

Chapter 4.07 Selected Illustrations from the New Testament

This chapter illustrates ideas about the New Testament by using selected passages, mostly from the Gospels and the letters of Paul. This chapter does not try to give a sense of the New Testament as a whole. It does not defend arguments from previous chapters point-by-point. This chapter introduces the gospel of John, and it explains the increasing accommodation of the Church to everyday life.

Jesus Through the Editing.

Recall that the gospels edited Jesus' words, including using them in settings in which he did not originally say those words. Some of the intent was to argue against the rivals of the early Church, the Pharisees. Some of the intent was to use Jesus to declare the identity that the Gospel writers wished for him, such as Messiah, King, and divine Son of God. The passage from Matthew below appeared in an earlier chapter but is reproduced here as a good illustration. The parts in red and/or italics are words that reflect the genuine intent of Jesus even if they are not his exact words. The other words attributed to him are from Matthew and probably do not reflect his intent or self-image.

Matthew 25:31 – 25:46. * When the Son of Man comes in glory with the angels around him as an army, he will sit in state on his throne, with all the people of the world, from all the peoples of the world, gathered at his feet. He will divide individual people into two groups, on the left and right, much as a shepherd sorts sheep on the right with goats on the left. King Jesus will say to the people on the right, "You have the blessing of God my Father. Come, enter, and possess the Kingdom of God. It has been ready for you since [before] the world was made." Jesus continued:

"When I was hungry, you fed me. When I was thirsty, you gave me water. When I was a stranger lonely and afraid, you took me into your home. When I had no clothes, you gave me shoes and a coat. When I was sick, you nursed me. When I was in jail, you visited me." Then the decent people [on the right] will ask, "Master, when did we see you hungry and feed you, when thirsty and gave you water, when a stranger that we took in, when shivering so that we clothed you, when ill so that we nursed you, and when in jail that we visited you?"

And Jesus the King will respond:

"Understand my words: Anything you did for any of my humble brothers and sisters on this Earth, you did as much for me."

Then Jesus will say to the people on his left hand, "You are cursed. Get out of my sight. Go to the eternal Hell that is waiting for you, the Devil, and his angels."

"When I was hungry, you gave me nothing to eat. When I was thirsty, you gave me nothing to drink. When I shivered, you gave me nothing to wear. When I was ill, you gave me no care, [medicine, or insurance]. When I was in jail, you increased my time. [You found rationalizations to deny me, overlook me, and hurt me.]"

The indecent on the left will retort: "Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty, unclothed, shivering, a stranger, ill, or in prison, and did not help you?"

Jesus will declare, "Hear me. Whenever you ignored or denied any other person, no matter how small, you ignored and denied me personally."

And the indecent will go to Hell's punishment eternally. But the decent people will have eternal life. *

Blessings and Woes.

Matthew and Luke have different versions of the "Beatitudes" (blessings). In Matthew, they are part of the Sermon on the Mount while in Luke they are part of the Sermon on the Plain. Matthew softens Jesus' blunt style, and he changes the focus from simple life situations to complex relations with God. Matthew sounds like a polemical theologian while Luke sounds like Jesus. In addition, Luke has a section of "woes" that Matthew omits. Luke's list of Beatitudes is shorter. Most scholars believe the wording in Luke is older and more accurate, and that the "woes" were part of a set of Jesus' sayings that was compiled before Luke and Matthew wrote in 70-80 CE. Within only 40 years of Jesus' death, already Matthew changed Jesus considerably. Some of what Matthew has Jesus say is good in itself but it is not what Jesus said or intended. This case shows how we have to think not just about what Jesus really said or intended but also of logical extensions of his ideas and of religious ideas from other people that have become part of Christianity. The Beatitudes are not always easy to understand. Even if we think we understand them, we are not sure how they could apply to real life. I do not try to expound them here.

Luke 6:20 – 6:38. *

"How blessed already are the poor and needy because you will own the Kingdom of God.

How blessed already are hungry people because you [will be fed and] satisfied.

How blessed already are people who cry now because you will laugh [and smile].

How blessed you already are when men hate you, when they use the law to prosecute you and force you out of society, when they insult you, when they ruin your reputation so that your name is like a curse, all because you follow the Son of Man. On the day when you realize your suffering comes from following me, be glad and jump for joy because then you will have a rich reward from God. In the past, the ancestors of the people that persecute you treated the prophets that way [the prophets they now adore].

Too bad for you rich because you have already had your period of happiness.

Too bad for you over-fed gourmands because now you will go hungry.

Too bad for you who smirk now because you will cry and feel sorry for yourselves.

Too bad for you when you have a good reputation and everybody praises you because that is how the ancestors of you flatterers treated the false prophets of the past.

[You misunderstood the Law before] so instead I say to anybody with the wit to hear and

understand:

Love your enemies. Do good even to people who hate you. Bless the people who curse you. Pray for the people who are spiteful and vindictive. If a man smacks you on one cheek, offer him the other cheek too. If a man sues the coat off your back, offer to give him the shirt along with it. Give to anybody who asks you. If somebody takes your car or your cell phone, don't demand it back. Treat other people the way you want them to treat you. If you love only the people that love you, how does that make you a good person and a force for good? Even hateful people do that. If you give to people only when they are well-off enough to give back, how does that make you a good person or a force for good? Even greedy people lend to people who can repay [because the greedy people know they risk nothing]. You have to love even your enemies and do good [to them and all other people]. Give without expecting to be paid back. Doing that, God will reward you well. You will become children of the highest God. God is merciful and kind even to sinners and ungrateful people [so he certainly will be to you]. Be merciful and kind just like your Father. Don't judge other people and they won't judge you. Don't decide other people are worthless, bad, or stupid and they won't see you that way either. Let other people get by [with their needs and foibles] and they will let you get by. Give, and other people will give to you. You will get a big, dense, honest measure of fun, joy, and useful material goods because that is what you give to other people and they will give it back to you." *

Matthew 5:3 – 5:12. *

"How blessed already are people who know how much they need God and in what ways they need God because they already live in the Kingdom of God."

How blessed already are the unhappy, depressed, and sorrowful because they will get consolation.

How blessed already are people with a gentle spirit because in the end they will control the world.

How blessed already are people who yearn for justice like a deep hunger and thirst because they will get justice and be satisfied.

How blessed already are people who show mercy because mercy will be shown to them.

How blessed already are people with pure hearts [intentions and outlooks on others] because they will see God [in the workings of the world and in their intuition].

How blessed already are people who know how to make peace and who work to make peace because God will take them as his children.

How blessed already are people who suffer abuse for justice and good because they will get the Kingdom of God [and help run it]." *

Matthew twisted Jesus too much, and Matthew did it for bad reasons. The Kings James (Authorized Version) translation from Luke is succinct about the poor: "Blessed are the poor". In Luke, Jesus' phrase for the poor ("the poor and needy") becomes in Matthew "those who know how much they need

God". Luke's "poor" became in Matthew "the poor in spirit". Matthew completely subverted Jesus' meaning and intent. Jesus gave the poor hope, and he wanted his followers to help the poor. Jesus meant the real poor, people without enough food, clothes, shelter, land, or capital. "People who know how much they need God (the poor in spirit)" are another group entirely. By looking at them, we lose sight of the real material poor. Without a philosophical guidebook, we are not even sure who the poor in spirit are. Matthew's wording opens the door to a lot of odd interpretations. Matthew's words must have made middle class and wealthy would-be followers of Jesus breathe easier but his alteration of Jesus is wrong.

Luke says the hungry will be satisfied, will be fed. Matthew changes "the hungry" to be people "who yearn for justice like a deep hunger and thirst". He does the same thing with the hungry that he did with the poor. He changed a category of real physical people with real physical needs into a category of metaphysical people with abstract needs. He subverted Jesus so as to serve the needs not of people who hunger and thirst, or even who hunger and thirst to see justice prevail, but of people who want to avoid the issues altogether.

In his woes, Luke condemns the rich clearly. He condemns people that have enough to eat while others go hungry. He condemns people that laugh first, maybe because they tend to be the powerful; so indirectly he condemns the powerful. These words would offend the people that Matthew tried to recruit, so maybe that is why he left them out.

Some of the remaining sections of Luke follow Jesus fairly closely, such as the famous "offer the other cheek". Some of Luke's words drift away from the likely words of Jesus but the intent still follows Jesus. Luke is a clear and beautiful statement of ethics in its own right. Matthew has no parallel to Luke.

The Prodigal Son.

Like Matthew, Luke also put words in Jesus' mouth. Here is a famous story, and the subject of many gospel songs and blues songs. It comes right after the stories of a man who had a hundred sheep but lost one and looked until he found it, and a woman who had ten coins but lost one and looked until she found it. Jesus narrates.

Luke 15:10 – 15:32. * "I declare to you, the angels of God feel great joy over one sinner who repents. Once a man had two sons. The younger son said, 'Father, give me now my share of your property that I would inherit anyway.' So the father divided his estate between the two sons. In a few days, the younger son liquidated his share of the estate into cash and left home for a city in a faraway land. There he quickly squandered his wealth in booze, gambling, drugs, women, bars, cars, and bad living. After he had spent it all, the economy of the country collapsed, unemployment shot up, and he could not find any job or support. So he went out to the countryside where he found a pig raiser that gave him a job. He did not get paid much and there was no food allowance. Many days he would have been happy to eat the melon rinds and leftover grits out of the pig troughs but nobody gave him even that much. One day all the drugs and foolishness wore off, he came to his senses, and said to himself, 'My father's servants get paid well and they have more than enough to eat, yet here I am sweating blood and almost starving to death. I will go to my father and plead with him, "Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I am not worthy to be your son. Please hire me and treat me as only one of your other paid servants."' So he went back

to his father's house. Even while he was still a way off, his father recognized him, and the father's heart went out to the wayward son. The father ran to greet him, threw his arms around the son, and kissed him. The son said, 'Father, I have sinned against you and God. I am no longer fit to be your son. [Please hire me and treat me as a servant.]' But the father said to his servants, 'Right now go get some new jeans, a shirt, and some shoes for my son out of my own closet. Go kill the fat calf that we had been saving for a special feast and let's have that feast tonight. Until now, this son of mine had been dead to me but he has come back to life. I had lost him but now I have found him.' No sooner said than the servants clothed the son and the celebration began.

Just when the younger son returned, the older son was out working in the fields. As the older son came back to the house, he heard the music and saw the commotion. He asked one of the servants what was going on. The servant said, 'Your brother came home, and your father killed the feast calf to celebrate because your brother returned safe and sound.' The older brother was angry and refused to go join the celebration. The father came out to see what was wrong and pleaded with the son. The son whined in retort, 'You know that I have worked hard like a slave for you for decades. I never once disobeyed you. [I never asked you for anything.] After burning up what you and I had earned on drugs, gambling, and whores, now this delinquent son shows his face again, so what do you do? You kill the feast calf for him.' The father explained, 'My son, you have always been with me and always will be. Everything I have is yours and will be yours. But how could we not help celebrate this happy day? Your brother was like the dead and has come back to life, was lost to us and now is found, [was stupid but now sees].'" *

Jesus probably did not really tell the story, Luke did. I do not know if Luke adapted a story from Jesus but no other gospel says that Jesus told this story. If Luke did make up this story and put it in Jesus' mouth, it is easy to forgive Luke because the lesson is fully compatible with Jesus' ideas and the story is a great piece of religious education.

Most people think the story ends after the first long paragraph. Originally it might have ended there and had been closer to something Jesus said but I do not know for sure. The last paragraph has a critical message. The original readers of Luke would have understood immediately that the father is God, the older son is the Jews, and the younger son is the Gentile followers of Jesus. A distant country is anywhere but Israel, anywhere foreign, where "they" raise disgusting pigs and "they" get little reward for their honest labor. Original readers of Luke would have thought: "Now that Gentiles have seen their mistake and have come back to God through Jesus, why can't the Jews accept the return of the Gentiles and join in their joy? Why do the Jews sullenly refuse to join the party by not accepting Jesus?" I think it is good that modern readers do not see the story this way anymore. They interpret the characters according to their own experiences. Most people think of some sullen member of their family who was brought back into the family fold through the kindness of other family members; some people think of an alienated workmate; some people think of old-fashioned Christians and new-fashioned Christians. We probably do not see it in terms of Jews and Gentile Christians anymore not out of any progress toward greater enlightenment but because Jews have "dropped off the radar" for so long that we forget to think of them in these terms. That is good enough for now.

Fundamental Hymns.

This section shows early ideas about Jesus as the Christ by using small excerpts, mostly from Paul.

Scholars think these excerpts are hymns that Paul and others quote but nobody knows for sure. Unfortunately, their character as hymns does not come out in translation. These pieces show ideas that predate Paul and the gospels, and thus already were current in the decade or two after Jesus died. They were used for instruction and might have been used in rituals such as baptism. I do not point out all the ideas in each excerpt that might indicate a divine Christ or might show how Christ saved. Sometimes Christ is clearly a Gnostic-emanation figure or a Wisdom figure; I do not point out those cases either. Just because some early followers of Jesus saw him as God or saw him in other exalted ways does not mean it is all true or all false; but it does mean we have to think about how Jews and God Fearers could have thought this, and we have to think about our appropriate response either way. I think the best response either way is to do what Jesus asked.

Paul: Romans 3:25 – 3:26a. * God crafted Jesus as the master tool to cut away sin, for all who believe, through Jesus' death. God overlooked the sins of the past in the same way that a master woodworker finds a way to use inferior wood, and God needed us to see in Jesus the justness of his skill. *

Paul: Philippians 2:5 – 2:11. * Make your behavior towards one another come out of your new life in Christ Jesus.

[Full] Godliness was in Jesus from the beginning
But Jesus did not cling to equality with God [the Father]
[From everything], Jesus made himself into nothing
Taking on the nature of a slave, taking on the appearance of a human,
Showing himself in human form, he humbled himself
In full obedience [to his mission and his dual nature] he accepted even death on a cross
For his obedience, God raised him from the depths to the heights
And made sure his name would be first of all names
At his name all knees would bow, in heaven or earth, and in Hell,
And every mouth acknowledge "Jesus Christ is Lord"
All to the glory of God the Father. *

The hymn probably begins with the sentence, "[Full] Godliness was in Jesus..."

Paul: Colossians 1:15 – 1:22.

* Jesus' form is our image of the invisible God
He is primary over all created beings In him, heaven and earth were created
Not only what we can see [with our eyes]
But also the invisible spiritual beings that rule over the created world
Everything was created through him and for him
He was before anything was
All things continue on through connection to him
He is head of the body of human life, of the church
He founded the church
He was first to return from the dead
Through him, all of God, by God's own choice

Came to live among us
Through him God chose to make peace with and reunite all of creation to himself
He made peace and unity through his blood that was shed upon the cross
All things in heaven and earth were brought to God through Jesus and his blood alone

In the past, you were separated from God.
You opposed him in your hearts and minds,
And so what you did could come to nothing but evil.
But now because of Christ's death in his body of flesh and blood on the cross,
You can stand before God as voluntarily choosing God,
Dedicated men, free of stain, and innocent in his sight. *

If you know the Nicene Creed, note the similarity of this passage to it. The phrase "Through him God chose to make peace with and reunite all of creation to himself" ("Through him God chose to reconcile the whole world to himself") is justly famous.

The second paragraph likely does not belong to the hymn. It fuels the terribly wrong and hurtful idea that people can do only evil and that all good comes from God and God only. This idea predated Paul and Augustine but they made further use of it.

Paul: Colossians 3:16 – 3:17. *

Invite the message of Christ to live with you in all its wealth Teach and correct each other along by following greatest Wisdom Sing to God with thankfulness in your hearts Sing psalms and songs that express the Holy Spirit through you Whatever you do, however you speak, however you act Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Giving thanks to God the Father through Jesus *

The following is definitely a hymn because Paul quotes it as such. Paul introduces it.

Paul: 1 Timothy 3:16. * The mysterious truth of our religion is certainly great and profound:

"The person who came in a body Was proven true and good as a spirit Was seen by angels Was taught to all peoples of the world Led people everywhere in the world to believe in him Let him be glorified in the highest realm of God" *

Paul: Ephesians 5:13 – 5:14 and Ephesians 5:19.

* When the light comes, then it shines on everything, bathes everything, and makes everything visible.

"Awake sleeper, Get up from your death And Christ will shine on you" *

In Paul's name: Hebrews: 1:2 – 1:4.

*But in this final age God has spoken to us in the Son, the Son to whom God gave the whole world, and through whom he had already created all levels of existence.

"The Son is the emanation of God's power And the die-mark of God's deepest being

[A stamp of evidence both on his own body and through him on all creation]

The Son sustains the world by his word of command power

When the Son had cleaned all sins

The Son took his seat at the right hand of Glory on high

Raised [by God] far above all angels

Because the rank he inherited was greater than that of any angel" *

(Pseudo) James: James 5:13. *

"Does trouble follow anyone among us?

Turn to prayer and so turn away from trouble.

Does a joyful heart beat in anyone's breast?

Let the joyful rhythm spread by singing songs of praise. *

The Gospel of John.

See the section on "Jesus and God" in Chapter 04.02 on "Illustrating Particular Topics About Jesus".

The seed that was planted in the pre-Pauline hymns, and nurtured in Paul and the gospels, blooms in John. The Gospel of John was written about 100 CE (AD), likely near Antioch in Syria. I comment on it after giving some content from it. John did not write for Jews in Israel but for Diaspora Jews that had little Aramaic or Hebrew but did know Greek and Greek ideas, and for God Fearers and Gentiles. Already by the time of John, his mission has given up on Jews in Israel and his mission had transformed accordingly. John wrote in controversy with (at least) Jews who were more conservative (Jesus could not be really God) and with Jews and Gentiles who were more extreme (Jesus was fully only God and hardly human). It would take too much space to show how John's arguments with those groups shaped his theology and how John's theology anticipated later Church theology. You will get the gist of what you need to go on.

The best introduction to John that I can give is John's own opening, which is a long hymn to the Christ. This hymn is not as early as the hymns above but probably predates the Gospel of John. John might have reworked it. He did an amazing job. It is quite a piece of both philosophy and poetry. The paragraphs about John the Baptist are likely not part of the original hymn. They are cleverly woven into the hymn so that they do not disturb it much. Try reading the piece both with the paragraphs and without them. In the first paragraph about the Baptist, some passages about light might be derived from this hymn or other similar hymns.

John 1:1 – 1:18. * At the start of creation, the Word [Jesus] already existed.

The Word lived in God. God existed and the Word existed.

So the Word existed in God at the start,

And through him [the Word] all things opened into existence.

Not one thing was created without the Word.

All created things shared the life of the Word.

The life of the Word is the light of all people.
The light pierces the dark, and the darkness has never beaten it.

Then John arrived, sent from God. John came to proclaim the light so that all people might believe in the light because of John's own words. John was not himself the light, he only came to proclaim the light. The real light that illuminates all people was at the time of John just forming for itself a body for this world.

He [Jesus, Word, Light] came into the world but the world did not recognize him even though he had created the world and the world depended on him for its being. To all people who did recognize and receive him, to all who transferred their loyalty to him, he bequeathed the right to become themselves Children of God, no longer dependent on human birth, and not limited by the thinking and desire of the body, but the true Children of God himself. So the Word became flesh. The Word came to live among us. We saw the glory of the Word, the glory that can surround only the Father's son, fully of grace and truth.

Here is what John proclaimed about him. John shouted, "This is the man about whom I said, 'Although he comes after me [in time], he far outranks me. Even before I was born on this world, he already existed in the greater world.'"

From his abundance of grace we received layers of grace. The Law came through Moses but the Truth came only through Jesus Christ. No person has ever seen God but only God's Son has seen him. God has revealed to us his Son who is nearest to God's heart. *

Jesus almost certainly never spoke like this, and I doubt that he thought like this. This passage is really not about Jesus at all but about an idealized Christ. It is beautiful and it is inspiring to some people but it is probably not about the person from whom we want to learn morality. For all its beauty, it makes me sad because it leads people away from Jesus to an unreal Christ.

The term "Word" translates the Greek "logos", which is the same root as "logic", and is the "ology" or "ologist" in terms such as "anthropology" and "sociologist". It means something like "the logical structure of being, about which we have faith that it comes from a benevolent mind, and about which we have faith that it can be captured in orderly human speech". Notice that: word equals being equals light equals emanated-level-of-God equals life equals creation equals fullness equals governance equals grace equals truth equals child of God. I do not try to point out what is in all these connections. Modern people would not immediately understand that the real Word, Jesus incarnate, is now a substitute for the Law, derived from Judaism. The Jewish Law was divine words. If Christians can find words that are even more divine, they overcome and subsume the old divine words of the Law. By making the Christ into the Word, the Christ takes the place of the former divine words of the Jewish Law. The new abstract Word takes the place of the concrete practices of the old Jewish Law. Christianity absorbs Judaism.

There is nothing here about Jesus' message. The Word is not Jesus' message or anybody's message with any particular content. The Word is an abstract entity that means "knowledge of knowing" but not knowledge about any real thing in particular. Christians had a lot of leeway to fill the Word in with whatever details suited particular groups. This Word is all about the status of the Christ. Belief and devotion are enough. This text is a basis for the Nicene Creed.

Several passages from this hymn are famous and now stand alone, such as “So the Word became flesh; he came to dwell among us”. The most well-known phrase is probably the opening, in the King James: “In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God and the Word was God.”

Almost no words that are attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John are really from Jesus, an odd development considering that Jesus’ prime identity there is the “Word”. If words were so important, John might have stuck more to the books of sayings that claimed to have captured Jesus’ words and that formed the basis for the other three gospels. Probably the real words of Jesus would not support what John wanted to make of Christ. The easiest way to defend this argument about John is to give samples of Jesus’ speech in John that you can compare to any passage of Jesus quoted in previous chapters. In John, Jesus gives impossibly long speeches like a middle-Platonic philosopher trying to show how close he already is to God, and trying to bring others along his exalted path. I do not choose the most philosophic speeches because they can be boring. I choose speeches that convey the appeal of standard Christianity.

John 14:6 – 14:12. * Jesus replied, “I am the way, I am the truth, and I am life. No person comes to the Father except through me. If you knew me, you would know my Father as well. In fact, from now on, you do know him because you have seen him.” Philip said to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father and we won’t ask you for anything more again.” Jesus said, “Philip, have I been among you all this time and you still don’t know me? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. Then how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? I am not on-my-own the source of what I say to you. The Father who lives in me does his own work in having me speak. Believe me when I say that the Father is in me and I am in the Father. If you do not believe my words, then believe my actions. In deepest truth, I tell you, whoever has faith in me will do as I have done. He will do even more than I have done because soon I will return to the Father [die in this world]. In fact, whatever you ask for in my name I will do for you, so that the Father will be honored through the Son. If you ask anything [sincerely] in my name, I will do it [for you].” *

John 16:31 – 17:19. * Jesus replied, “Do you believe now? Pay attention. Soon, in fact already, you will all be scattered. Each will flee to his own home. You will abandon me alone. Of course, I won’t be completely alone because my Father is with me. I tell you this ahead of time so that when it happens you will be prepared, not fear, and find some peace [in what has to be]. In this world, trouble for you is unavoidable. Have courage. Regardless of what happens, I have already won. I have already conquered the world.”

Then Jesus looked up to God and said, “Father, it’s time now. Glorify your son [me] so that your son might glorify you. You have made the Son king over all peoples so that all peoples [that receive him] might have eternal life. Eternal life is to know [have a relation with] you who alone are true God, and to know Jesus Christ whom you sent. I honored you by completing the work that you sent me to do. So, now, Father, honor me in front of your face with the glory that has attended me since the world began. I taught men your name, the name that you gave to me from beyond this world. You gave me all the peoples of the world as my charge, and they obeyed your commands. Now they know that all my powers have come to me from you. I taught them all that I learned from you and they listened to all I taught. They know for sure that I came from you. They had faith enough to believe that you sent me. I pray for them. I do not pray for the whole world but only for the ones that you gave me because they are my

charge. All that is mine is yours, and what is yours is mine. Through them [that you gave to me] my glory shone forth. I am going to you. I have to leave the world now but they are still in this world. Father, protect by the power of your name the ones that you gave me so that they may be one [among themselves] as you and I are one. When I was with them, I kept them safe by the power of your name. Not one of them is lost except the one man who had to be lost to fulfill the scriptures. Now I have to go to you but while I am still here I say these words so that they [our people] might be as full of joy as they can. I taught your word to them. The world hates them because they are not a part of the rest of the world, just as I am a stranger to the world. Please, don't take them bodily out of the world but do keep them from the Evil enemy. They are strangers here as I am. Make them sacred [and protect them] with the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I send them into the world. For their sake I now dedicate myself so that your truth can make them sacred." *

Some passages of John are famous and convey an important message whether Jesus really said them or not.

John 3:16 – 3:17. * God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so everyone who believes in him does not die but has eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world but so that through his Son the world would be saved." *

John 4:19 – 4:26. * She said, "Sir, I see you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain but you Jews say the true temple of God's worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said, "Believe me; soon you will not worship the Father on this mountain or in the Temple at Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship without really knowing what you worship while we Jews do know what we worship. Salvation comes from the Jews. Very soon, in fact already, real followers of God will worship the Father in truth and in spirit. Those are the kind of worshippers the Father really wants. God is spirit, and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." The woman said, "I know the Messiah (that is, the Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Jesus continued, "I am he, the Messiah. I who speak to you now am he."

If the woman was a Samaritan rather than a Jew, then Jesus was not a Jew in the sense of the word at the time of Jesus but a Galilean. Only later when the Romans had ruined Israel and "Jew" meant "all descendants of Jacob and Israel", would Jesus become just a "Jew". So, when it is convenient to be a Jew, John makes Jesus a Jew. John had to translate the term "messiah" because his intended readers, mostly non-Jews by then, would not have understood it. Too bad Christians and Jews did not pay more attention to the phrase "Salvation comes from the Jews". Too bad everybody has not paid more attention to the idea that God is spirit and truth.

People often say that Christianity is about universal love but usually they cannot say why. Here is one passage to that point. Unfortunately, after a good start, John makes friendship conditional: he says that people are his friends only if they do as he tells them. I think Jesus cast a wider net. I think of it as "you are my friends because you try to follow my message".

John 15:9 – 15:17. * "As God the Father loves me, so I love you. Live in my love. If you listen to me, you will live in my love as I listened to my Father and have lived in his love. I have talked to you like this so that the joy I feel might be in you and so your joy [in life] will be complete. This is my command: Love

one another as I have loved you. A man cannot show any greater love than to die for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I tell you. I no longer call you servants. A servant does not know why his master does what his master does. I call you friends because I have told you everything I heard from my Father [and now you know why]. You did not choose me; I chose you. I charged you to go out into the world and to bear fruit, fruit that will endure. When you carry out your charge, God will give you all that you ask in my name. This is my [final and highest] command to you: Love one another.” *

Chapter 21 of John is not by the same person who wrote the first twenty chapters. I do not speculate on why somebody felt the need to add. Chapter 21 does add something that the regular John does not appear to have, specific instructions on how to carry out the commandment to love, including an idea of who to love. For the modern world, to the message of Chapter 21, I add, “Give them clean water, clothe, house, and educate them, make sure they use birth control, and give them medical care, old age care, and responsible limited voting rights, and make sure they do not abuse the system”. But food is the necessary beginning. I am not sure if Simon is the son of John or Jonas.

John 21:14 – 21:17. * This time was the third appearance of Jesus to his disciples after Jesus returned from the dead. After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me above all else?” Simon answered, “Yes, Lord, you know I love you.” Jesus said, “Then feed my lambs.” Jesus asked a second time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Simon replied again, “Yes, Lord, you know I love you.” [Jesus repeated] “Then tend my sheep”. A third time Jesus asked, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt that Jesus asked him three times about his love, so Peter retorted, “Lord, you know everything so you know that I love you.” Jesus said again, “Feed my sheep.” *