



Church Goer

@pointlesschurch

Others have purpose for going to church. I'm just spinning my wheels. What am I missing? Where is the Holy Spirit? Seems like a lost cause. Should I just fake until I make it? [#iamnotalright?](#)



Persecuted Church

@istherehope

Why does God let his people get imprisoned and killed for loving him? Is there justice? Will we ever see it? Is there something we should be doing? [#iamnotalright](#)



Struggling Christian

@whypray

Why doesn't God answer my prayers when I need something? What is wrong with me? When am I ever going to be strong enough? [#iamnotalright](#)

#iamnotalright

...and it is ok.



Lonely Christian

@needtoknow

How do I experience God's presence, because I don't feel anything? Sometimes it would be nice if there was some kind of Jesus hug thing. [#lovemyteddybear](#) [#iamnotalright](#)



Average Believer

@discipleofchrist

I am feeling alone. I am tired. I am confused. How do I know Jesus is present in my life? Where can I turn for help? Is there anyone out there? What do I do now? Is it ok to say [#iamnotalright?](#)

#IAMNOTALRIGHT

Meditations from John 14-17 on Jesus's Prayer for His Sinful Followers

Introduction

What Is the Deal with that Bizarre Title?

It is common today for people to use hashtags (#) to indicate a topic. The trend began on social media, and it is now a familiar way people mark topics on those kinds of services. Most recently, it was part of the #BLM (Black Lives Matter) and #METOO movements. If you are involved in social media, you know that sometimes these platforms can become a morass of shared feelings, frustrations and complaints. Many times, people will use their social media accounts to express emotions that otherwise went unsaid.

Rather than focus on this kind of thing, the hashtag in the title of this booklet - #IAMNOTALRIGHT – is a *declaration of our dependence on Christ*. It is a brief statement of our insufficiency to manage our lives without a deep relationship with Him. And it is a confession that this is a universal situation. It is not like some people are more complete than others. We are all in need of our Savior.

Christ is aware of our situation, our state, our struggles. (That should not surprise us!) He knows the challenges we face. And in John's Gospel, there is a large portion which addresses how we should live as Christ's followers while He is absent. This portion – John 14-17 – is the focus of our study during this season. These are Jesus's words *after* the last supper, probably on the way to the garden of Gethsemane, where he was arrested. (Jn 13:20) The setting is important. It foreshadows the distance that would come between Jesus and his disciples – first in the sense in which he is tried and crucified while they look on, but also looking forward to the day when he ascended, and they are required to carry on without him physically present. This passage (John 14-17) is Jesus's discourse with and prayer for his disciples as he prepares them for this certain separation.

The Narrative Christology of John's Gospel

Anyone who has read the four gospels notices immediately just how different John's gospel is. It is almost as if John did not get the memo on what should be recorded of Jesus's life. This difference exists because John's gospel comes much later than the others. While Matthew, Mark and Luke (collectively known as the Synoptics) were probably all composed before AD 70, John's gospel was probably written closer to AD 90-100. Because of the late date, John's gospel is much more of a synthesis of the Hebrew and Greek ways of thinking. The earlier gospels were concerned with presenting the narrative of the gospel to the world for the first time. But by the time John's gospel was written, the Church had been established long enough that there were people who had grown up within the faith; and this context presents its own set of challenges.

To answer these challenges, John crafted a very specific way of telling the Jesus story. He presents the events of Christ's life, ministry, death and resurrection as what we might call a *Narrative Christology*.¹ John's storytelling begins with the presupposition of Christ's deity and glorification. He is not trying to convince an unbelieving world. John is teaching a new generation of believers, those who grew up in a world *after* Christ – having never physically walked with Him as John had done. The gospel contains large sections of Jesus's voice, often punctuated with John's parenthetical commentary. (While some modern Bibles attempt to mark

¹ See Mark W.G. Stibbe, *John as Storyteller: Narrative, Criticism and the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Jesus's words in red, but they often do not take these parentheticals into consideration. An obvious case of this is John 3:16, which many Bibles mark as Jesus's words but are probably John's commentary on Jesus's words. But telling the difference is difficult – sometimes impossible.)

As you read through the scriptures referenced in these devotionals (and you can't do this without reading the Scriptures), keep a few things in mind:

- **John loves to circle back on an idea.** He will throw something out, an image or a word, without any explanation or exposition. Then, later in a seemingly unconnected moment, he will bring that idea back up. If you're watching for this, you will notice the elaborate ways in which he is drawing you toward Christ.
- **There are no wasted words.** Every word in John is significant. This is not a casually dashed off letter. It is the product of what was probably decades of composition, recitation and discussion. While John loves big ideas (*life, light, love, water, spirit*, etc.), everything he includes fits with every other thing.
- **What you think doesn't fit DOES.** This is a logical step from the previous two points. Sometimes, you read something in John's gospel and wonder why it is there. The story of the adulteress woman (John 8:1-11) or the "eat my flesh" discourse (John 6:25-41) might seem to be out of left field; but they do fit into what John is saying about Christ. When you encounter something like this, mark it and jot down some big ideas from it. You'll be surprised to discover those ideas cropping up later, in places you did not expect to see them.
- **Everything – EVERYTHING – in John's gospel is about Christ.** There is not a single narrative, discourse or parenthetical note that is not focused on Jesus Christ. So, if you think the focus is on someone else (Nicodemus, the man born blind, etc.), rethink your position. John's view of the gospel landscape is completely filled with the multifaceted image of Christ.

How to Use This Booklet

This booklet contains devotional thoughts for each weekday of the six weeks preceding Resurrection Sunday. There are no devotional thoughts for the weekends, because we want to focus on what the Lord has for us in our weekly worship gathering. Each week is loosely structured to build toward a particular perspective on the passage, and then each subsequent week develops further the ideas learned before. The final week, known as "Holy Week" in many liturgical churches, is devoted to Jesus's prayer in John 17 – which is the last thing John records before Christ's arrest, trial and resurrection.

Reading the Scriptures as a community is always an engaging experience. It is best enjoyed through discussion and conversation, rather than in isolation. With that in mind, do not simply read the devotional thoughts in this booklet. You will miss out on the broader, more robust interactions with the Scriptures.

- Partner with someone else (your spouse, a friend, your kids) to engage with the devotional thoughts together. You do not need to be in the same place to do it. You can interact over the phone or email or social media.
- Do not read just the verse cited in a particular devotional thought. Read around it, get the context.
- All of the questions in this booklet are *open-ended*. That means they are not yes/no questions and the answers will often vary from person-to-person.

In each week, commit to read through the passage for that week *every day* as you study. The whole context is helpful and you will find you understand the particular piece of the passage better after multiple readings.

Week 1: 13:31-38

Monday, March 11

13:35, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Have you ever considered *why* Jesus said this? In context, he is preparing his disciples to go on living the life he was teaching once he was gone. With Jesus physically not present, all they would have is each other. The church would not be some kind of glorious, amazing thing that everybody would want to be a part of. It would be a persecuted minority, pushed underground by Romans and Jews alike. All these disciples would have to rely upon would be each other. But even in the presence of their fellow believers, they would be, in a sense, alone. They would be alone together, a movement of people clinging to the teachings of an absent teacher. There would be no empire or magistrates to protect them.

- Consider where you put Christian community in your list of priorities. Make a list of your top five relationship priorities.
- What do you need to clear from the field in order to make more of a priority of "having love for one another"?

Tuesday, March 12

13:36, "Lord, where are you going?"

Peter asked this question honestly. He legitimately did not know what he was going to do without Jesus to protect him from himself. He could not see beyond the moment. He was incapable of seeing what Christ needed *him* to do; and he could not understand that Jesus would have to change him in order for Peter to become the man he would need to be. Jesus's absence required more of Peter than Peter could even see.

- What blocks your perspective on what Christ is doing?
- When was the last time you took the time to look back and then forward to see how what *has* happened is taking to where you are going? And have you considered how to correct your path to keep in alignment with Christ's priorities for you?

Wednesday, March 13

13:38-14:1, "...until you have denied...let not hearts be troubled..."

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not only predicted Simon Peter's failure, but also gave encouragement in that failure. Is it really all that extraordinary that Jesus plans to see us through failure? He is never surprised by our struggles? He sees through denial to the place where we discover our need, to the moment when our hearts tremble and break over our weakness and failure.

- How have past failures troubled your heart?
- Have you ever expressed those troubles in a relationship with another believer? Do you have another believer who you trust with such open thoughts?

Thursday, March 14

14:4, "You know the way I am going."

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already knew the answers to the questions they asked. They were afraid of the answers they already knew. This is the completion of Jesus's answer to Simon Peter's question in 13:36. What were the disciples afraid of? Losing Jesus. They could not comprehend how to do thing by themselves. Jesus had always done things for explained what they could not understand. Wasn't this whole deal anyway? But they were deluding themselves. had never hidden his purposes to them. The disciples just chosen not to listen. Their faith wavered because it grounding in false assumptions, false confidences of own devising. But to *truly be disciples*, they would have stop looking to Jesus for everything. They would have to the Spirit's work in themselves and in each other.

- What are some areas of your life that you want to learn how to biblically more self-sufficient?
- Can you identify times when the Spirit was prompting you in these areas?

Friday, March 15

14:5, "But how can we know the way?"

Jesus

would make things as plain as He could for their human limitations. "I am the way..." (v 6) For all their questions,

the answer came down to one simple question – are you going to trust that Jesus knows what He is doing or not? He is either sovereign or He isn't. It is simple as that. We always want more

Week 2: 14:1-14

Monday, March 18

14:1-8, "You believe in God, believe also in Me..."

You have to follow the way Jesus uses the words *believe*, *know* and *show* in these verses. He is pushing us to use our brains, wrapping our heads around the complexity of his relationship to the Father and to us. The exchange of ideas is both doctrinal and practical. In essence, the disciples couldn't see God (and his purposes) because they refused to see Jesus as He is revealed to them. We miss the truth of God's nature when we refuse to see the truth of Jesus's reality. They are inextricably connected and interwoven. It is only when we lay down our presuppositions and ideas about Jesus that we can embrace the reality of His mystery; and in so doing, glimpse the Father. Remember when the disciples were on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus and completely missed the point? Missed the glory of the Father revealed on the Son because they saw Moses and Elijah? (Mk 9:2-13)

- What does "believe" mean to you? Write out a practical, simple definition for yourself.
- What about the word "mystery"? Write a definition out for that one as well.
- Do you think these are mutually exclusive? How do they interact?

Tuesday, March 19

14:10, "The Father who dwells in me does his works."

We should not delude ourselves into thinking our good works are anything other than Christ's, and that His works are the Father's through Him. We want to believe that we have full autonomy in doing good; but all good we do as human beings is a reflection of God's goodness, not our own. (Rm 3:10, Jm 1:17)

- What are some "good things" in your life that you have never considered to be God's work?"
- How has good used these good things to make you a better, more whole person?
- If the good things came from an individual, have you ever stopped to thank him/her/them for being used by God to help you?

Friday, March 22

14:17, “[The Spirit] dwells with you and will be in you...”

This is a difficult phrase. Again, remember that John is writing to believers in the Church. This is probably one of his parenthetical notes and not the words of Jesus. The world – those who are not followers of Jesus – cannot receive the Spirit because he does not dwell in them. This is why the world “will not see him” (v 19). Believers are able to recognize the work of the Spirit of God because they know God through the Jesus. An unbeliever should not be expected to see what he cannot know or to experience the presence of a Spirit he has never met. At best, the unbeliever can see our *works* (which are the works of the Father) and glorify God by accepting him by faith. (Mt 5:16)

- Do you have a friend or family member who is not a believer who simply “doesn’t get it” about your faith? Tell about their reaction to your descriptions of your faith.
- Have you ever felt rejected or doubtful because of the way an unbelieving person close to you reacts to your faith? What steps can you take to develop a right, loving attitude toward them even in rejection?

This Week’s Summary

Jesus brings together His ministry and the ministry of the Father and the Spirit. They are not at crossed purposes but working together in a perfect synergy to make us who we need to be, especially in a world of unbelief. This should be a great encouragement to us. The life we are living in Christ is one that is in harmony with the will and work of the entire Godhead.

Week 3: 14:15-31

Monday, March 25

14:20, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me."

Jesus sets up a reciprocal love relationship. To keep his commandments is to love Him; and to love Him is to be loved by the Father; and to be loved by the Father is to be loved by Jesus. And we only know His commandments by His love for us. So, ultimately this is all about Christ. If He did not love us first, we would be incapable of loving Him (1 Jn 4:19). Even our faith is a gift of His grace. So, is it our place to take that gift and hoard it to ourselves? Remember that Jesus makes this point in the context of His Spirit being manifest through us to the world that cannot know Him.

- How can *love* be a command? Consider some of the ways *love* can be something other than an emotion we feel.
- How do you think *love* and *grace* interact in the work of Christ? How can you interweave these two things into your own life as a believer?

Tuesday, March 26

14:23, "...we will come to him and make our home with him."

What a profound statement. Jesus declares that the observance of his commandments is loving Him; and then that He and the Father will dwell with the person who loves Him. Remember in the first part of the passage, when Jesus told His disciples that we has going to make a place for them (v 2)? Or when he reminded that the Comforter (the Spirit) already "dwells with you" (v 17)? Here is a promise that the fullness of the Godhead is present in the life of the believer – not only present but *dwelling* with us. God has taken up permanent residence in the midst of his Church. This is a comfort, especially given the enormous, overwhelming tasks required of us as the agents of the gospel.

- How is the presence of God "making our home" in you a comfort? Why would people consider such a thing to be uncomfortable?
- If God is present in our lives as we are present in our homes, how does that affect the priorities of your life? What is one thing you would probably think twice about doing if you were to acknowledge God's presence in every aspect of your life?

Week 4: 15:1-27

Monday, April 1

15:8, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

How will people know we are Christ's disciples? By our love for one another. How do we prove it? By bearing fruit. Jesus talks about the confidence we can have, as His disciples. When we face difficulty, it is the pruning of fruitful branches, not the removal of the dead branches (v 2). So, we are called to be what we are made to be in Christ. When we question whether we are *capable* of the basic work of the gospel, of the basic maturity of the believer, we are really questioning whether God can do what He has done and is doing. Doubt has *no place* in the life of the believer. Anxiety comes from trusting ourselves, and then doubting ourselves, rather than placing confidence in the Father as our caretaker and provider.

- What is the greatest fruit a Christian parent can bear as a part of Christ's "vine" (v1)?
- How do you sometimes feel inadequate to the job of bearing fruit? And how can you best meet those feelings of inadequacy?

Tuesday, April 2

15:14, "You are my friends..."

Our relationship with Christ is something we should marvel at – daily. We are transformed from darkness to light, altered and renewed; but most importantly, we are invited into a relationship with God the Son. The friendship of the Savior is not something offered without true *gravity*. We enter into a two-way relationship with the sustainer of all creation. Friends do not support the other out of guilt or obligation but out of mutual devotion. Unlike the bonds of family or responsibilities of employment, the covenant of friendship is one we enter into voluntarily.

- Is it possible to *try so hard* to be a good friend that you actually wind up ruining the relationship? If you have experienced this, what was that like?
- How can you be a better friend to Christ? Name two steps you could take in your relationship with Christ to improve your side of this relationship.

Wednesday, April 3

15:17-18, "...you will love one another. If the world hates you..."

Look at the juxtaposition of *love* and *hate* here. You will love one another (if you are in Christ) but the world will hate you (because of Christ in you). This is why we are "not of the world" (v 19). So often, we think Christians are different from those around us because of behavior or because of philosophy; but the real difference is the presence of Christ. In fact, if we take the passages above literally, then it is because the whole Godhead dwells with us; and it is in human nature to reject and hate God's presence (see John 1:11-13).

- Name three ways in which Christ's presence in your life has altered it.
- Does it help you deal with rejection from the world to know that it is *Christ* people are rejecting, not you personally?

Thursday, April 4

John 15:20, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

The Christian life is not characterized by ease, specifically because it is defined by Christ. John's gospel has a deep undercurrent of Christ identifying himself with the Church; and the Church therefore only having existence and life because of Him. This kind of interdependence is bound to cause conflict with the world. In verses 19-20, John emphasizes that the believer is not anchored to this world because he/she has been *chosen* (Gk. *eklegomai*, literally "called out") of the world. This verb ties back to 1:1-3: "In the beginning was the Word (Gk. *ho logos*) ...All things were made through him." Here is the core of our identity with Christ. We are spoken for by the Word – the same power that created the world also recreated you. We are quite literally "of another world."

- How does it change your thinking if you see our salvation as Christ identifying with *us* rather than us identifying with Christ?
- Search the Scriptures for 3 things we have *in Christ*. Consider how these things (like peace, grace, forgiveness of sins, etc.) are reflections of Christ's character rather than our desires or needs.

Friday, April 5

John 15:27, "You also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning."

Although Jesus is speaking to His disciples, he is also speaking to John's audience and to us. In context, Jesus has made it clear that the Spirit and Father are in unity with Him about His work with the Church. Here, he reminds us that we are in synergy with the whole Godhead when we act as the Church. We are not doing this *for* God but rather *with* God.

Although this means inevitable rejection (16:1), we are called and equipped to persevere. We are not the chosen of God because we persevere. We can persevere *because we are the chosen of God*.

- Think for a moment about the difference between *having to* do something on your own and *being given the ability to* do it.
- How can you peacefully and gracefully bear witness to who Christ is today? In your current situation? List two or three ways you can do this.

This Week's Summary

As you explored this portion of John 15, you should have observed the unity of Christ with His Church. We are His friends, and our mutual commitment to the friendship is an identification with one another. We are truly called to a synergy with the Godhead.

Week 5: 16:1-29

Monday, April 8

John 16:6, "...sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth."

Jesus breaks our hearts. Why? Because the truth is tough to take. Humans are not fans of unvarnished, unadorned truth. We like to have things offered to us in palatable ways. We might complain about the way others couch harsh realities in platitudes; but secretly we know that if someone just said the truth, it would hurt more. The truth about Jesus is that He pushes us (sometimes drags us!) through sorrow into glory, through darkness into light. For Him, as the creator of our souls, this is a necessary process for our maturing and growth into the individuals, families and communities we were meant to be. Our hearts are broken by the one whose heart breaks for the world.

- What are the most uncomfortable truths you have been confronted with in Scripture? What made them so uncomfortable for you?
- At times, we all face events we cannot reconcile with our understanding of God.
- How have you dealt with these kinds of situations? Have others helped you through them? If so, how?

Tuesday, April 9

John 16:14, "[The Spirit] will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine..."

The coherence and cooperation of the Godhead is infinite and unerring. There is no contradiction among the persons of God. Too often, we think of Jesus having to "satisfy" the Father's justice or the Spirit somehow being "more present" than Christ in our lives. But this simply is not so. All members of the Godhead are always in perfect harmony. And in this context, Jesus is saying that the glory of Christ is the manifestation of the Father and the Spirit. They are one and the same; and therefore, since we are Christ's, we behold and may live in the glory of the Creator. It is *not* ours to do with as we please, but rather something extraordinary that touches our lives and transforms us as we submit to Christ.

- Why is it important that we see all the members of the Godhead working perfectly together in all things?
- If we are called to be like Christ in our relationships with others, how will this harmony manifest itself in our lives?

Wednesday, April 10

John 16:24, "Until now, you have asked nothing in my name."

Why does Jesus make such a big deal about his name in this passage (14:13-14, 26, 15:16, 21, 16:23-24, 26)? If we're not careful, we will miss this. *It is a declaration that Jesus is indeed the God of the Old Testament.* The Jews would not utter his name for fear of violating the third commandment (Maimonides, *Law of Oaths* 2:11). As near as can be told, this prohibition became common after the fall of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70, which occurred in the time between the other gospels and John. The old oral traditions of Judaism (*Mishnah*) advocate using the name while the later interpretations (*Talmud*) forbid it. In the Revelation, John emphasizes Jesus's "revealed name" (Rev 19:16). Jesus's "name utterances" are clear references to His divinity and the fact that the disciples did not yet understand this (Jn 20:31).

- Why are Christians encouraged to pray in Jesus's name? What is different about our relationship with God through Christ?
- John really emphasizes Jesus's divinity in passages like this. Why do you think this emphasis was (and is) so important?

Thursday, April 11

John 16:25, "The hour is coming..."

Jesus says this phrase three times in John 16 (2, 25, 32). The only other place He uses it is in chapter 4, when speaking to the Samaritan woman. In both cases, Jesus is looking forward to the transition from His presence to His absence. The world will be radically changed by His ascension; and the faith required to continue to worship, to continue to serve will be something different. It is easy to worship and work when the One is with us. It is something else entirely when He is gone. And this is why our works are greater than those Jesus did – *not because we are greater in His absence but because He is revealed to be greater by not being present* (14:2). We live in "the hour," just as the disciples did after Christ ascended. Just as the Samaritan woman and the other converts there did, as they waited for the Holy Spirit (Ac 8).

- Do you think living a faithful Christian life would be easier if Jesus had remained physically present? Why or why not?
- What is the hardest part about following Christ since he is "absent" in a physical sense?

Week 6: 17:1-26

Chapter 17 of John's gospel is Jesus's final prayer for his disciples. It is therefore a prayer to God on the brink of Judas's betrayal and Jesus's subsequent suffering. This prayer, which John alone records, ties together all the words Jesus has been sharing with His disciples on the way to the cross.

Unlike the previous weeks, there are not question prompts after the devotional thoughts. Instead, you are encouraged to read the 4-5 verse sections and come up with a few additional thoughts, questions or comments to accompany them. Jot your thoughts down and bring this booklet with you on Good Friday to share with the congregation.

Monday, April 15

John 17:1-5, "Glorify"

All the way back to the moment that Jesus entered Jerusalem (John 12:23-26). Jesus makes the point to his disciples that His glorification before the Gentiles was coming, but it would require His death. (In fact, this passage lays the foundations for much of chapters 14-17.) This glory is not like normal human glory, because it is not about one's life but about one's service. Everyone is looking for Jesus's glory to be easy to see, easy to appreciate. While faith in Christ is *simple*, it most assuredly is not *easy*.

Tuesday, April 16

John 17:6-10

Jesus emphasizes his rightful possession of "the people whom you gave me out of the world." This possession is Jesus's *right* as the Creator, as a member of the Godhead; but He makes it clear that He subordinates Himself to the Father, despite their eternal co-equality and co-existence. Remember that this is not a prayer for him or for the world, but for them (v 9). Remember that Jesus is praying this *with the disciples in earshot!* They can hear every word.

Wednesday, April 17

John 17:11-14

When Jesus asks that the Father "keep them in your name" (v 11), Jesus is not simply making a request and hoping the Father makes good on it. This is a case of Jesus stating what is true already to Him. Jesus kept us (v 12), now the Father keeps us. Both were already doing it, but the disciples could see Jesus caring for them.

A Timeline of Jesus's Last Days According to John's Gospel

Because John's gospel has such a unique perspective, it is important that we understand its internal coherence before we attempt to synchronize it with the other three gospels. Therefore, I am presenting here a timeline of Jesus's days before and shortly after the crucifixion based solely on John.

The Passover of the Jews was at hand (11:55)

John begins with a synchronization with the Passover (Heb. *pesach*), the most sacred day of the Jewish calendar. The Passover is a week-long spring festival which begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of Nisan, the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar. Jewish days begin at sundown, so technically Passover begins when the fourteenth day comes to an end, so it is observed on 15-22 Nisan (Lev 23:5, Num 33:3). Hebrew months are calculated based on the new moon, they are about 29 days long, so Passover can move around in relation to our modern solar calendar.

Passover is one of the three pilgrimage holidays (Heb. *shalosh regalim*) when all Torah-observant Jews were supposed to journey to Jerusalem. (Ex 23:14-17, 34:18-23; Dt 16:1-17) These holidays mark significant times in the harvest cycle of their agrarian culture. Passover comes at the beginning of the barley harvest, which they called *abib* (Dt 16:1) and we would call spring. The Jews presented the best of their lambs born during the early winter. Then comes Pentecost (Heb. *shavuot*) at the end of the fifty-day barley harvest. On that day, the Jews presented the first fruits of their harvest. Finally, there was Tabernacles (Heb. *succoth*) which comes in the autumn after the other later grains like wheat and grapes were harvested.

So, John's reference to the Passover being "at hand" (Gk. *hēn engus*, literally "was close") indicates that this was at the end of the winter. It had been a long winter for Jesus who had to leave the Jerusalem observance of *Hanukkah* because the Jews had tried to kill him. (10:22) He had left the city and crossed the Jordan but then had returned to Bethany – a suburb of Jerusalem - when his friend Lazarus died (10:39-11:17). He then traveled north to a town in Ephraim where he stayed until the Passover (10:54). It was only when Passover was close that Jesus returned to Bethany and prepared to enter the city again.

Six Days Before the Passover (12:1)

Although this is not absolute, we can conjecture fairly reasonably that Jesus left Jerusalem at the end of *Hanukkah* (3 Tevet) and raised Lazarus three months later in the first week or so of Nisan.² During the intervening months, people would have been busy planting and tending the barley crop. If the first new moon of Nisan coincided with the near ripening of the barley, the Passover would be declared for the fifteenth. If the barley was not yet ripe, an additional month called *Adar Beth* would be added.³ It is only when the barley is ripe that Passover can begin.

It is not a coincidence that Jesus speaks of resurrection in terms of grain dying and then bearing fruit (12:23-26), which is why I tend to believe that Lazarus was raised in the first week of Nisan. It neatly corresponds with the Passover, which John ties closely to the resurrection. Jesus leaves Bethany after the resurrection of Lazarus, but returns six days before Passover to have a meal before heading into the city. (12:2) This is not six days before the beginning of the Passover week. It is six days before the Passover meal, which is held on the first day of Passover. Although John uses the same word to describe both the meal at Lazarus's house

² Hanukkah begins on 25 Kislev, the 9th month. Then there are Tevet (10), Shevat (11), Adar (12). Nisan is considered the first month of the liturgical year.

³ Any lunar calendar will get out of sync with the natural rhythms of agriculture because the months are only 29 days long. This kind of additional month was very common in these cultures.

and the last supper (Gk. *to deipnon*), they are distinct. The meal Jesus shares with the disciples is also not the Passover meal, as we shall see that it is not observed on the right day.

The Next Day (12:12)

Jesus eats at Lazarus's house on that evening, which would have been the beginning of 9 Nisan, and then the following day which was still 9 Nisan,⁴ he entered Jerusalem with Lazarus by his side (12:12). John is the only gospel that records *why* there was a crowd assembled for Jesus's entry. It is because of the large number of people who had borne witness of Lazarus's resurrection (11:45, 12:9, 17). It makes sense that this event occurred at a time when a large number of pilgrims were entering the city, preparing for the festivities. This is the buildup to the Passover meal.

The procession of Jesus's entry into Jerusalem was a mixed crowd, including a number of "Greeks" – probably Hellenic Jews – who asked questions to Jesus through Philip. (12:20-26) This offers us a bit of an indication that Jesus might not have spoken Greek, but that Philip did. This would fit with his occupation as a fisherman in Galilee, since he would have had to sell his produce to Greek-speaking people in Tiberius and the Decapolis.

Now Before the Feast of the Passover (13:1)

There are important indications in this passage that the meal (Gk. *to deipnon*) that Jesus observed with his disciples as the last supper is *not* the Passover meal observed on 15 Nisan.

- Among them is the indication that Jesus sends Judas out and the disciples think it is to purchase items for the Passover meal (13:29).
- Another is that Judas is sent out in the night (Gk. *hē nūx*), and the Passover meal was to be eaten at twilight. In Hebrew, the term for twilight is *'arbayim*, literally "between the nights." (Lev 23:5) This is the moment when the last darkness of the previous day meets the first darkness of the next, right at twilight. Jesus and his disciples begin eating far too late in the night for it to be the Passover meal.
- Finally, after the meal, Jesus and his disciples leave the city, cross the Kidron valley and go out to a garden. They are attacked by the priests' guard and Jesus is imprisoned. (18:1-3) The city gates would have been closed if they were observing the Passover meal. The Romans closed the gates during these events to ensure no one interfered. So, Jesus and his disciples might have slipped out, but it is highly unlikely that the priests' guards could have.

It Was Early Morning (18:28)

Jesus and his disciples are eating the meal for the day *before* the Passover meal. Jesus's accusers take Jesus to the governor's fortress the morning after his arrest, but they will not go into the fortress for fear of defiling themselves before the feast (18:28). John provides no time markers for the rest of the events, indicating that they occur all on this day, so this must be either 13 or 14 Nisan (see "The First Day of the Week" below).

This is reinforced by a later statement that it was "the day of preparation." (19:31) This was not just the Jewish preparations but also the Roman. During the Passover, the Romans secured the gates of the city and then all withdrew to their fortress. They did not interfere with the Jewish feasts, and that would have included tending the victims of their crucifixions. So, they ensured all the victims were dead before dusk.

After These Things (19:38)

⁴ Jewish days are evening and morning, so John's reference to "the next day" is a time reference for his Gentile readers.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus must have been standing ready for Jesus to be declared dead because they make quick work of having him removed from the cross, wrapped in a shroud and buried. To remain clean according to Torah, they would be prohibited from observing the Passover meal; but there was a provision for them to observe it the following month (Nu 9:1-14) so they were able to bury Jesus and still be Torah observant. They were also able to keep Jesus's body ritually pure because he would be properly buried before the Passover began. It was a *tremendous* sacrifice for the two of them to do this.

The First Day of the Week (20:1)

John provides no detail of the events between Jesus's burial and the discovery of the resurrection, and it is important to remember that John is writing to Gentiles. For him, such details were insignificant but the other gospel writers do provide some detail. Each of the gospel writers refers differently to the moment when Jesus's resurrection was discovered.

- Matthew 28:1 - Now after the sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week
- Mark 16:1 – When the sabbath was past
- Luke 24:1 – Now on the first day of the week, in the early dawn

All agree that Jesus was raised *after* the sabbath and that it must have occurred during the night, since he was already gone by dawn.

Jesus was buried *before dusk* on the day before the Passover meal and the indication from the gospels is that there was a *sabbath* in there as well. While other feasts, such as the Day of Atonement, were granted sabbath status (Lev 16:29-34), the Passover was already a holy day and not a sabbath. During the week of the Passover observance, people pretty much went about their affairs as usual unless there was a sabbath day, and the indication here is that there was indeed a sabbath after Passover.

Matthew provides another interesting detail. When asked by the chief priests to provide guards for the tomb, the Roman governor refuses. This was probably because he knew the Jews would rise up against him if Roman troops left their fortress during the Passover observance (Mt 27:62-66).

Luke throws a wrinkle into things by saying that Jesus was buried on the Day of Preparation "when the sabbath was dawning." (Lk 23:54, Gk. *sabbaton epefōsken*) To get around this, many translations change this to "sabbath was beginning" but that would make the Passover on a sabbath. The only other place the word appears is in Matthew describing the dawn of the first day of the week (Mt 28:1). It is possible that Luke is explaining the space between Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection by noting that the day of preparation was not the day *before* Passover but rather that Passover was on the day *after* the sabbath so the preparation had to be done beforehand.

If so, then the sequence of days is as follows: Jesus was crucified on the day of preparation; then there was a sabbath day, then the day of Passover, and Jesus was already raised when the women came to embalm him in the morning on the third day. That makes three days (preparation, sabbath, Passover) and three nights, since he was raised sometime before the dawn on the first day of the week. Matthew and Mark may have referred to the sabbath and Passover days as "the sabbath" while Luke clarified why there was a two-day sabbath for his readers; and John just stuck with "the first day of the week." This is one possible solution that smooths out any possible discrepancies.