

## **The Gospel of John – The Miracles in John**

### *New Testament Survey – Lesson 12 (Part 2)*

My name is William Mark Lanier. I have always gone by “Mark,” my middle name. That is, except for a few weeks in fourth grade. My fourth grade teacher, Ms. Offesend, did not believe I should go by my middle name. It just didn’t seem right to her. Instead, she insisted on calling me “William.”

After a few weeks of school, my mom and dad got a request that they come in for a teacher conference. While there, Ms. Offesend informed them that I was totally disrespectful and needed to be corrected. Mom and dad were stunned, and probed for ways my behavior was out of line. They were told that whenever the teacher called on me, I refused to answer. My refusal was not an in your face rebellion, but much more an ignoring of the teacher. Mom knew this did not sound like me (I always loved a chance to talk!), and so probed deeper. Before long, it became apparent that the teacher was calling me William. Then it was clear.

I wasn’t answering because I did not know the teacher was talking to me. I was not, nor had I ever been, William! You could call out for William all day long, and I would not turn and answer. Now, if instead you call me Mark, there would be a good chance I would talk the rest of the day!

Names and labels are important, far beyond someone answering when called. We see this significantly in John’s Gospel purpose statement as we continue our study from last week.

### **JOHN’S PURPOSE STATEMENT**

As we continue our exploration of the miracles John chose to include in his gospel, we return to John’s purpose statement in John 20:30-31.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

In this passage we have a chain of words that are particularly significant to John:

*Signs      Believe      Christ      Son of God      Life      Name*

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We began last week looking at these words and we covered “believe” and “Christ.” This week we continue considering “Son of God,” giving us a chance to consider several of the miracles John chose as well. Each of these terms within the chain explain John’s purpose of choosing the signs/miracles he did, as well as his purpose behind writing the Gospel.

### ***Son of God – Non-John Usage***

Calling Jesus the “Son of God” is not unique to John’s Gospel, but it certainly takes a more central status there. John uses the phrase just one time less than the other three gospels put together. As a later gospel, this is seen by some as evidence that the church was not as conversant with the title for Jesus in the earliest days of the church as in later New Testament times.<sup>1</sup>

More realistically, it is apparent that Jesus used the title for himself, although he more typically called himself the Son of Man. But while the title was used early, it was not the title, but the meaning of the title that took the church time to figure out. If we look at the church scholars that followed the New Testament, as they developed the understanding of Jesus’ identity based on the gospels, it was the Gospel of John that gave them much of the information that enabled them to explain what Jesus was as the Son of God.

If we try to understand the contemporary usage of the title “Son of God” at the time of Christ, we find a relatively diverse picture. Beyond Jewish literature, it was used for Greek mythological heroes, Roman emperors, and Egyptian pharaohs. If we draw closer to Jewish literature and culture we see an even broader usage of the term. Repeatedly the term was applied to the nation of Israel. For example, Exodus 4:22 notes,

Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son.’

This is significant enough to where some John scholars believe that the reference to Jesus as God’s Son stems from identifying Jesus as the “true Israel.” However, while the Old Testament clearly portrays Israel as the Son of God, it is not the only usage of the phrase.

We also find in the Old Testament a reference to people as “sons of God” on an individual basis, not simply as a nation. We see this readily in a number of places

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<sup>1</sup> Martin, Ralph and Davids, Peter, *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, (IVP 2012).

like Deuteronomy 14:1 where Moses was delivering the word of the Lord for the behavior expected of individuals.

You are the sons of the LORD your God. You shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead.

In multiple places in the Old Testament, angels are referred to as sons of God. We see it in Job 1:6,

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.

Kings were often recognized in the Old Testament as sons of God. As David explained the Lord's prophecy over Solomon, he detailed that God had declared,

He shall build a house for my name. He shall be my son, and I will be his father, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever.

If we consider the other Jewish literature from the New Testament times, we find similar references. In the intertestamental book writing *The Book of Jubilees* the tradition of God speaking to Moses is explained with God saying of the Israelites,

I will be their Father and they shall be my children. And they all shall be called children of the living God (Jub. 1:23-24).

Another intertestamental writing, exemplifies angels as sons of God.

And he said unto him: 'I have begotten a strange son, diverse from and unlike man, and resembling the sons of the God of heaven; and his nature is different and he is not like us and his eyes are as the rays of the sun, and his countenance is glorious. And it seems to me that he is not sprung from me but from the angels (1 Enoch 106:5-6).

There is an interesting usage in the book of 2 Esdras, which some scholars date as early as the second century BC, but others date to 75-90AD, which is within a decade of the Gospel of John.<sup>2</sup> Either way, it is a good reflection of some thought among Jews of Jesus and John's day. It ties the title "son of God" to the Messiah.

For my son the Messiah shall be revealed with those who are with him, and those who remain shall rejoice four hundred years (2 Esdras 7:28).

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<sup>2</sup> For the early dating, see, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. For the later date see, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*.

With such a wide range of usages on the term, we are served best by seeing the usage that John records in his own text as the usage of Jesus. John does not leave us guessing what “Son of God” Jesus was. He makes it crystal clear.

### *Son of God – John’s Usage*

John starts his Gospel with two references to Jesus as the Son of God. The first is from John the Baptist who said of Jesus,

I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God (Jn 1:34).

Immediately on the heels of the Baptist’s testimony, we read the affirmation of Nathaniel,

Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel! (Jn 1:49)

John sets these two witnesses at the beginning of the Gospel in a way that would be regarded as fundamental testimony for Jewish courts. It took the testimony of two witnesses to establish guilt or prove an action (Deut. 19:15 – “Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.”) Jesus knew this, as did John. We know not only because they were Jews who lived under the Jewish legal system, but also because Jesus dealt with the matter regularly, as recorded by John.

In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true (Jn. 8:17).

After setting out two early attestations to Jesus as the Son of God, John sets out in his Gospel to explain the title. Following this the phrase of Jesus as the “Son of God” are grouped into four stories.

#### *1. Nicodemus (John 3)*

In this story, the Pharisaic leader Nicodemus came to Jesus “by night” to dialogue with him. Nicodemus acknowledged that Jesus had “come from God” because the miracles could be explained no other way. Jesus replied with something that caught Nicodemus off guard. He told him, “unless one is born again [or “from above”] he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus thought Jesus was speaking of a physical birth, but Jesus explained it was a spiritual birth. In the following dialogue, Jesus explained the “Son of Man” would be lifted up. He<sup>3</sup> then added the beloved verses,

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<sup>3</sup> This sentence is ambiguous. Do I mean the Jesus added the beloved verses or that John did? The ambiguity is planned! The Greek did not use quotation marks, so we do not have a clear understanding of where the quoting of Jesus ended and where John’s comments started. Scholars

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (Jn 3:16-18).

While there is evidence that John's original manuscript might have read "God's Chosen One," it does not matter on seeing this passage as Christ affirming his role as the Son of God.<sup>4</sup> This is a significant passage as Jesus details himself the "only Son" of God the Father. In light of this, it is not surprising to John's careful language, not only in his Gospel, but also his epistles. John refers only to Jesus as the "Son [*huios* – υἱός] of God." Believers are always called "children [Greek *teknia* – τεκνία] of God."

Jesus was unique; he was a special Son of God. He was not one of the many found in Old Testament references, nor in the references of more contemporary writings. John recorded Jesus' claim as the "only" Son. The older versions that many have memorized call Jesus the "only begotten" Son, but the Greek word used (*monogenes* – μονογενής) means "unique" or "only." Jesus was one of a kind. There was no other like Son, nor would there ever be.

This passage goes further in establishing Jesus as one that God "sent" into the world. The idea of being sent is seen as having a legal flavor. It is the idea of one sending another on one's behalf, much like a proxy. It explains why Jesus was dependent on the Father and obedient to the Father. Jesus was sent on the Father's behalf, to say and do the things that God had decreed from heaven. In this sense John ended chapter three emphasizing,

He who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

## 2. *Healing a Lame Man (John 5)*

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disagree over whether John was the source of the words or whether Jesus was. There are solid scholars on both sides of this issue.

<sup>4</sup> See discussion at Morris, Leon, *The Gospel According to John – The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Eerdmans 1995), at 134.

In John 5, John reported a miracle Jesus performed on the Sabbath. Jesus went to a pool where a number of infirm stayed (blind, lame, and even paralyzed). Jesus struck up a conversation with a lame man. He had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. Jesus asked the man whether he wanted to be healed, and the man's answer indicated he likely had no recognition that Jesus might be the healer. The invalid thought healing would lay in the power of the water. Evidently there was a superstition that at times an angel would stir up the waters and the first one in after that would get healed.<sup>5</sup> So the old man replied to Jesus,

“Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.”

Jesus was not concerned about miracle water. Nor was he talking about an angelic healing. Jesus simply instructed the man to pick up his mat and walk, healing the man on the spot.

Jews challenged the healed invalid for carrying his mat on a Sabbath, and the man blamed Jesus! He explained that Jesus told him to after healing him. Of course, this meant that Jesus violated two Sabbath customs; he healed on the Sabbath and instructed a man to carry his mat. At that point, however, the healed man did not know Jesus' identity and was unable to affirm who had transgressed the Sabbath's customs.

A bit later, Jesus saw the man again and instructed the man,

“See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.”

In a manner reminiscent of what children call a “tattle tale,” the healed man then sought out the Jewish authorities and told them he could now identify Jesus as the healer. From this miracle, the Jews challenged and persecuted Jesus for breaking the Sabbath. It is in this context that we have a direct window in John's teaching on Jesus as the Son of God.

As Jesus was answering the Jewish challenges, his response included the comment,

My Father is working until now, and I am working.

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<sup>5</sup> This is suggested by verse seven in the text. There also was an insertion into John's gospel in later copies to this effect. The later insertion assumed that an angel did in fact do such stirring producing a healing for the first one in afterwards. This would not have been in John's original Gospel.

This was blasphemous to the Jews. It was a clear affirmation by Christ that God was his Father in the sense that Jesus was God's equal. In John 5:18, John makes it clear:

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

For John, Jesus was not simply God's unique Son sent by God as a proxy (the Nicodemus story), but Jesus was God's Son as an equal to God. John then adds more narrative from Christ indicating that John did not merely come up with such an idea, nor was it simply an assessment from the actions of Christ. But it was apparent from the teachings of Jesus as well. There is an extended narrative from Jesus about what it meant that he was the Son of God.

- **Jesus worked God's works:** "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise" (5:19).
- **Jesus was privy to God's plans:** "For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel" (5:20).
- **Jesus had God's power to give life:** "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will...For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself." (5:21, 26).
- **This power is based on Jesus as the Son of God:** "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (5:25).

This will take on more direct significance in the miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

- **Jesus had God's authority:** "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son" (5:22).
- **Jesus was worthy of the honor due God:** "that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him" (5:23).

- **Jesus was attested to by Scripture:** “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (5:39-40).
- **Jesus was there on the Father’s behalf:** “I have come in my Father’s name” (5:43).

While many often claim that the deity of Christ was thrust on Jesus by a much later church, the truth according to John is that Jesus claimed his role as Deity, affirming it with works not otherwise explainable. Jesus was God’s Son, in a sense of one united with God in purpose, actions, will, power, honor, and authority.

Reading this, we are mindful that it is only one of the seven miracles John gave us, but it is apparent why this miracle fit John’s purpose:

these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (Jn 20:31).

The healing of the lame man passage has Jesus explaining not only his Sonship, but also the life found in his name.

- **Jesus was the source of life:** “whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (5:24).

The third section where John writes of Jesus using the phrase “Son of God” is found in John 10, at the Feast of Dedication.

### *3. Jesus at the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22-42)*

This is a wintertime event in the life of Christ that students of the Old Testament are hard pressed to place. John starts this section saying,

At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon.

There is no Feast of Dedication in the Old Testament. This is a feast that was placed into Jewish practice in the second century BC. Today we call it *Hanukkah*. It was a feast that celebrated the Jews rededicating their temple after its desecration at the hands of Antiochus Epiphanes.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For details on this, read the lesson on the Intertestamental time period earlier in our series. It is available at the class website: [www.Biblical-Literacy.com](http://www.Biblical-Literacy.com).

As Jesus taught, there was considerable discussion among the Jews whether he was indeed the Messiah, a term we discussed earlier that was open to many opinions about what exactly it entailed. They asked Jesus to “tell them plainly” whether he was the Messiah or not. Jesus responded that he had told them, but they would not accept it or believe it. If they were like many people today, they wrote off his actions as rumors, tricks, or legends. After all, they had not seen a Messiah before, why should they see one that day!

As Jesus explained further he emphasized his relationship as a Son to God the Father. It united him to the Father. The miracles they refused to accept were testimony to Jesus’ identity; the people just refused to believe them. Again we hear echoes of this today. Countless people do not view the miracles as possible for a God to do, and so discount the idea that Jesus was God. (Albeit circular reasoning, but the reasoning offered often nonetheless.)

At this the Jews picked up stones to stone Jesus for blasphemy. They rightly understood the claims of Jesus,

It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.

Jesus did not deny the claim. In fact he underscored it:

Do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.

While the Jews sought to seize and arrest Jesus, he escaped and left Jerusalem, going to the other side of the Jordan River.

In this interaction, the miracles are again linked to the claims of Jesus. Jesus again was not emphatic about his title, recognizing simply that he was about the Father’s business. Jesus did the Father’s work as a faithful Son. The real question was never the identity of Jesus, but whether the people had enough vision to see and faith to accept who Jesus was.

#### *4. The Raising of Lazarus (John 11)*

Here we have the final section of John identifying Jesus by the specific phrase “Son of God.” This is also the second directly associated with one of John’s seven recorded miracles, the first being the healing of a lame man in John 5. This happened in Bethany, a small village just outside Jerusalem (2 miles) on the road

to Jericho. Set against the context of Chapter 10 where Jesus fled Jerusalem to avoid the Jewish attempts at stoning him, this has Jesus returning just two miles away, certainly not a risk free location!

Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha, two important ladies to Jesus and his ministry who lived in Bethany. When Lazarus fell ill, the sisters sent a messenger to Jesus. Jesus responded to those around him,

This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.

The story subsequently makes clear that the “Son of God” to be glorified through these events was Jesus.

After saying this, Jesus waited two more days before declaring his intent to set out for Bethany. His disciples challenged the decision reminding him how close Bethany was to where the Jews were waiting to stone him. Jesus explained that he was not afraid, but that it was time to go because Lazarus had “fallen asleep.” While Jesus meant that he was dead, the disciples took him literally and again urged Jesus not to go because he would surely wake up later. Jesus spoke more bluntly and said that Lazarus was dead! Jesus saw that in the events that were about to unfold, the disciples would experience something that would stick with them forever. They were going to see that Jesus was not speaking allegorically when he said he had the power of life!

By the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been dead four days. Since Bethany was slightly less than two miles from Jerusalem, there were many who had come to grieve with the family. Mary stayed at home grieving while Martha went out to meet Jesus. In the interchange Martha also joins the acknowledgement of Jesus as the Son of God.

Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

Jesus meets up with Mary and goes to the tomb where many are weeping and mourning. Here John made an interesting comment. In a story that is to show the glory of Jesus, and that shows his power over death, we have John putting in two

words: Jesus wept. This, the shortest verse in the New Testament, shows a side to Jesus that is compassionate and caring. I suggest it is a part of the way this miracle shows the glory of God. God is not simply a being with the power over life and death. He is also a kind and loving God. His heart understands grief and agony, and it moves him. This is as much the glory of the Son of God as the power to raise the dead!

Some of the Jews noted Jesus was moved, but openly wondered whether or not Jesus could have saved him had he been there timely. Mary and Martha wondered the same. Jesus ordered the tombstone rolled back, over the protests of Martha who noted the smell would be potent. Standing at the face of the opened tomb, Jesus cried out to God, and then called Lazarus forth:

Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”

Lazarus came out immediately, still wrapped in his burial clothes. Jesus ordered the family to unwrap him.

In the midst of this miracle, came the final downfall of Jesus. While many of the Jews present believed in Jesus after this, some returned the 1.75 miles to Jerusalem and told the Pharisees what had happened. At a meeting of the Chief Priests and Jewish ruling council, it was decided that something had to be done about Jesus, and the decision was made to put him to death once and for all.

## CONCLUSION

The Son of God title still induces wonderment over the illustration of what it meant versus what it did not mean. Lightfoot worded it well,

The Son of God...did not glisten in any worldly pomp or grandeur according to what the Jewish nation fondly dreamed their Messiah would do; but he was decked with the glory, holiness, grace, truth, and the power of miracles.<sup>7</sup>

John wanted his readers to be confirmed in the knowledge and understanding of Jesus as Son of God. Jesus was a reflection of the Father’s heart and priorities. God was never reflected in one who sought the world’s pleasures, the world’s prestige, or the world’s popularity. Jesus was on mission to accomplish God’s

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<sup>7</sup> Lightfoot, John, *Commentary on the Gospels from the Talmud and Hebraica* ().

plans and works, and then return home. It was just a matter of doing that and no more. The Son of God lived reflecting a God of Glory and holiness, of grace and truth, and of power, specifically the power of miracles. These attested to his authority in ways nothing else could.

From John's write up and understanding, we have many of the tools that helped the church grow to understand the Trinity. It established Jesus as God's equal, even as he was doing the Father's bidding while on earth. Augustine explained this role of Jesus as less than he was, where he "emptied himself," to use Paul's terminology (Phil. 2:6-8).

...the Son of God is both understood to be equal to the Father according to the form of God in which He is, and less than the Father according to the form of a servant which He took; in which form He was found to be not only less than the Father, but also less than the Holy Spirit; and not only so, but less even than Himself.<sup>8</sup>

Augustine took the titles further seeing the semantic difference between the Father and Son as a key to understanding the Trinity.

We understand that the Son is not indeed less than, but equal to the Father, but yet that He is from Him, God of God, Light of light. For we call the Son God *of* God; but the Father, God only; not *of* God. Whence it is plain that the Son has another *of* whom He is, and to whom He is Son; but that the Father has not a Son *of* whom He is, but only to whom He is father. For every son is what he is, *of* his father, and is son to his father; but no father is what he is, *of* his son, but is father to his son.<sup>9</sup>

John does not push those final conclusions, but John does set them up. John understood that in the midst of many contemporary ideas about who was and who was not a son of God, Jesus was *the* Son of God.

### POINTS FOR HOME

1. *"Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God"* (Jn 3:18).

It is not surprising to read this verse in light of what we have seen thus far in our study of John. With an understanding of "believe" as trust or rely,

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<sup>8</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, Book II, Ch. 2-3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 3-4.

we are told that relying on Jesus will give one life, but self-reliance produces only the condemnation already at play among humanity. This is a basic Biblical truth. We can choose to trust on the work of Christ or we can decide not to. I know where my decision is, the question for me is now an examination of my life to see if it is lip service or genuine.

In this sense I like the subtle way that John tells the story of Nicodemus. He pointed out that Nicodemus came to Jesus to talk at night. Some see here an implication that Nicodemus did not want anyone to see him talking to Jesus. Others see the night as Nicodemus's spiritual darkness. One thing is for certain, once faith is placed in Jesus, one no longer holds the conversation in the darkness of either disguise or unbelief. The Christian walk is in the light.

2. *“Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me” (Jn. 5:7).*

I must admit, I am not fond of the lame man in this healing. He makes up excuses for his condition when Jesus first asks him whether he wants to be healed. Then after Jesus heals him, he doesn't bother to learn about Jesus. Once he finds out who Jesus was, he then goes to the authorities to identify Jesus and get him in trouble. Is this gratitude? Absolutely not!

No, I am not fond of the lame man, and that bothers me. Because I can think of the blessings that God has given me, which I have never sought out – blessings that he has given me simply out of his heart. There are many of these that I have not thanked him for. Do I think they are my due? Do I think it is just my hard work or maybe my lucky day? Furthermore, how much time do I spend getting to know Jesus versus the time I spend on other things in life? Then how many times have I sold out Jesus rather than stand under his banner proclaiming him in love with all my allegiance?

I am not fond of the lame man, but I wonder if that is because in some ways, I am he.

3. *“This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (Jn 11:4).*

Here is where I want to be! I want Jesus glorified by his work in my life. He has brought me back from spiritual death, and I want to shed my grave clothes and walk in the newness of this life he gave me! Glory to God!