



## TIME OF GRACE®

# *Fake News/Real Jesus: Meet the Real Jesus!*

## Study Notes

### *Summary*

Was Jesus a good man? a wise teacher? a religious guide? a prophet? a god? Jesus' best friend John answers those questions in the opening words of his gospel. Jesus is the Word, both with God and himself God. Jesus is the way God communicates with us, showing us the darkness of life without him and the bright light of trusting in him.

- **John 1:1-5,14-18:** <sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup>Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. <sup>14</sup>The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. <sup>15</sup>(John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") <sup>16</sup>Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. <sup>17</sup>For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.
- Big Theme #1: Jesus' \_\_\_\_\_ (the \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_).
- **John 1:10-13:** <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup>He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. <sup>12</sup>Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— <sup>13</sup>children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.
- Big Theme #2: Jesus' \_\_\_\_\_.
- **John 1:6-9:** <sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. <sup>9</sup>The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

- Big Theme #3: Jesus' \_\_\_\_\_.
- **John, selected verses:** “John [the Baptist] came as a witness to testify.” “Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in [Jesus] because of the woman’s testimony.” “The very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me.” “These are the very Scriptures that testify about me.” “My other witness is the Father, who sent me.” “The Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me.” “And you [apostles] also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.” “The man who saw it has given testimony. . . . He testifies so that you also may believe.”
- What next? \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

### *Points to Ponder*

1. Think of the biggest moral questions our society is wrestling with. Why do people on each side of the controversy claim that Jesus supports their views?
2. Study the seven “I Am” statements Jesus made in John’s gospel (a simple internet search will help you find them). What do you learn about Jesus’ true identity from these words?
3. **Challenge:** By the end of this TV series, read the entire gospel of John. (Bonus points if you finish before next Sunday!)

### *Homework for Next Week*

Read John 1:29-34.

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Fake News, Real Jesus: Meet The Real Jesus!**  
John 1: 1-18  
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*Pastor Mike Novotny*

It's kind of struck me as I keep my ears open for Jesus name in our media and our culture that everyone I can find wants Jesus on their side except sometimes people aren't on the same side who are both claiming Jesus.

I think about our conservative friends who always talk about Jesus as they, you know, focus on the family and talk about traditional Christian marriage. And then I think about our more liberal friends who say, you know, when I read this book, Jesus talked way more about the poor and the needy than he did about marriage and family. Our friends who go to church say they go to church because of Jesus; that he said we should do it and he himself had the habit of going to the synagogue week after week so we should, too. While our not-so-church friends will say, no, actually, Jesus was like scathing in his critique of organized religion and he never equated a good relationship with God with your rituals and rules that you follow on the weekend.

I think about our vice president and his wife who've been in the news a lot in recent months. They say because of Jesus, they have certain like conservative, traditional, historic views about LGBT issues and sexuality. To which other people who say because Jesus taught them to love and accept and to not judge, hold the very opposite views and call our vice president the "Worst kind of Christian," a quote from Lady Gaga, herself.

Our Muslim friends say that Jesus was a great prophet who just passed out on the cross but never died for you, never was raised from the dead. And our Christian friends would say, no, Jesus was way more than a prophet. He was the Son of God, crucified, buried, and raised for the forgiveness of our sins.

So how do you know exactly what's true? And that's why today and for the next couple of weeks, I want to introduce you to a man named John. He's sometimes called the apostle John or the disciple that Jesus loved. And he's called that because Jesus loved him and Jesus apparently loved to hang out with him. I think when Jesus officially started to teach and preach and began his ministry career at age 30, I'm not sure if there's any human being who saw and experienced more of Jesus firsthand than John. He was part of Jesus' inner circle with Peter and John's brother, James. He went places even the other apostles didn't get to go. And not only was John really close to Jesus, he did us a great favor because he wrote down what happened. It's one of the biographies of Jesus that you can find in the Bible that we call the gospel of John. And so, what we're going to do in this series is to really listen in and follow along with John's gospel and see if we can't wade through all the opinions and assumptions and fake news and get back to the Jesus who turned the world upside down.

"In the beginning was the Word." That's a nickname for Jesus. "And the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."

John continues in our next verses: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John," that's actually a different John; John the Baptist, "testified concerning Jesus. He cried out saying, 'This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God but the One and Only Son who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known."

Alright, we're looking for three things in John's gospel. If you have a pen ready, here's the first one. John wants to teach you all about Jesus' identity. John wants to convince you that Jesus' identity is the word. The very first sentence out of John's pen, "In the beginning was the Word. The Word became flesh. The Word was with God and the Word was God." In other words, that was one of Jesus' nicknames from the apostle John. If John was the captain of the basketball team with the apostles, he would have gotten Jesus' jersey and on the back it would just have said, "Word." Which is, you know, a pretty sweet nickname; it sounds pretty like 21st century. But what does that mean? That Jesus was the Word?

Well, think for a second of what words do. Essentially, words help another person's head understand what's happening in your heart. Like right now, as you all look at me, I honestly have no clue if you're already super bored with this sermon or if you're kind of like, "Oh, tell me more, Pastor." You know, lots of you grew up in really conservative churches with no emotion so you give me the same face no matter what I'm saying so I have no clue what's going on inside of you unless - unless you would speak a word. And with a word or two or just a sentence or two, my head could know in an instant what's going on in your heart. And it's kind of the same with Jesus and God. Do you catch that line? John said, "No one has ever seen God," so what did the word do? "He made God known." Instead of you having to guess like what God is like or what God thinks, what God approves of and what he condemns, if God forgives, if he loves, if he saves, instead of just like trusting the church we grew up in or our culture or our family or our gut or our own intuition or assumption, we wouldn't have to. All we have to do is listen to Jesus because he's the word that lets our heads know what's in the Father's heart. That's the first part of Jesus' identity.

Here's the second: John also wants you to know that Jesus is God. Now if this is like your first time kind of checking out a church and exploring Christianity, I'm going to apologize right now because this is probably the most confusing part of our faith. The Bible teaches that there are these three people that love each other - the Father, the Son, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit - and there's also just one God. And do you know who that God is? The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We Christians who grew up with it, we sometimes forget how baffling this is; what we call the Trinity - three persons but one God. And if that's confusing, that's okay. You don't have to understand that just now but you do need to know that John is saying that Jesus is God. He's

not just a good guy who started a religion. He's not like Muhammad or Buddha or Joseph Smith. He claimed to be God. He didn't want you to respect him; he wanted you to worship him. He didn't want you to give a little bit of your time or money to honor him. He wanted you to give up your entire life to follow him.

The third thing you need to know about Jesus is this: That he is full of grace and truth. John said it just like that: "He came from the Father full of grace and truth." That's actually one of our church's values that our leaders try to live by. We call it 200 proof grace and truth. Like, we never, ever want to water down, get like 99 percent truth in our church and we don't want to be like 58 percent loving and gracious because we want to imitate Jesus who at the same time was so full of truth and, at the same time, was incredibly full of grace. And this is what makes Jesus so unique; why he never fit in anyone's like expectational box because most people are really like passionate about the truth and what's right or wrong and obey the laws of God. And other people are all about love and compassion and acceptance and patience. And Jesus, somehow, was both of those things at the very same time. And if you come back for the rest of this series, you're going to see that in shocking ways. I love how my favorite Christian artist depicted it in one of his pictures. That's Jesus. Like, do you want a word from the Father's heart? There's a direct quote. Do you want to know that Jesus was not just some guy on the cross? Look at the golden holy halo around his head. Do you want to know that God takes sin very seriously? That he's committed to truth? There's the proof. And do you want to know that God has uncommon - Jesus has crazy, unconditional love for people like us? There's the proof, too. A holy God who came down from heaven to give his life on the cross for sinners, that's Jesus and that's what John wants you to know. So for the next few weeks, I want you to keep your ears open for two things. Number one, like I said, are the "I am" statements of Christ. And secondly, I want you to keep your ears open for the signs. John's also famous for seven signs that prove Jesus is not just a good guy; he is God.

Alright, there's the first thing that I wanted to get into your head, which means you're ready for thing number two. Alright, let's jump in back to John 1 where John said this: "He," Jesus, "was in the world and though the world was made through him," because he's God, "the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

That's crazy, huh? God shows up. He's full of power, of miracles. He's full of grace and truth but what happened? People didn't receive him, didn't trust him, didn't follow him, didn't believe in him, even though he came to his own. Think about this: Jesus was born of a Jewish mother. When the word became flesh and dwelt among us, he came from a Jewish woman and womb. He was born in a Jewish place called Bethlehem. He grew up in a Jewish town called Nazareth. He did all of his miracles on Jewish soil. He died and was raised from the dead with a Jewish GPS location. He spent 99.7 percent of his life in Jewish territory and yet, 99.7 percent of the Jewish people did not love him.

Which is what John wants you to know - if you're taking notes, here's big idea number two: John wants you to know about Jesus' controversy. He could heal the sick, he could raise the dead, he

could forgive sins but when Pastor Jesus tried to start a church, he couldn't even fill up the first service. Three years of hard work and he had fewer people than maybe there are in this church right now today. And that's really, really important for you to know. Because sometimes we assume that, you know, Christianity is controversial or, you know, people don't like what this church stands for. If only Jesus would come or we could be loving like Jesus, then everyone would love Jesus. But not everyone loved the real Jesus! John 6 is maybe the best example of this. Have you ever heard of the feeding of the five thousand? A bunch of people come to hear Jesus' teaching, they find him compelling and interesting, they're getting hungry, they've got nothing to eat. So Jesus takes this like kid's Lunchable and he feeds 5,000 people and they love him so much, they say, "We have to make him king. He can feed us every day!" In response, Jesus preaches a sermon called the Bread of Life Discourse that is so controversial and offensive, 4,988 people leave. And the only people that are left are Jesus' 12 apostles and Jesus says, "Are you going to go, too?" And they look back and they said, "Jesus, this is a hard teaching." You know you have the real Jesus when you study his words and your heart says, "Whoa. This is a hard teaching." If Jesus never challenges or confronts or makes you feel like you have to change anything in your life, you're probably not looking at Jesus. Because the real Jesus, no matter how loving or how conservative, how liberal or how whatever, he always made people question and change to follow the ways of the kingdom of God.

In other words, Jesus was not like me playing guitar hero. I think Sarah here has my prop that I brought today. Back in the early 2000's, I was a rock god. I know, I know you should not brag in church but I've got to tell you guys, I was really, really good at this game. I had to give it up; I was playing like a Metallica solo on expert in the year, I think, 2008 and my daughter who was just learning to take her first steps, she kept unplugging my guitar out of the Xbox. I got very angry at her and it kind of dawned on me that maybe I needed to put this down and become a father. If you've ever played guitar hero before or video games in general, you might know that you get to choose your avatar. You ever heard of that before? Your avatar is like your computerized character. And I noticed that, you know, as I was choosing my character, I could click down and I could choose what I wanted him to look like, and his hairstyle, and his sweet rocker outfit, facial hair, check, what kind of guitar will he play? I like that one. Boom - I could choose it; I could pick every little thing about him. And if I had to describe the sound of modern Christianity in America, it would be this.

What did Jesus say about marriage? Hmm. How about money? I like that one. What did he say about church? About addiction? Forgiveness? Family? Divorce? Yeah, that looks like Jesus. But I'll tell you what - the reason they put Jesus on the cross is because he rarely pushed this button with people to confirm their previously held beliefs. But he often pushed this one and he said, "Nope. I came from God." "Nope." And they didn't like it so much. And I want you to know that.

Let me give you just a head's up to prepare your heart for what's coming. If you're kind of a conservative person - morally conservative, maybe even politically conservative - Jesus is going to try to change you. As I try to listen to like conservative news media and I talk to kind of conservative people, I realize very, very quickly that their lifestyle is so different than the life of compassion, generosity and love that Jesus exemplified. Jesus once told a story to a guy who wanted to know how to be right with God and the story was this. This guy was injured on the

side of the road and this religious guy who worked in a church walked by but he didn't help. And so another religious guy who actually worked for the church, he walked by but he didn't help. And then a guy who was from the wrong culture, the wrong religion, he walked by and he helped. So who loved his neighbor? The one who went to church? Who worked for the church? Or paused his weekly plans to help?

Jesus had such a shocking, compassionate love, he once said to a rich, conservative, religious guy who was trying to keep all the rules, he said, "Jesus, what should I do?" Jesus said, "Sell all of it and give it to the poor." Jesus said things like when you open your home, don't just invite your friends; everyone does that. Invite the homeless, the beggars, the friendless, the awkward, the people who can't give you anything back. That's what worshipping God looks like. And I don't know many conservative people that talk like that.

And I also don't know many liberal people who talk like Jesus. Many people on the other side of the kind of moral, political spectrum, talk a ton about compassion and intolerance and acceptance, but their definition of love looks so little like Jesus. Jesus called people to change their lives; he loved them but he would actually heal people who were cripples and then get up so excited and Jesus would look them in the face and say, "Now don't sin or something worse will happen to you." Jesus talked more about hell, like consciously suffering apart from God forever and ever more than anyone else. If you think people are like Bible thumping, fire and brimstone preachers, get ready for Jesus because he did both. With Jesus, you don't get to pick and choose. C.S. Lewis, the Oxford scholar, atheist who became a Christian, he once said, "You can call Jesus your Lord or you can call him a lunatic or a liar but don't patronize him with anything in between." Two thousand years ago, Jesus was not accepted by everyone. He was controversial so prepare your heart for the same.

I promised you three big ideas to understand John's gospel - let's look at the passage that explains the third. John says, "There was a man sent from God whose name was John." That's John the Baptist, Jesus' relative. "He came as a witness to testify concerning that light so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world." We talked about the identity and the controversy. Finally, John wants you to know about Jesus' testimony; all those who will testify on his behalf that he is the word, he is God, and he is full of grace and truth.

Let me prove it to you that John's gospel is all about this. I just took a snippet of all the passages that use the word "testify" or "witness" just from John's gospel and here's the small snippet I came up with. That's the small snippet, okay? John the Baptist came as a witness to testify. Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony. Jesus said the works I'm doing testify that the Father sent me. These are the Scriptures that testify about me. My other witness is the Father. The Spirit, he will testify about me. And you apostles must also testify. The man who saw it has given his testimony. He testifies so that you may believe. John's like a great lawyer and he knows a lot of people believe a lot of things about Jesus and so he just wants you to sit long enough and listen.

The Bible is not like other books. Just listen to the International Federation of Library Associations. Some books have more testimony, more sources, are closer to the date and to the

truth. But Joseph Smith wrote his book about Jesus, the Book of Mormon, almost 2,000 years after it happened. But the manuscripts of the gospels and letters of Paul are just decades after Jesus lived and died by the eyewitnesses themselves. And so when someone just says, "Hey, it's all just different names for God. You know, religion is just opinion; it's just culture." It's just historically not the truth. And if you care about the facts and you care about the truth, there is something really unique and compelling to explore the teaching of Christianity: It's based on Jesus. And there's so many people who testified, were witnesses, of who he was. And I want you to be one of those rare people who doesn't just know what they believe but why they believe it. Who's not going to write their personal blog about Jesus with no footnotes on the bottom but instead can testify, "I believe he is God himself and here are the reasons why." I want you to have a firm foundation to know that when you die, you're not just going to have to hope that what you believed in your heart was right but it's based on your incredible foundation of facts, history, and truth.

So here's what I need you to do before I say amen. I need to give you two bits of homework. The first homework, what I need you to do next, is to return. You've got to come back, alright? I'm not just trying to pad the church attendance statistics; I need you to come back because John has so much more to say. I've given you verses one to 18 but in this series, we're going to cover John one through four and he's going to unpack these three big ideas in powerful ways. And second, if I can challenge you, I want you to read John. Yeah, the sermon series covers John one through four, but there are 21 chapters and there's so much more that I want you to see and understand.

Because in the end, I want you to have the same experience as Vidia did. About a decade ago, I was a brand new pastor and a member of our church brought her coworker named Vidia, a Hindu Indian woman, to talk to me. She wasn't Christian but she was facing something that she couldn't fix and she was desperate for solutions and answers so she came to my office and I got to tell her about Jesus. I told her Jesus' identity; that he was God and that because of God, he was powerful and he could help her. And that Jesus wasn't just powerful; he was full of grace and truth; that he actually loved her. I told her that I couldn't guarantee Jesus would fix her problem now but he could give her something so much better because he is the way and the he is the truth and he is the life. And do you know what this Hindu woman said to me? "Okay." And I drove home and I said, "I'm good at this, holy cow!" Like, seven minutes, Hindus are becoming Christians; just like that in one conversation. You know, then God kind of reminded me - do you know what Hindus believe? They believe in millions of Gods so to call Jesus her God and pray to him was just a million and one gods in her list, which isn't the Christian faith at all. You know, she never came back to our church. But a couple years ago, after I moved to Appleton, I got an email from the coworker who had invited her and she said, "Did you hear about Vidia?" And I said, "No." She said, "Well, Jesus gave her what she prayed for. He solved her problem. And even better, Vidia came to believe that Jesus was God." She follows him now as her Lord and her Savior. She was born not of a husband's will or human decision but reborn by the Spirit of God, for God so loved the world - the world - that he gave his one and only Son. That whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life.



And that's what I want for you, too. There's a lot of controversy and a lot of opinions out there but Jesus wants to give you life. He will challenge you with his truth but I guarantee he can change everything with his love.

Let's pray.

Jesus, we speak to you right now because you're God. Because you're God, you're right here. Because you're God, you care about us. And because you're God, you can change anything. I pray, God, that you would persuade our hearts. That we would believe that we are standing on the truth and yet, I pray that we would imitate your incredible grace and we can be humble, compassionate, and kind about it.

Jesus, you love people who didn't believe in you. And I pray that we can do the same. That you were stubborn about the truth and yet, you were so compassionate and patient with the people that you would dialogue with and talk to and I pray that we can be the same. You were willing to hang out with people that no other religious people hung out with and I pray that we can be the same. I pray, Jesus, as we get closer and closer to you, our passion and our percentage would rise up to 200 proof until the people that meet us are confused why we stand so hard on truth and yet, baffled by the uncommon way that we love. If we call ourselves Christians, Jesus, help us to be like you are as Jesus the Christ.

Finally, I pray that we can find life. Jesus, in the gospel of John, you talked about that all the time; an abundant life, a good life, a life with God. Let that be our experience. As we put down good roots in you, the real Jesus, help the Spirit produce fruit in our heart that we could have more peace than we had yesterday. More joy, like you and the Father share; that we could have incredible love. This is our prayer, God, for your glory and for the good of your church. We ask it all, Jesus, in your powerful name, Amen.