Lesson 12
John 5–6; Mark 6:30–44; Matthew 14:22–33

As is often the case, there is far more here than a person can prepare for one lesson. These materials will focus on John 5, but I will also include questions on John 6.

John 5
Some have suggested that the Gospel of John is constructed around seven wondrous works or miracles. With each, Jesus gives a sermon that illustrates the significance of what he has done. The seven are:

1. Turning water into wine at the wedding feast and the discourse on being born again (John 2:1–12; 3:1–21)
2. Raising the nobleman’s son to life and a discourse on Jesus as the living water (John 4:43–51; 4:1–42)
3. Healing the man by the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath and explaining that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath (John 5:1–14; 5:19–47)
4. Feeding the five thousand and teaching that Jesus is the bread of life (John 6:1–15; 6:22–66)
5. Walking on the sea of Galilee, Jesus comes to Capernaum mysteriously and the discourse on the
inability of the Pharisees to understand him (John 6:16–21; 7:14–39)

6. Healing the man born blind and the teaching that Christ is the Light of the World (John 9; 8:12–59)

7. Raising Lazarus from the dead and the teaching of the resurrection (John 11; John 10:1–18)

Three of the seven are included in the readings for this lesson, one in this chapter and two in the next. Why do you think John might choose to give his testimony using that method of organization? What explanatory function do marvelous works play in John’s narrative?

Verse 1: What feast do you think is referred to? (See the footnote.) Is that relevant to the story that follows? If so, how?

Verses 2–16: John seems to use water as a symbol of what the life-giving water of Christ—his word—can do that the ritual cleansings of Judaism cannot do. The name of the pool (the Aramaic word Bethatha is probably more accurate than Bethesda) may be “house of the two springs,” referring to the springs that fed the pool—or it may mean “house of divine mercy.” There are good arguments for both meanings.

Besides being near the Sheep Gate (the gate through which sheep were taken into the temple precincts, on the north side of the temple), archaeological evidence shows that there were actually two pools, a larger one and a smaller one. It also suggests that the pools were near a Greco-Roman temple to Aesclepius, the god of healing. Temples to Aesclepius always contained a pool; those who went to the temples looking to be cured offered sacrifice—which they
had to buy from the temple priests—and then slept in the temple waiting for a dream to tell them whether they would be cured. It is possible that the Bethesda pools were used by those too poor to afford the Aesclepian sacrifice, but hoping that they could have a similar experience at Bethesda.

Do you see any symbolic significance in the pool’s location? What kinds of parallels and differences do you see between Jewish ritual and what Jesus does? Between Greco-Roman practice and what Jesus does? How does what Jesus does demonstrate his difference from the other two major religious understandings?

On the Sabbath (verse 9) at about the time of Passover (verse 1), Jesus goes to a pool where many infirm people gather (verses 2–4). He approaches a man among those gathered at the pool and heals him (verses 5–9). Then he immediately leaves, undetected (verse 13). When the healed man is questioned because he is breaking the Sabbath (verses 10–12), he doesn’t know who healed him (verse 13). However, later in the temple, Jesus finds the man and makes himself known (verse 14). Then the man reports to the authorities that Jesus healed him (verse 15). This is a strange story. What is going on here?

Why do you think Jesus went to these pools on the Sabbath? Why did Jesus initiate the healing rather than, as usual, wait for the suffering person to ask for help? Why did he tell the man to pick up his bed? Doesn’t Jeremiah 17:21 specifically forbid what Jesus commands?

What quarrel do “the Jews” have with the man who was healed? What is his justification for carrying his bed? Did
Jesus search the man out or just happen to meet him? How do you understand Jesus’s warning in verse 14?

Is Jesus suggesting that the man’s sins caused his problems and warning him that he may have a worse illness if he sins again? Doesn’t John 9:1–4 make that interpretation difficult? What else might Jesus be saying?

What is worse than physical illness?

Do you think Jesus was planning on or even precipitating what happens as a result of this miracle? If so, why?

Notice that John lumps a lot of events together in verse 16 and then moves to Jesus’s response to those events in the following verses. As a result, though at first glance we seem to be seeing one continuous story, if we look carefully we can see that a good deal of time might have passed between the miracle at the pool and Jesus’s answer to their charge. Note also that no early New Testament manuscripts contain the last part of verse 3 (“waiting for the moving of the water”) or verse 4, so many scholars believe that the original manuscript went directly from speaking of the great multitude gathered at the pool (the first part of verse 3) to verse 5. If they are right, does that change the meaning of these verses? How so?

**Verse 17:** How does Jesus respond to the charge that he works on the Sabbath? We could translate this “My Father is still working and I work.” What does “My Father is still working” mean? How does the Father continue to work? Is this an admission that his accusers are right about his Sabbath breaking? Explain how what Jesus says is an answer to their charge.
Is Jesus saying that the Father works on the Sabbath day? If so, how do you explain the apparent contradiction between that claim and Genesis 2:2? If not, how does Jesus’s answer justify healing on the Sabbath?

According to the Hermeneia commentary on John, *Exodus Rabbah* (part of the Jewish tradition, written down about 200 years after Christ, but assumed to reflect at least some teachings from Christ’s time) argues that carrying something around in your own house is not a breach of the commandment not to work on the Sabbath.1 (The argument is based on the wording of Jeremiah 17:21–22.) It follows that since the earth is God’s footstool, part of his house, he can do things on the Sabbath without breaking the commandment.

**Verse 18:** How do the authorities respond to his explanation? All of the Gospel writers agree that the authorities were initially offended by what they took to be Jesus’s Sabbath breaking and subsequently by his claim to be equal to God (though the latter was more serious). Has Jesus made himself equal to God by referring to himself as the Son? Why do you think Jesus made the Sabbath rather than some other disagreement about the Law the initial point of contention between himself and the authorities?

**Verses 19–21:** Traditional Christians use this verse (among others) to justify their belief in Trinitarianism. How do Latter-day Saints understand what Jesus says in verse 19? How do 2 Nephi 31:12 and 2 Nephi 18:24 relate to verse 19? Might they help us understand what that verse means? How does Jesus explain his imitation of the Father? Does that teach us anything about our imitation of the Savior?
How does love make command and obedience possible? How is that different from the command and obedience that we usually think of?

What does verse 21 tell us about the resurrection?

Verses 22–23: What does verse 22 tell us about the judgment? The word translated judgment in verse 22 and the word translated condemnation in verse 24 are variations of the same word. So we could insert condemn here in place of judge or we could insert judgment in verse 24 instead of condemnation. (However, see verse 24 and the notes on it.)

Verse 23 is given as an explanation of verse 22. What is the explanation? Why is honor (or according to another translation, valuing) so important in our relation to the Father and the Son? How do we honor them, value them? How is honor related to worship? How is honor related to what we saw when we looked at the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13; lesson 9)? Is honor important in our culture? If so, in what ways? How do we show honor? Do we honor things we ought not to honor? What are some examples?

Verses 24–25: Does verse 24 answer some of the questions I asked about verse 23?

What does verse 24 teach about what will happen to the person who follows Christ? (I take it that verse 24 demonstrates that, in the New Testament, judgment most often means “condemnation” rather than “decision.”)

What does it mean to hear the word of Christ? Does our discussion of Matthew 13:9 and related verses shed light on this verse?
When do we pass “out of death, into life”? Is that something that happens only with the physical resurrection, or can it occur before that? (Compare Romans 8:1–13, especially verses 8–10.)

To what event or events was Jesus referring in verse 25? Is that a verse only about those who are physically dead, or might it also be a verse about the spiritually dead? What does it mean to be spiritually dead?

**Verses 26–27:** What does it mean to say that the Father has life in himself? To say that he has given the Son life in himself? It might seem that we, as intelligences, have life in ourselves. However, if we did, then this statement wouldn’t say anything particularly interesting about the Father and the Son; it wouldn’t say anything about them that isn’t also true of everyone. Presumably, then, we don’t have life in ourselves. So what does that mean?

These verses say that the Father has given the Son two things: life in himself and the authority to judge. Are those two related in some way?

Jesus says that the Father has given him these things because Jesus is “the Son of man.” What does that phrase mean, and how does it explain what the Father has given the Son?

**Verses 28–29:** We can paraphrase verse 28 in this way: “Don’t wonder at the fact that the Father has given me life in myself and the authority to judge, because there will be a resurrection of the dead.” What does this mean? How are the two parts of that sentence related to each other? Is Jesus saying that the resurrection is even more amazing
than these two gifts of the Father to the Son? Or is he saying something else?

How are these two verses related to verse 22? Do they say the same thing or something different? Are verses 28–29 perhaps an expansion of the teaching in verse 22?

If, because we sin, we are all unworthy to enter the kingdom of heaven, what does it mean to say that we will be judged by our works (verse 29)?

**Verse 30:** How is the teaching of this verse related to that of verse 19?

What does Jesus mean when he says, “As I hear, I judge”?

Is this verse a summary of the theme Jesus announced in verse 17: “The Father is still working and I work”?

What guarantees that Jesus’s judgment is right? How is that relevant to us?

**Verses 31–47:** Jesus tells his audience who his witnesses are: John, Jesus’s works, the Father, and the scriptures. Who is the audience? How do you know? How are those witnesses relevant to them? To us?

**Verses 32–35:** John has testified of Jesus; he was a light in darkness—but that is not the witness to which Jesus will appeal. Why is Jesus not satisfied with the testimony of human beings (verse 34)?

What does he mean when he says, “These things I say, that ye might be saved”? To whom is he speaking? To what does “these things” refer? How will those things save? From what will they save?
**Verses 36:** A greater witness than John is the mighty works that Jesus has performed, works that he was given by the Father to bring to completion (“to perfect” in the King James Version). Why are Jesus’s works a greater testimony of who he is than is the testimony of John the Baptist?

**Verses 37–38:** The true witness of Jesus is the Father. If Jesus’s audience has not seen or heard the Father (verse 37), how has he been a witness?

What is the “abiding word” that his audience does not have?

When Jesus refers to “whom he hath sent,” who is he talking about? Is it only himself, or is he also talking about others who have been sent? If the latter, who might that be?

For the scribes and Pharisees, who was the most important person who had been sent? How do the authorities show that they don’t believe those whom the Father has sent?

**Verses 39–40:** We sometimes quote the first part of verse 39 as if it were a command, but a closer look at the context shows that to be unlikely. This verse probably means “You search the scriptures in which you think you find eternal life, but they testify of me.” In other words, even though the scriptures, which you believe have the words of eternal life, bear witness of me (see Galatians 3:21–24), you don’t see it. Putting verses 39 and 40 together, what is Jesus saying? To whom is he speaking?

**Verses 41–44:** Verse 41 seems to say that no one honors Jesus, but it really means that he does not seek the honor of men. Whom do the people that Jesus is addressing honor?
Verses 45–47: What does Jesus mean when he says that Moses, not he, will accuse them? What is the irony of Jesus’s accusation?

John 6

Verses 1–13: That this occurs just before Passover (verse 4) suggests that it has been a year since the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda. Why do you think Jesus performs this miracle, and what does John hope to show us by telling us of it? How was it a benefit to the crowd? To the disciples? What does it teach us? Is this miracle a representation, a type, of the sacrament? (See verse 51.)

Verses 15–21: Why does Jesus withdraw from the crowd?

What does the miracle of Jesus walking on the water teach us? Why do Mark and John tell so much less of the story than does Matthew? (Compare Mark 4:35–41 and Matthew 14:24–31.)

Verses 22–27: Why did the crowd follow Jesus to Capernaum?

Notice how the little parable in verse 27 leads the crowd to ask a question that goes further than the question they began with. They move from “How did you get here?” to “How do we do God’s work?” (verse 28). Does that change of their question suggest anything about how we should understand the story? About how we should understand our own questions?

Verses 28–29: Why is believing on him whom the Father has sent a work? (The word translated believe could also have been translated trust or have faith in.)
**Verses 30–40:** Why don’t the crowds understand Jesus’s teaching here? What has that to do with the fact that he taught in parables? Given Jesus’s explanation for why he taught in parables, what does their misunderstanding show us? Are we ever like the crowd, misunderstanding and, so, asking the wrong question? When? (We might wish to change the old saw to “Seeing is not necessarily believing.”)

**Verses 40–51:** We’ve seen the crowd misunderstand; now we see the authorities misunderstand. Why do you think John shows us this comparison? How do their misunderstandings differ?

Verse 44 says that no one comes to the Son unless the Father has drawn him (literally “dragged him”) to the Son. What does that mean?

Eating human flesh is in direct contradiction to the Mosaic law, so Jesus’s statement in verse 51 would be shocking. What is the symbolic significance of that shock? Ought we perhaps to be more shocked by the symbols of the sacrament? Would we learn anything from that shock? What kinds of meanings do you see in the symbolic act of eating Christ’s flesh and drinking his blood?

**Verses 52–59:** The authorities were shocked by Jesus’s statement that those who wish to live must eat his flesh, but he shocks them even more: you cannot live unless you eat the flesh of the Son and drink his blood. Not only was human blood forbidden, all blood was forbidden, so the idea of drinking human blood was doubly offensive. (See Genesis 9:4 and Deuteronomy 12:16.) Verse 57 tells us that if we eat his flesh we shall live. To live in a fallen world is to live by
killing other living beings, vegetable or animal; as mortal human beings, we cannot avoid that fact. How does verse 57 use that fact, and what point does it make?

**Verses 60–66:** When the disciples say, “This is a hard saying,” it is as if they are saying, “This parable is too difficult.” (The word translated *hard* could also have been translated *harsh* or *violent.*) Why does the teaching of verses 40–59 cause many to cease following Jesus? Why does Jesus ask, “Does this offend you?” when he must know that it did?

When Jesus says “the flesh profiteth nothing” (verse 63), is he using the word *flesh* literally or as a symbol? How do you explain your answer? How is he using the word *spirit* in that verse?

**Verses 67–71:** How are the apostles different from the disciples? Can you answer that question using only the New Testament? Why does Jesus point out that one of them is a devil?