternal life' here? To what and whom is it linked?

READ | Psalm 2

5. Describe the relationship between:

- The LORD and His Anointed One/The Son

- The LORD and kings/earthly rulers

6. How does **Psalm 2** help us better understand the “glory” and “authority” Jesus speaks of in his prayer?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

7. What difference does this insight into the Son’s relationship with the Father make to:

- Your Christian fellowship?

8. On the one hand, this is uniquely a prayer from the eternal Son to the eternal Father. On the other hand, Jesus prays this prayer aloud for his disciples to hear.

With this in mind, how might we use this prayer to inform our own prayers to God (who through Christ is our heavenly Father, too)?

STUDY 9 | A Prayer for Those Who Follow

John 17:6–26

1. Think about the sorts of things you tend to ask/desire people to pray on your behalf. Are they all manner of things, spiritual and otherwise? Or do you reserve prayer requests for strictly 'significant' things? Why/why not?

READ | John 17:6–12

2. Describe the 'chain of revelation' depicted by Jesus in **vv.6-8**.

3. Consider how are the disciples are referred to in **vv.9-10**. What strikes you about it?

- Does this encourage you in any way? If so, how?

4. Jesus prays that the Father would protect his disciples "by your name that you have given to me" (**v.11**). What power exists in the name of the Father?

READ | John 17:13–19

5. What do you think Jesus means when he says that “[the disciples] are not of the world as I am not of the world” (v.14)?

6. How might God “sanctify” those who follow Jesus (vv.17, 19)?

READ | John 17:20–26

7. Whom else does Jesus pray for? In what way would this have been an encouragement to the disciples?

- In what way is this an encouragement to you?

8. Why do you think Jesus prays that future believers will “be one” (v.20)? What do you think might be the connection between unity and evangelism?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

9. Consider Jesus’ prayers that the Father would “protect” his disciples and followers. How should we understand that protection in the light of two thousand years (and counting) of Christian persecution?

- Does this challenge you or encourage you – or both?

10. What difference does Jesus' prayer on his disciples' – and your – behalf make to:

- Your Christian fellowship?

- Your gospel witness?

