

The Messiah is Jesus

Selected Scriptures

As we come to the word of God I would invite you to take your copy of the Scripture and turn to the Gospel of John chapter 20 for this message entitled, “The Messiah is Jesus.” We are launching into a verse-by-verse exposition of the Gospel of John, but we are not starting at 1:1 today.

The last few weeks I’ve been preparing for this study by studying the book as a whole. In the process it seemed to me that before we start working through it verse by verse, it would be helpful for us to frame this Gospel in its biblical and historical context so that we would understand John’s purpose for writing it. This would then enable us to approach it with the right mindset as we consider how this book applies to us.

So to begin to construct this frame, LOOK at John 20:30-31 with me. . . .

This is the purpose statement of the book. It tells us in no uncertain terms why John wrote it and what he hoped would result in the lives of his readers. John tells us why he included what he did and why he excluded what he did. This is helpful for us—perhaps more helpful for us than it was for the original readers because it helps us understand why his Gospel is so different from Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Those three Gospels are called the Synoptic Gospels because they each provide a similar telling of the life and ministry of Jesus, in their own ways and with their own emphases. John, however, is very different. John only records two miracles that are also found in the other Gospels, and much of the teaching of Jesus that John records is not repeated in the other Gospels. There is a lot of content of the life and teaching of Jesus that John does not include.

Further, while the other Gospels provide a basic chronology of the ministry of Jesus, John only gives us snippets of his three-year ministry, focusing mostly on his ministry in Judea and Galilee, and particularly when Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Passover and other feasts over His three-year ministry.

Why is the Gospel of John so different than the other Gospels? Not because John has a different perspective than the others, or because He understood Jesus differently, or remembered things differently. No, John’s Gospel is unique precisely because of what he says here in 20:30-31—he had a narrow purpose and goal, namely, to provide irrefutable evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. And the necessary response to that fact is to believe in Him and embrace Him as

such. And the result of believing in Jesus as the Messiah is that you experience life—not just life after death, but new life today in the here and now.

But to understand why this is so compelling for John and how it should impact you and me today, we have to understand the biblical expectation and hope for the Messiah. I don't know how to more strongly and clearly and directly say this: The Gospel of John, indeed the whole Bible, will not have its necessary effect on our lives until we understand as fully as possible what it means that Jesus is the Messiah.

Let me put it this way: We cannot be the people God calls us to be unless we rightly understand what it means that Jesus is the Messiah. We will not be the husbands, wives, singles, parents, children, siblings, employers, employees, students, teachers, neighbors, and fellow citizens that God calls us to be until we have a fuller understanding of what it means that Jesus is the Messiah.

A limited understanding of Jesus as the Messiah limits our perspective on life, our sense of identity and purpose, it makes us vulnerable to anxiety and depression and fear, it makes us short-sighted in our decisions and prevents us from having the right priorities. I could go on to list ways that a limited or faulty view of Jesus as the Messiah has disastrous effects on our personal lives.

For the church, an inadequate understanding of Jesus as the Messiah is devastating. First and most significant, it causes anemic teaching and preaching and can lead to false teaching. It also loosens our moorings such that we more easily drift in our mission and move away from our reason for existence. It causes us to focus on the wrong goals and spend resources on less important things. A diminished view of Jesus as the Messiah leads to the wrong kind of culture in the church, the propping up of the wrong kinds of leaders, and establishing the wrong ministries.

Add to this and relevant for us even this week, a limited understanding of Jesus as Messiah prevents us from having a right perspective on politics, history, world events, climate change, and especially matters pertaining to the nation of Israel. Without right and full understanding of Jesus as Messiah, our thoughts about Israel and response to their tragedies and triumphs will be misdirected.

Now I don't have time to prove all that to you today, but if you can take my word for it for now, do you see how critical it is that we understand to the fullest degree what it means that Jesus is the Messiah? [Do you?]

Praise be to God that thanks to 26 years of faithful Bible teaching from this pulpit, and the teaching many of you have received at other churches, there is a lot of understanding that we have already. But I'm convinced that we have a long way to

go. Why do I think that? Because I know that I'm not the husband and father and pastor that I would be if my understanding was as deep and penetrating as it could be. And my guess is you would say the same thing about your life—you're not the spouse or parent or student or employee or friend that you know you ought to be. Few of us serve Christ with the zeal and passion and personal sacrifice of the apostles had who could not be stopped from proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah.

More than that, as a church, while I believe we have significant health and strength as a church, I'm convinced that there is weakness and immaturity and room for spiritual growth and development that require a growing understanding of Jesus as the Messiah. We need to grow and mature in our worship of God, in our discipleship, and in our evangelism—perhaps most especially in our evangelism. I'll come back to this at the end.

This is why I'm excited to study this Gospel with you. I'm excited for my own personal growth, and I'm excited for us as a church. I am praying that we will not be the same people and the same church when we conclude this study than we are today. Will you pray with me toward that end? Let's do that now. . . .

Let's begin with understanding the word "Messiah." I find it fascinating that the word Messiah itself is only found twice in the entire Bible in the ESV. The NASB has it a few times because in the early chapters of Matthew it mysteriously translates *christos* as Messiah, and in two passages in Daniel it understandably but uniquely among translations translates the anointed one as Messiah. Nevertheless, one would think that the term Messiah would be more frequent in the Bible.

And in fact it is. The reason it's only used a couple times is simply because the New Testament was written in Greek, not Hebrew or Aramaic. The people living in Israel in the first century spoke a mix of Aramaic and Greek, but the New Testament was written in Greek, and only on rare occasions did the authors include the actual Aramaic words, usually giving their Greek translation for clarity. With this, the word Messiah actually shows up over 550 times in the New Testament, it's just that in Greek "Messiah" is the word "Christos," or as it's translated into English, Christ.

As we'll see in our study when we get there, the Aramaic word Messiah is found only in John's gospel on the lips of Andrew who told Simon Peter that he found the Messiah; and on the lips of the Samaritan woman who spoke to Jesus about the Messiah. Apart from those two times, Christ is used throughout the rest of John's Gospel and the New Testament.

The word Christ is a title, not a personal name. So when the Bible says "Jesus Christ" as it does over 130 times, Christ is not his last name, it's his title; which is why 84 times you find it reversed—"Christ Jesus."

The word “Christ” in Greek or “Messiah” in Aramaic and Hebrew means “anointed one.” As just the word “lord” can be used of anyone who had authority, or specifically as a title for God, “anointed one” is used broadly to speak of someone set apart for a specific purpose—such as priests and kings—and it’s also used technically to refer to God’s promised deliverer.

In fact, in his excellent book *The Messianic Hope*, Michael Rydelnik commends this definition of “Messiah” from the perspective of the Old Testament: The Messiah is “a future royal figure sent by God who will bring salvation to God’s people and the world and establish a kingdom characterized by features such as peace and justice.”

If you know the ministry of Jesus well, you know that one of the challenges he faced was the attempts by the crowds to make him king. They heard his teaching, they saw his miracles, and they concluded that he must be the Messiah, so they tried to force their expectations to come to pass. The problem was, there is a lot more to the Old Testament’s teaching about the Messiah than that he would be a king and establish a kingdom.

Thinking again of John’s purpose to show that Jesus is the Messiah, John does not deny that Jesus is king, but he also doesn’t make that his focus. His focus is on other aspects of the Old Testament’s teaching about the Messiah.

Now what’s interesting is that John does not quote the Old Testament very often. But his Gospel revolves around and is anchored to the Old Testament teaching on the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed one. And John most heavily leans on the book of Isaiah. The book of Isaiah has so much prophecy about the Messiah it’s been called the 5th Gospel.

What is the Old Testament’s teaching on the Messiah? What does God reveal from creation until the coming of Christ what His people should anticipate? It would be impossible to a full study in one sermon, but I want to spend the rest of our time giving an overview from a few key passages before Isaiah, and then several key passages in Isaiah.

Understanding Messianic expectations demands that we go to the beginning. When God completed the creation of the universe and all things in it on day six, Genesis 1:31 says, “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” At that moment there was no need for a Messiah, a Christ, a Savior. There was nothing to be saved from. There was nothing and no one to redeem and restore because all creation—including Adam and Eve—functioned according to their design and lived submissively and harmoniously before God and with each other.

There were no natural disasters, there was no sickness or disease, there was no deception or corruption in relationships, there was no fear of harm among people and animals, and there was no death. All things, and all creatures, and all people—both of them—experienced unity and harmony and productivity and joy. But then Eve was deceived and Adam rebelled against God and death and corruption entered creation.

As we studied from Genesis 3 a few months ago, in the goodness and grace of God, He promised that one would come who would bring deliverance. In Genesis 3:15 the Lord says to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” This promise is a seed that grows and flourishes as we move forward in Scripture.

We know that promise was understood by Adam and Eve because 1,000 years later, in Genesis 5, Lamech made this declaration when Noah was born. He said, “Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.” It seems that he hoped Noah would be the deliverer.

Rest came, but not in the form he hoped. He died just a few years before flood where the Lord judged the entire human race and drowned all breathing creatures except Noah and his family and the creatures in the ark.

When mankind increased after the flood, the Lord confused languages at the Tower of Babel and separated the peoples on the earth, creating nations and people groups out of which He chose one man—Abram—to bless. The Lord said to him in Genesis 12, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Then in Genesis 17 the Lord repeated and expanded on this promise to include a royal line and homeland. He said, “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”

Over 500 years later, part of this promise was fulfilled. The Lord redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt and gave them the land of Canaan. Nearly 500 years passed again and because the people rebelled against God's theocratic rule through the judges and prophets, the Lord granted them their desire for a king; which, remember, is what He had promised to Abraham. And it was to their second king, David, that the Lord made this promise in 2 Samuel 7, "I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. . . . And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."

So at this point the expectation of God's people is that he would establish for them a sovereign and secure nation ruled by a king whose throne would be established forever. This was significant because Israel's history 1,500 years, from the time of Exodus though 2 Samuel, was defined by oppression and war. Starting with Abraham running through the time of David, the people of God suffered under the weight of their own sin and the sins of others.

So there was nothing more exciting than the promise of God that He would establish them in peace and security with a king whose reign would last forever. We don't know when it was written, but Psalm 2 is a psalm about the Messiah's victory over God's enemies and it tells us that the reign of God's king won't just be over Israel, but over the whole world. In response to the kings of the earth who rebel against the Lord and His Anointed One, it says in vs. 6, "I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession."

So the Messiah will reign not just over the people of Israel but even over the earth. Then in Psalm 110 the Lord adds a spiritual role to the Messiah. It says, "The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." So the Messiah will not only be a ruler over the world on a political level, he will also be the spiritual leader of the nations forever.

In addition to being a king and a priest, going back to Deuteronomy 18 at the end of Moses' life, the Lord said to Moses, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from

among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.” As generic as that may sound, the apostles in the book of Acts point to that text as a reference to the Messiah. There were many prophets who spoke for the Lord between Moses and the Messiah, but none who were like Moses. And we will see John present Jesus as a prophet like Moses.

All this is almost too hard to believe. That one man could be prophet, priest, and king over the earth is a task no human has the capacity to fulfill. In many ways, all the prophets and priests and kings of Israel were anointed ones—they were chosen and appointed by God to bring His truth to His people and lead them in the way of righteousness, lead them in battle, and establish God’s rule over their nation. They were messiahs with a little “m.” But clearly, they all fell short of accomplishing the fullness of what God promised.

So the people of Israel longed for the true Messiah—the one who would finally and forever defeat Israel’s enemies, grant them peace, and establish a kingdom of righteousness forever in the true worship of God.

We can understand that longing, can’t we? While we have not experienced thousands of years of oppression as Israel has, we see in our own nation and around the world that wickedness prevails on the earth. Truth is mocked, injustice abounds, immorality is ever-increasing, and society has been so corrupted that any leader who stands for truth, justice, and morality has no hope of gaining influence on the national level.

We long for the day when a leader will boldly speak the truth and fight for justice and promote morality. But even if we could have such a leader, we know that they would be fighting a world system set against such things. Our only hope is the Messiah—the one who will defeat His enemies, do away with failed human systems, and establish an everlasting kingdom of righteousness.

But beloved, we need far more than a king. We need more than a prophet who will proclaim truth. We need more than a priest who will stand between us and God.

There is a problem that all the prophets, priests, and kings, then and now cannot solve. And that is the problem of the wickedness in the human heart and the curse of sin in the world. The best ruler and the best system of government will always fail because sinful human beings corrupt everything they touch. If the Messiah came to establish His kingdom, we would be in trouble because we would all be condemned under His justice.

Knowing this, of course, the Lord promised a Messiah who would do far more than rule and reign and serve as a national leader of His people and rule over the earth.

The true Messiah would be a personal Messiah who would address the matter of sin in the heart, care for the needs of individual people, and bring restoration on an individual, personal level as well as national and global level. This is what we learn about the Messiah in the book of Isaiah.

Because the apostle John relies so heavily on Isaiah for his case that the Messiah is Jesus, I want to spend the rest of our time walking through three passages in Isaiah that establish some of the main expectations of what the Messiah would do. So turn over to Isaiah with me—it's the first of the major prophets, past Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. And it's before Jeremiah, Lamentations and Ezekiel.

The Old Testament has an incredible amount of specific prophecies and descriptions regarding the Messiah. And there are many passages in Isaiah especially that speak of the coming Messiah, but my purpose is to just look at a few that highlight descriptions of the Messiah that will prepare us for studying the book of John. Some of what we'll consider from Isaiah will overlap with what I've already said, but I trust it will be helpful.

In his book *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, Walter Kaiser brings together the many passages of the Messiah in Isaiah under the three roles of king, servant, and the anointed conqueror. We'll use that as our outline for our remaining minutes. The Messiah is King, Servant, and Anointed Conqueror.

Turn to Isaiah 9 to consider the Messiah as King. Isaiah 9 is a passage often read at Christmastime, but it is really about the future reign of the Messiah. LOOK at vs. 1-7.
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In verses 1-4 the prophet declares that what was once a time of darkness and oppression and contempt and anguish and war, will be replaced by a time of light and joy and freedom and peace. Verse 5 speaks of military uniforms being burned because they won't be needed anymore. Why? Vs. 6, "a child is born. . . a son is given." One will come who will bring an end to the tumult and tyranny Israel endured. On Him and Him alone will the government rest.

The names given to Him highlight His supremacy over all the leaders before Him. He is the "Wonderful Counselor" which means that all that He does will be good and wise. He is the "Mighty God" which means that He will conquer His enemies and reign with the undefeatable power of God. He is the "Everlasting Father" which is not a reference to the Father in the Trinity, but is a title that reflects His everlasting intimate love and care for His people. And He is the "Prince of Peace" which means that His reign will be defined by unmitigated peace never before seen on the earth.

And praise be to God, the Messiah's reign will not be limited and temporary. Vs. 7 says. . .

It's hard to wrap our minds around the endless glory of the Messiah's reign as king. Sometimes we look at a map of the globe today with its lines drawn around nations and we foolishly think it's always been this way. Or even if we have enough sense to know that it hasn't always been this way, we might think the world is more stable now than ever. But that's not the case. Our maps are different than they were 50 years ago, and it's likely they'll be different again 50 years from now. We forget that throughout history nations have risen and fallen, borders have increased and decreased, empires have been built and dismantled.

Until the Messiah comes to establish His reign on the earth, we ought to expect that maps need to be updated with constant shifting and changes in the geo-political markings. Why? Because human governments are anything but fixed and secure institutions. Stability will only come when the Messiah rules and reigns on the earth. And when He does, that will bring an end to the constant turmoil we see all around the globe.

But more than that, on a personal level, the Messiah's reign will have a deeply personal impact. When the Messiah establishes His reign of righteousness and justice, we won't need door locks and alarm systems and security cameras. We won't ever again shake our heads because our leaders can't get their act together. There will no longer be any doubts about the trustworthiness of information that gets spread around. There will be no fights or arguments among friends and family who have differing religious or political views. Because of the Prince of Peace, our lives will be defined by peace—peace in our homes, peace in our communities, peace among nations, and most of all, peace in our hearts.

Isaiah says more about the Messiah as king, but consider now the Messiah as servant. Turn over to Isaiah 52, and we'll start at vs. 13. . . .

In other places Isaiah speaks of the Messiah being the servant of Yahweh by focusing on His rule and reign as Yahweh's king. But here Isaiah focuses on the Messiah as the servant of Yahweh accomplishing what must be the most difficult task assigned to him—the salvation of His people by His own sacrifice. It's here that we see in most graphic detail that the Messiah will not only overcome evil by establishing a kingdom of righteousness, but He will also overcome evil by satisfying the justice of God in paying for the sins of His people.

Notice how 52:13 begins with a promise of exaltation. . . . And see how 53:12 ends with a triumphant victory. . . . But everything between those two verses seems like anything but the path to victory. This is because victory over sin cannot be won

through conquest—it can only be won through death. The victory is defined in vs. 11. . . . This victory is the making of many to be accounted righteous by taking their iniquities upon Himself.

The Old Testament drips with the blood of sacrifices because we have sinned against a holy and just God. And our violation of His perfect law brings us under the condemnation of death. The Mosaic Law provided a temporary covering for sin through animal sacrifices—but they could not eradicate sin. They needed to be repeated over and over and over again because they covered sins committed but they could not cover future sins or separate sin from sinners, and they certainly couldn't make anyone righteous.

This is the problem all people face today. We are sinners, and there is nothing we can do to remove the stain of sin from our lives. Even if we could do enough good deeds or pay enough money or do enough religious activity to convince ourselves that something we did has been absolved, the problem is we keep sinning. There is no end to penance. What all people need is for the penalty of sin to be paid, and the power of sin to be cut off, and ultimately, for the presence of sin to be eradicated.

In this text we are promised a Messiah who would do just that. He would take the penalty of our sin upon Himself and He would have such a glorious victory over sin that we would be justified—accounted righteous before God not having our sins counted against us. In the language of vs. 7, He would be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Until the coming of the Messiah, the people of Israel were enslaved by their sin—as all people are. For centuries they were under the sacrificial system which served as a constant reminder of their sin and pointed to a future ultimate sacrifice. And then when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians they no longer had a way to make sacrifices. And while the number of Israelites faithful to the Yahweh were few—they still existed. People like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azaria, Esther, Mordecai, and many more men and women. Imagine yourself in their position, dreadfully aware of their sin, unable to obey the Law of sacrifices which only compounded the weight of their sin, longing for the Messiah to come and be the final sacrifice.

Consider your own condition. If you have put your faith in Jesus' perfect life, death, and resurrection, God promises that our sins have been forgiven and we have been set free from the penalty and power of sin. And yet you and I still sin! There's not a day that goes by where we don't fall short of God's glory. There's not a moment where we are perfect, like our heavenly Father is perfect. And even though we know we're forgiven and set free, we battle sin and are weighed down by our inability to live for Christ as fully as we desire.

Do you not long for the day when the Messiah will come to take our sin away? Do we not ache for the day when all the vestiges of sin will be removed and we'll not only be accounted righteous, but we will be righteous through and through? When the Messiah comes take us to Himself no longer will we battle with sinful lusts and desires and wrong beliefs and doubts and fear and anger and depression.

The battle in our soul between the flesh and the Spirit will be over because the sinful flesh will be done away with forever, and we will be free! If we long for Jesus the Christ to take us to Himself and perfect us in glory, how much more must those who have not believed desperately long for to be freed from slavery to sin. Isaiah 53 promises that the Messiah is the servant of the Lord who in obedience to God will give His life for the redemption of sinners.

Well not only will the Messiah be a king and a servant, He will be the anointed conqueror. Turn over to Isaiah 61 and I'll read vs. 1-6. . . .

Yes, the anointed conqueror will conquer political and military enemies, but here we see that He will conquer everything that ails mankind. Here he speaks of poverty, brokenheartedness, captives and prisoners, those who mourn, those covered in ashes, being faint in spirit, those living in ruin and devastation. Some of those are specific circumstances, but the brokenhearted, faint in spirit, and those who mourn envelopes all suffering and its impact on the soul.

The curse of sin is found in every heart and in every sector of society and throughout creation, and it produces suffering that is sometimes evident, but many times hidden. But it's so pervasive that no one can escape. We are all infected and affected.

The world is full of abuse and oppression in many forms, economic uncertainty and downturns, political oppression, all kinds of criminal activity, human trafficking and slavery, conflicts and wars, earthquakes and hurricanes and tornados. There's sickness and disease that hasten the death of our already decaying bodies. There's broken relationships and divided families. Men and women, boys and girls are hated and persecuted because of their ethnicity or religion. Though our experience of life varies from person-to-person, not one of us can escape the ravages of a sin-cursed world.

Brokenhearted, faint in spirit, and grief and mourning is the human experience.

But here in Isaiah 61 we are promised that one day a deliverer would come who would bind up the brokenhearted, comfort those who mourn, strengthen the weak, release the captives, rebuild ruined cities, and cause prosperity to abound around the world. Because we are so used to the brokenness of our world it's hard to

imagine a world free from the curse of sin. But turn back to Isaiah 11 and LOOK at the description of the new age ushered in one day by the Messiah. Vs. 1-10. . . .

These are just snapshots of the reign of the Prophet, Priest and King Messiah who will not only Himself rule in righteousness and justice, but He will transform His people, removing the curse of sin from them along with removing the curse from the earth. One day there will be true and lasting peace on the earth. One day righteousness will surround the globe. One day all that is wrong will be made right and there will be no more tears and no more hunger and no more pain. Sin and its curse will be no more.

Do you not long for this day? Do you not hope for this day? Do you not ache for this day?

The Apostle John wrote his gospel to a people who were looking for the Messiah. He wrote for those who were desperate for the Christ to come, conquer his enemies, and rule in righteousness. And John was overflowing with zeal to proclaim to them that the Messiah they longed for was Jesus who fulfilled prophecy and healed the sick and raised the dead and gave sight to the blind and taught the truth.

Jesus accomplished the most painful role of the Messiah—He gave His life for His people, He took their iniquities on Himself, paying the penalty for their sin such that forgiveness is freely offered to all who would believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

Having risen on the third day the Messiah ascended into heaven where He is waiting until the proper time to come back and conquer His enemies as establish His kingdom. But He first had to come to save a people with whom He will reign forever and ever.

Now most of you already believe this. You can't become a member of this church, let alone be a Christian without believing that the Messiah is Jesus. So why do we need to study John's gospel? Let me give you three reasons, but I'll state them as three things that I pray God will accomplish in our lives and in our church through our study in the coming months and years.

First, even if you already believe that the Messiah is Jesus, I pray that our study will give each of us a fresh understanding of the wonder and glory of the person and work of Jesus the Christ. We always need to be reminded and reinvigorated in our thoughts about Jesus and there is always more to learn about our Savior. So I pray that we will grow deeper in our knowledge of Christ so that we can go higher in worship.

Second, I pray at this study will make us more like Christ. 1 Peter 1:21 says that Christ's life and suffering not only accomplished redemption for His people, but it also models for us what it looks like to live as an image bearer of God. So as we see how Jesus interacts with sinners and sufferers, as we observe His character, His words and actions, I pray that we will grow in the grace of Christ such that our lives will be conformed to His. In this way we will grow to be the people we ought to be as we gain a fuller understanding of the Messiah.

But third, and this is what I am perhaps most eager to see the Lord do among us, I pray that this study will make us fervent evangelists and that through our personal and corporate evangelism, we will see many come to believe in the Messiah.

What we have in the Gospel of John is a passionate proclamation of the Messiah by a man whose life was saved and transformed. John never refers to himself by name in the book—he refers to himself as the one whom Jesus loved. And because we know something of John's character before Jesus changed him, I believe John refers to himself that way because he is overwhelmed by the fact that the Messiah would love such a man as him. And that sense of awe simply does not allow him to keep the good news of the Messiah to himself. My friends, far too many of us are content to keep the news of the Messiah to ourselves. We love that Jesus saved us, but we're not all that eager to tell others about Him.

If we can be honest with ourselves, we can admit, even as Pastor Leake often said, that evangelism is one of the greatest weaknesses of our church. We've grown in recent years, and the Sharing Hope ministry is helping us, but we have a long way to go. Church, we have the greatest news in the world! We know the Messiah and He has come to save sinners!

How tragic it would be if we studied this Gospel and the evangelistic needle in our hearts didn't move at all. We would deprive Jesus Christ of the glory due His name if we kept silent about His life and His work and His future return. It would be a travesty if we spent months and years studying the life of Jesus and didn't tell sinners of the forgiveness and hope that can be theirs if they would believe on Christ.

So my prayer is that the same love of sinners that compelled John to write this Gospel and that compelled Jesus to set aside His glory and come as the Messiah would grow in our hearts so that in time to come we would be able to celebrate at the baptisms of many people who came to know Jesus the Christ because we have been active and bold to spread the good news of the Messiah who is Jesus our Lord.

As we begin our study of John 1 next Sunday, may our zeal for His glory burn within us so that we would be His ambassadors in Howard County and beyond such that Christ would be magnified and receive the glory due to His name.