

Third Sunday in Advent

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; 3 to grant to those who mourn in Zion — to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified. 4 They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

Chs 61–62 Aglow with images of light, abundance, gardens, brilliant jewels, and costly garments. The section begins with the Servant/Messiah's announcement of His role (61:1–3) and concludes with a call for the people to enter into the Lord's salvation (62:10–12). Three major segments are united by divine promises regarding Zion and the nations: Zion will eat the wealth of the nations (61:4–11), God will show the nations that Zion is not forsaken (62:1–5), and the nations will not devour Zion's wealth (62:6–9). (TLSB)

61:1–3, 10–11 Isaiah represents the Old Testament institution of prophecy as well as any of the ancient seers. He preaches boldly and without compromise the severity of God's law and fierceness of God's judgment. He brings a message of warning and denunciation against Judah for their idolatry and ungodly living. Yet Isaiah is also named the Evangelist of the Old Testament. While all the prophets proclaim God's love and grace, Isaiah does so with unsurpassed clarity and intensity. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 1)

The people rejected the prophet's preaching of the law and turned a deaf ear to his pleas for repentance and reform. Isaiah then foresees a future scourge of his people by powerful nations who are instruments of Yahweh's chastisement. Nevertheless, God is still gracious. When the people will languish as exiles in captivity, God shall hear their cry, rescue them, and deliver them. They shall be free to return to their homeland as God's chosen covenant people. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 1)

Isaiah 60 portrays the future glory and return to Zion. Our text, Isaiah 61, portrays the great Servant who shall effect Israel's liberation and restoration. The Servant was previously described in the four Suffering Servant Songs (Is 42:1–9; 49:1–7; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12). While some of Isaiah's contemporaries were described as servants of God, the New Testament makes clear that the fulfillment of these prophecies came in the person of Jesus Christ, the Messiah who earned salvation from the tyranny of sin and death for all the world's people. This futuristic reference of Isaiah's words is confirmed by our Lord's frequent descriptions of himself as the Servant who "did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Jesus specifically claimed to be the Servant described in our text when he read it in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16–21). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 1)

6:1-3 The speaker in vv 1–3, the great Servant, not only announces the imparting of gifts, but also dispenses these gifts of God for the liberation of his people. He is uniquely qualified because the Lord has anointed him with his Spirit (v 1). Elsewhere in the OT, the Spirit equipped kings, prophets, and priests with gifts for their respective offices, but the Spirit is given without measure to the Messiah (John 1:33–34; 3:34). The Messiah receives all the gifts of the Spirit in preparation for fulfilling the duties of his office (Is 11:2–5). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 1)

61:1–2 Jesus applied these verses to himself in the synagogue at Nazareth (see Lk 4:16–21; cf. Mt 11:5). (CSB)

A succession of phrases in vv 1–2 describes the Messiah’s deliverance. To the poor, to the afflicted in heart, he gives the sure prospect of deliverance. This good news comes on the authority of God, for the speaker is sent by God. The terms “captives” and “prisoners” may refer in part to the outward condition of the exiles, but the “brokenhearted” are those in every age who are bound to sin and the shackles of a deep sense of guilt before God. Deliverance from that spiritual dungeon of darkness will be like gaining new sight for the eyes. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 1)

61:1 *Spirit ... is upon me.*† The Messianic servant is meant. (CSB)

Me. The Lord’s Servant (42:1–7; 49:1–7; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12). (TLSB)

Jesus is not coming by his own impulse, nor by any other human catalyst, but by the Holy Spirit.

This Spirit then is the strong taproot of the life and being of the one who speaks. (Leupold)

Matthew 3:16 “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.”

anointed me. These are grand words. First He says that He was anointed, indicating that He was made King and Priest. He is the Messiah. Here we have the verb מָשַׁח, that is, “He anointed,” and from this we get “Messiah.” (Luther)

good news. A messenger announces the glory to be revealed in the messianic age. The Messiah not only has prophetic authority to speak for God, but He Himself made the promise come true (cf Ac 4:27; 10:38; Heb 1:9). In Is, the Spirit is esp associated with the power to bring justice and righteousness on the earth, often through the spoken Word (cf 59:21). “According to [Christ’s] divinity, He is of one essence with the Holy Spirit” (FC SD VIII 72). Luther: “Christ is the person sent by God and filled with the Holy Spirit to be the Preacher and Evangelist to the poor, that is, the afflicted. This was not done for Christ’s sake but for our sake.... Note this especially, that we must be content with the God of majesty when we consider His hidden but grand and terrifying offices. When we fall into this labyrinth, we become involved in speculations about divinity, and we want to become investigators of His majesty at our peril. As for you, be content with the God incarnate. Then you will remain in peace and safety, and you will know God. Cast off speculations about divine glory, as the pope and Mohammed speculate. You stay with Christ crucified, whom Paul and others preach” (AE 17:330–31). (TLSB)

poor. Cf. 11:4; 29:19. (CSB)

In the Scriptures the afflicted are the poor and the distressed. So Matt. 11:5 reads: “The poor have good news preached to them.” And in Exodus Moses was the meekest and most afflicted man. Here Christ is sent and called to preach to the afflicted and the wretched. This is very clear in opposition to the Jews, who are hoping for a Christ who will reign and rule over a worldly empire, when in reality it is the proper office of this King to preach the Gospel, to proclaim good news. (Luther)

bind up the brokenhearted. They are all mankind who are stung by the Law because of their sin and the death that will follow. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

This can include all that are deeply grieved over their sins as well as those that have been all but crushed by life's adversities. (Leupold)

1 Corinthians 15:56 "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law."

liberty to the captives. Freedom is used of the Year of Jubilee in Lev 25:10. Release from sin has as its background release from Babylon. (CSB)

61:2 *year of the LORD's favor.* † Corresponds to the "day of salvation" in 49:8 and the "year of my redemption" in 63:4. Christ ended his quotation at this point (Lk 4:19–20), because the "day of vengeance" will not occur until his second coming. (CSB)

Note that the Lord's favor is a *year* and in contrast the day of vengeance is only a *day*. God is known for his mercy and compassion. But, he is a just God and will judge those who refuse his free mercy.

day of vengeance. Jesus did not include the vengeance mentioned in this prophecy when, in Nazareth, He declared the year of the Lord's favor (Lk 4:18–19). Final judgment on the wicked and simultaneous vindication of the righteous are to take place when He returns (cf Mt 24:30). (TLSB)

Some of the terms used to describe the year of the Lord's favor are reminiscent of the Jubilee Year. The new time of God's grace is also described in Is 40:1–11 and chapters 51, 52, and 60. A time of divine vengeance (*nakam*, v 2) is reserved for those who persist in their evil ways when the day of redemption has been announced. It is significant that Jesus ended his quote of our passage with "the Lord's favor" and omitted "vengeance," perhaps to stress the graciousness of his First Advent and because God will not take full vengeance on his enemies until the Second Advent (Luke 4:19). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 1)

Jesus did not include the vengeance mentioned in this prophecy when in Nazareth, He declared the year of the Lord's favor (Lk 4:18–19). Final judgment on the wicked and simultaneous vindication of the righteous are to take place when He returns (cf Mt 24:30). (TLSB)

comfort all who mourn. The Lord's Servant goes on to proclaim comfort to all who mourn (vv 2b–3a). The Servant brings comfort, enabling them to carry their heads high as if wearing a garland. There is a play on the Hebrew words: they receive *pæer*, "a crown of beauty," in place of *aphar* "ashes." There is then a shift to botanical imagery: the righteousness imparted to them by the Servant shall make them as strong and durable as oaks planted by the Lord to demonstrate his grace. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 1)

61:3 *beautiful headdress.* A "turban" (as the Hebrew for this phrase is translated in Eze 24:17) or headdress. In 3:20 the women of Jerusalem were to lose their beautiful headdresses. (CSB)

oil of gladness. Anointing with olive oil was common on joyous occasions (see Ps 23:5; 45:7; 104:15; 133:1–2; cf. 2Sa 14:2). (CSB)

This is a complete 180 degree turn from what happened at the fall of man and can only be done by a merciful God. This is the miracle Jesus wants to do for everyone.

Mourning. The mourner with ashes on the head, wrapped in sackcloth, and with a spirit crushed with despair, is replaced by one who celebrates with a beautiful headdress, smelling of costly oil, and wearing a garment of praise. (TLSB)

garment of praise. Contrast the “garments of vengeance” in 59:17. (CSB)

The mourner with ashes on the head, wrapped in sackcloth, and with a spirit crushed with despair, is replaced by one who celebrates with a beautiful headdress, smelling of costly oil, and wearing a garment of praise. (TLSB)

oaks of righteousness. Contrast the oaks of 1:30. (CSB)

The redeemed of the Lord, rooted by faith in His promises (cf Ps 1:3). The Servant/Messiah will not simply throw words at the poor. His words impart what they announce (cf 55:10–11). (TLSB)

This is an act by God who plants it and helps it to grow like he does with Christians. It is his intervening action. Oaks are tree of great strength and endurance. They are often a haven for all kinds of wildlife. They were rare in that climate just as Christians are the minority in much of society.

planting ... may be glorified. All the trees of this garden are called righteous. In the world there are also very large trees like the cedars, but they are trees of unrighteousness and iniquity. But in this garden they will be righteous, planted by God. It follows therefore that a Christian does not just come into being, but he is planted and produced by the work of God. Christ is the gardener. Therefore a Christian is a divine work and a planting of God. For through the Word he is uprooted from the world and transplanted into this garden and watered. (Luther)

61:4–7 The work of the Servant/Messiah makes possible the reversal of fortunes for the people. (TLSB)

61:4 *shall build up the ancient ruins ... ruined cities.* The former devastations are the synagogues and the meeting places of the Gentiles, which have long lain deserted, forsaken by the Pharisees and Sadducees, as Christ says in the Gospel (Matt. 9:37), “the laborers are few,” and elsewhere (Matt. 9:36), “harassed like sheep.” Just so this city was deserted before the Gospel came, as is the case with other cities also. (Luther)

8 For I the LORD love justice; I hate robbery and wrong; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
9 Their offspring shall be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are an offspring the LORD has blessed.
10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. 11 For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.

61:8 *love justice.* Cf. 30:18; 59:15. (CSB)

everlasting covenant. † The new covenant . (CSB)

The result of the work of the Servant/Messiah (49:8; 54:10; 55:5; Ezk 37:25–26). (TLSB)

61:9 *offspring the LORD has blessed.* † See 44:3; 65:23. The promises to Abraham in Ge 12:1–3 will be fulfilled. (CSB)

God will fulfill His promise to Abraham (Gn 12:3). (TLSB)

61:10-11 In vv 10–11, the speaker is no longer the Servant, but Zion, and by anticipation, the New Testament church. The mood is one of joy because the Lord has adorned his people in garments of salvation and righteousness. The garment of Christ’s righteousness is placed on us in baptism (Gal 3:27). The church is described using nuptial imagery as in Eph 5:25–27. The groom and bride both anticipate joyfully their coming marriage. The imagery in v 11 then echoes the botanical description at the end of v 3: the Lord will make salvation and righteousness grow throughout the world like a garden, hinting of paradise restored. It is the Lord, both sovereign and gracious, who causes salvation to grow and encompass the nations of the world, foreshadowing the inclusion of gentiles in the church. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 1)

61:10 וְשׂוֹשׂ אֶשְׂשׂוּם בְּיִהוָה—The Qal infinitive absolute וְשׂוֹשׂ (translated adverbially, “exuberantly”) with the imperfect אֶשְׂשׂוּם (“I will rejoice”) intensifies the prophet’s expression of joy. For וְשׂוֹשׂ, see the third textual note on 61:3. While אֶשְׂשׂוּם is the regular form of the Qal imperfect (not cohortative in form), the context implies that its mood is cohortative, i.e., a strong volitional declaration of the speaker’s intention to rejoice. See Joüon, § 114 b (1) and the next textual note. (CC)

וְנִפְשִׁי בְּאֱלֹהֵי—The form of נִפְשִׁי, “to exult,” is jussive (נִפְשִׁי), rather than imperfect (נִפְשִׁי). This volitive form (and mood; see Joüon, § 114 g (1)) confirms the volitional (cohortative) mood of אֶשְׂשׂוּם in the preceding clause and likewise is a powerful expression of the will (Joüon, § 114 h), thus “indeed exult.” נִפְשִׁי is third feminine singular since its subject is נִפְשִׁי, the suffixed feminine singular noun נִפְשִׁי, “soul.” Compare St. Paul’s terminology for the “inner man” who delights in God’s Law (Rom 7:22), is being renewed daily (2 Cor 4:16), and is strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph 3:16), and his terminology for the “new man” created “in the righteousness and the holiness of the truth” (Eph 4:24). (CC)

כִּי הִלְבִּישְׁנִי בְּגָדֵי-יִשְׁע מְעִיל צְדָקָה יְעֻטְנִי—The “garments of skin” Yahweh provided for Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21) were a down payment of glorious attire to come. In the next clauses Isaiah will describe this garb in bridal terms (see the next textual note). Hebrew poetry often alternates between plural and singular forms, as here with בְּגָדֵי-יִשְׁע, “garments of salvation,” and then מְעִיל צְדָקָה, “a robe of righteousness.” Isaiah and by extension all believers are clothed in this vesture; cf. the Christian’s “breastplate of righteousness” in Eph 6:14 and “crown of righteousness” in 2 Tim 4:8. The terms בְּגָד, “garment,” and מְעִיל, “robe,” also appear together in Is 59:17 to describe the Divine Warrior; and for the Davidic Messiah, “righteousness will be the belt of his waist” (11:5 וְהָיָה צִדְקָה אֲזוּר מִתְּהַיָּו, “righteousness will be the belt of his waist”). The nouns יִשְׁע or שׁוּעָה, “salvation,” and צְדָקָה or צְדָקָה, “righteousness,” are also parallel in 45:8; 51:5, 6, 8; 56:1; 59:17; 62:1. In 52:1 Yahweh commands, לְבַשְׂי עֹזָר צִיּוֹן לְבַשְׂי | בְּגָדֵי תִפְאָרֶתָךְ, “put on/clothe yourself with your strength, O Zion; put on garments of your beauty.” Similar expressions are in Ps 132:9, 16. (CC)

Here, instead of Isaiah/the faithful remnant clothing himself/themselves (Qal of לְבַשׂ, as in 49:18; 51:9; 52:1) with a garment provided by Yahweh, the entire action is performed by Yahweh alone. He is the subject of both verbs. This depicts divine monergism in salvation: Yahweh does it all! Both verbs take a double accusative construction: the first accusative is denoted by the first common singular pronominal suffix on each of the verbs (-נִי, “me,” the person clothed), and the second accusative is the two-word phrase that refers to the garment (בְּגָדֵי-יִשְׁע and then מְעִיל צְדָקָה). The first verb, הִלְבִּישְׁנִי, “he clothed me, caused me to be clothed,” is the (causative) Hiphil of לְבַשׂ. The second verb form, יְעֻטְנִי, is the Qal perfect third masculine singular of עָטָה, to “cover” (BDB, DCH), a hapax legomenon, with a first common singular suffix. Some suggest emending it to a Hiphil imperfect third masculine singular of the related verb עָטָה, “wrap with, cover with” (DCH, עָטָה I, Hiphil), but emendation is unnecessary. (CC)

כְּחַתָּן כְּחַתָּן יִהְיֶה פֶּאֶר וְכַכְלֵה תַעֲבֹדָה כְּלִיָּה—Is 61:10b–11 is connected through four similes, each beginning with the preposition כְּ: “like a bridegroom” and “like a bride” (61:10b) and “as the earth” and “as a

garden” (61:11; see also 58:11). The subjects here, the “bridegroom” (קַדְוָן) and “bride” (כַּלְהָה), likewise rejoice in 62:5. This same marital joy is expressed in Jer 33:11. The noun פְּאָר, “headdress,” appears also in 61:3; see the second textual note there. The פְּאָר was worn by Israelite priests (Ex 39:28; Ezek 44:18). This and other priestly connections explain the use of the denominative Piel verb (derived from the noun כַּהֵן, “priest”) כִּכְהֵן, “dress like a priest.” Note the gift of the title כַּהֲנֵי יְהוָה, “priests of Yahweh,” in 61:6. The investing of the bridegroom with a priestly headdress may be compared to the crowning of the bridegroom on his wedding day in Song 3:11. The parallel verb תִּעְבְּדֵהּ is the third feminine singular Qal imperfect of עָבַד, “adorn/ornament oneself” (see BDB, עָבַד II), although the form itself could be Hiphil (not used in the OT).²² This verb appears in the context of Bridegroom Yahweh adorning his bride Jerusalem in Ezek 16:11, 13. Cf. the cognate noun יָבֻד denoting a bride’s “ornaments” in Is 49:18; Jer 2:32; Ezek 16:11. Here in Is 61:10 כְּלִיהָ, the suffixed plural of the multivalent noun כֶּלֶי, denotes “her ornaments” or “her jewels.” כְּלֵי denotes precious betrothal gifts in Gen 24:53 (cf. Ex 3:22; 11:2). (CC)

Isaiah makes this confession for himself as well as for the remnant community. The first person singular discourse creates an inclusio around chapter 61. In 61:1–3 the Anointed Servant speaks in the first person as he proclaims the gifts he brings, while here Isaiah celebrates those Gospel gifts. Luther rightly comments: “This is a song which the prophet sings as representative of the church.” And just like to Peter, “flesh and blood” did not reveal this to Isaiah (Mt 16:17). It was not human insight or imagination. It was rather Yahweh’s self-disclosure through his Anointed Servant (Is 61:1–3), who let the prophet see the beauty of salvation. (CC)

Envision a woman dressed for a funeral who receives word that a mistake has been made. She is told, “Instead of a funeral there will be a wedding with the love of your life!” What does she do? In breathtaking speed she washes the ashes from her face, dons her wedding garments, and crowns her head with a garland of flowers. It is time to celebrate! In like manner, Zion’s wailing has been turned into celebration; her sackcloth is gone, and she is girded with joy (cf. Ps 30:12 [ET 30:11]). Zion’s beauty comes from Yahweh. And it is everlasting! (CC)

In the OT the process of marriage often begins with the payment of a bride price or gift (e.g., Gen 24:51–53; 34:12; 1 Sam 18:25; cf. Song 1:10–11). Yahweh paid for his bride through the suffering and death of his faithful Servant (Is 52:13–53:12), so the baptized have been bought, “not with gold or silver, but with His [Christ’s] holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.” God does not pursue his bride because she is lovely; he seeks the one who is unlovely to bestow upon her a perfect righteousness (Hos 2:21 [ET 2:19]; Eph 5:25–28). (CC)

The Anointed Servant gives gifts so that the faithful become “oaks of righteousness” (Is 61:3). Now, speaking for Zion, Isaiah responds with praise to Yahweh for having cloaked his people with righteousness. Justification is not an improvement, an alteration, a change of heart, or a cleaning up of the old Adam. It is an imputed righteous standing, received by faith, for Christ’s sake (Is 53:11; 54:17; Rom 3:24–30; Gal 3:8–14). These garments of salvation and righteousness are similar to the Divine Warrior’s clothes (Is 59:17). We therefore not only receive a righteous standing, but incorporated into Christ, we also become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). Our cups overflow with celebrative elation (Ps 23:5)! (CC)

These garments of salvation are the same clothes John calls white robes washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14). Paul maintains that the baptized bride of Christ stands before him “without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Eph 5:27; cf. Gal 3:27; Col 3:9–10). The salvation story is truly one of rags (see Is 64:5 [ET 64:6]) to riches because Christ went from riches to rags (cf. Jn 19:23–24; 2 Cor 8:9). (CC)

I greatly rejoice in the Lord – The speaker seems to be the same as in the first verse of the following chapter, that is, the prophet speaking in the name of Zion’s watchman. Compare 62:6 (Concordia Bible)

The words remind us of the “Song of Mary” when she heard that she would be the mother of the Messiah: “My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Luke 1:46, 47). The words recorded here by the prophet Isaiah are the words of a believer who has received the great blessings of God. Great joy fills the heart of such a believer. (PBC)

he has covered me – The speaker is no longer the Servant, but Zion, and by anticipation, the NT church. The mood is one of joy because the Lord has adorned his people in garments of salvation and righteousness. The garment of Christ’s righteousness is placed on us in baptism (Gal 3:27). Many families have a white baptism dress that is worn by each member of the family when they are baptized.

Robe of righteousness.† See v. 3; 52:1. (CSB)

Those whom the Lord wraps in this robe not only experience deliverance from unrighteousness but also power to live out His righteousness. (TLSB)

Because the robe of righteousness covers the deepest stain of human sin, it becomes also a garment of salvation. Humans stand before God dressed in this robe. God sees the believer clothed with the perfection of His own Son and welcomes the believer into His presence. (PBC)

robe of righteousness – All “our righteousness” are loathsome and abominable, but the garment of Christ’s righteousness and salvation, wherewith He clothes His people, is excellent and glorious in the view of all beholders; it fills the hearts of its possessors with “the peace of God which passes understanding” with “joy unspeakable, and full of glory.” (Concordia Bible)

Jesus fashioned this robe from the threads of His perfect life. Then He wove it on the loom of the cross and colored it with His own red blood. God freely gives the cloak of His Son’s perfect life to the sinner, and it covers every sin, rebellion, and deviation from God’s standard. This robe of Christ’s righteousness is long and wide enough to cover every twisted human thought, word, and deed. But this robe comes only from God. No human can erase sin. Left to ourselves, we walk about as Lady Macbeth did. She killed the king, and her sins haunted her conscience and heart. Like Shakespeare’s character, we vainly attempt to wipe our own sinful hands clean. If we are honest, we will conclude as she did: “Here’s the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand” (Macbeth 5.152-54) (PBC)

head like a priest. Putting on a turban or headband (see note on v. 3). (CSB)

Cf v 3; 3:20 (only other times mentioned in Is). (TLSB)

This is likened to the meticulous care employed by the priest as he equips himself for the performance of his sacred duties. (Leupold)

bride ... with her jewels. The church is described using nuptial imagery as in Eph 5:25-27. The groom and the bride both anticipate joyfully their coming marriage.

61:11 Both 55:10–11 and 61:11 employ nature comparisons to make stunning theological claims. God has designed nature to be fruitful and productive by means of rainfall and soil; how much more fruitful and productive, then, will God be as he accomplishes salvation by the power of his Word (55:10–11) to

yield “righteousness” and “praise” (61:11). These texts organize their claims by means of the conjunctions כְּאֲשֶׁר and כִּי and the adverb כֵּן. In 55:10–11 the sequence is כְּאֲשֶׁר, “just as,” and then כֵּן, “thus.” In 61:11 it is כִּי twice, on כְּאֲרֶץ, “as the earth,” and כַּגֵּן, “as a garden,” and then כֵּן, “thus.” (CC)

הַאֲרֶץ תּוֹצִיא צִמּוֹת—The feminine noun אֲרֶץ, “earth,” is the subject of תּוֹצִיא, the feminine (causative) Hiphil imperfect of יָצָא, whose direct object is the noun צִמּוֹת, a collective singular, “sprouts,” whose feminine suffix (צִמּוֹת) refers back to אֲרֶץ, “earth.” Literally, the earth “causes its sprouts to go out,” i.e., to emerge out from the ground, but the verb is rendered as “brings forth.” For similar agricultural instances of the Hiphil of יָצָא, see Gen 1:12, 24; Hag 1:11; Ps 104:14 (BDB, יָצָא, Hiphil, 4 j). (CC)

וְהִגְנָה וְרוּחֵיהָ תִצְמַח—Parallel to the preceding clause, the feminine גֵּן, “garden,” is the subject of תִצְמַח, the feminine (causative) Hiphil imperfect of יָצָא, “cause to sprout.” The direct object is the suffixed plural of the noun רוּחַ, “what is sown.” This passive noun formation is related to רוּעַ, “seed, offspring,” and likely alludes to the prominent theme of the Servant’s “offspring”; see the first textual note on 61:9 and the fourth textual note on 53:10. (CC)

Isaiah employs the root צמח three times in this verse, once as a noun in the preceding clause (צִמּוֹת, “its sprouts”) and twice as a Hiphil verb (תִצְמַח here and תִצְמַח in the next clause). See the third textual note on 42:9. The verb appears in 58:8 when Yahweh promises that healing will quickly sprout. In 4:2 Yahweh’s צִמּוֹת, “Sprout, Branch,” is messianic, as it is also in Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12. Additional botanical motifs in Is 61:11 include כַּגֵּן, “as a garden,” and רוּחֵיהָ, “what has been sown in it.” (CC)

“Garden” (גֵּן here; גֵּן in 51:3; 58:11) retrospectively alludes to Eden (Genesis 2; see Is 51:3) and prospectively to paradise restored (Is 58:11; Lk 23:43; Rev 2:7; 22:1–2, 14, 19). During the present era, the apostates pollute the “garden” by their idolatrous practices (e.g., Is 65:3; 66:17), but God intends it to be the place where bride and groom meet (גֵּן or גֵּן in Song 4:12–5:1; 6:2, 11; 8:13) to celebrate the love that is “the flame of Yah” (Song 8:6). Thus the garden motif in Is 61:11 relates to the bridal motif in 61:10; 62:5. Eden was the site of the first wedding (Gen 2:24), and the eschatological “wedding” of the divine Bridegroom and his beautifully adorned bride, the church (Rev 19:7–8; 21:2), is celebrated in the greater Eden (Rev 22:1–2). (CC)

כֵּן | אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה יִצְמַח צְדָקָה וְתִהְיֶה לְכָל־הַגּוֹיִם—The adverb כֵּן, “thus, so,” introduces the soteriological point of the preceding creation comparisons. Instead of the “garden,” now it is אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה, “the Lord Yahweh” (see the first textual note on 61:1), who “will cause to sprout up” (יִצְמַח, Hiphil of יָצָא, as in the preceding textual note). Moreover, the object here is not vegetation; the compound direct object is צְדָקָה וְתִהְיֶה, “righteousness and praise,” and in that order, because justification by grace alone is the basis for rendering praise to God (e.g., Ex 15:2; Deut 10:21; Ps 7:18 [ET 7:17]; Is 25:1; 45:25; 60:18; Phil 1:11). Zion’s inhabitants will be צְדִיקִים, “righteous” (60:21), and אֲיֵלֵי הַצִּדְקָה, “oaks of righteousness” (61:3). “Righteousness” (צְדָקָה) is parallel with יְשׁוּעָה, “salvation” (61:10). Because “Salvation” (יְשׁוּעָה) is the name of the new Zion’s walls, “Praise” (תִּהְיֶה) is the name of her gates (60:18). Jerusalem will become the cause of “praise [תִּהְיֶה] in the earth [בְּאֲרֶץ]” (62:7). (CC)

Characteristically, praise begins with Isaiah and the remnant he speaks for (Is 61:10) and then expands to include all the nations (Is 61:11). The same development appears in Psalm 22. David announces, “I will recount your name to my brothers” (Ps 22:23 [ET 22:22]). This is followed by “you who fear Yahweh, praise him” (Ps 22:24 [ET 22:23]). Finally David sings, “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to Yahweh” (Ps 22:28 [ET 22:27]). (CC)

Isaiah frequently employs creation to make a point. Just as he likens the efficacy of God's Word to rain and snow that bring forth food (Is 55:10–11), so in Is 61:11 he links the gift of righteousness with the earth's ability to bring forth plant life. In both cases, the prophet is reflecting upon Gen 1:11–12; 2:9; 8:22. "In this way God's activity in nature is the image and the guarantee of his activity in history." (CC)

This confirms the pledge in Is 60:21 when Isaiah says that the remnant will possess the land forever and become a branch of Yahweh's planting. This branch, though the smallest and least, will grow into a mighty nation (Is 60:22; cf. Mk 4:30–32). God's people will be called "oaks of righteousness" and "a planting of Yahweh" (Is 61:3; cf. Jn 15:1–9). The gift of righteousness extends to coming generations (Is 61:9; cf. Mt 19:14; Acts 2:39; 2 Tim 3:15), and Yahweh is the foundation for this transformation (Is 61:8). It is his initiative and covenant faithfulness that makes new life happen. In the place of devastation the land will be restored and renewed, as will the persecuted remnant. (CC)

The righteousness that the Israelites were unable to attain for themselves (e.g., 48:1; 64:5 [ET 64:6]) will now spring up, blossom, and grow! "If nature is reliable, how much more so is the Creator of nature!" Yahweh asserts similar promises connecting righteousness to the Creator's faithfulness in, e.g., Is 45:8; Psalms 72 and 85. Paul makes the message clearer. Quoting from Hab 2:4 the apostle writes: "For [the] righteousness of God is being revealed in it from faith[fulness] into faith, just as it stands written: 'But the righteous person will live from faith' " (Rom 1:17). In subsequent chapters Paul makes the revelation of a righteous standing before the Father crystal clear (e.g., Rom 3:22–24; 4:25; 5:1). The climactic revelation of righteousness comes through the death and resurrection of Jesus: "The one not knowing sin, he made sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor 5:21). "Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness My beauty are, my glorious dress." (CC)

The vision of a renewed garden appears in, e.g., Is 51:3; 58:11; Jer 31:12. The way into the eternal garden paradise (Rev 2:7; 22:1–2) is opened by Jesus. "Now in the place where he was crucified was a garden, and in the garden, a new tomb in which no one yet had been placed" (Jn 19:41). Wright adds:

The Spirit who brooded over the waters of creation at the beginning broods now over God's world, ready to bring it bursting to springtime life. Mary goes to the tomb while it's still dark and in the morning light meets Jesus in the garden. She thinks he is the gardener, as in one important sense he indeed is. This is the new creation. This is the new Genesis. (CC)

sprouts. Cf. 55:10. (CSB)

a garden – The imagery in this verse echoes the botanical description at the end of verse 3, the Lord will make salvation and righteousness grow throughout the world like a garden, hinting of paradise restored. It is the Lord, both sovereign and gracious, who causes salvation to grow and encompass the nations of the world, foreshadowing the inclusion of gentiles in the church.

righteousness and praise sprout up. Joy is guaranteed just as the earth is guaranteed to cause seeds sown in it to sprout. If nature is reliable, how much more so is God? (TLSB)

The last verse of the chapter assured God's OT readers that this would all come to pass. Just as the soil brings forth green grass and beautiful flowers, so surely will the "Sovereign Lord" make "righteousness and praise spring up before all nations." The soil may look barren and lifeless, but after a time the seed sprouts and grows. For the Jews of Isaiah's day, Jerusalem would be destroyed and God's people led away captive. But, in God's good time, they would return. Beyond that return, further into the future, the Messiah would come and proclaim the good news of the gospel. All the words of this chapter, as well as all the other prophecies, would then bloom into fulfillment. (PBC)

Ch 61 The Servant/Messiah will come, bringing good news and everlasting joy to the redeemed of Israel. As brokenhearted souls, we must confess the sinful cause of our poverty and brokenness. Our dire straits are due to our sinful condition—a condition from which we cannot free ourselves. Jesus brings liberty for all held captive by sin and death. By His death and resurrection, He has delivered us from the shame of our sin, clothed us in His own righteousness, and made us to be His holy priests. • Lord God, teach us not to rely on the tattered fabric of our own works and accomplishments. Lead us to be comforted each day in Your robe of righteousness. Amen. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil. 23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

vv5:16-24 At the beginning of ch 5, Paul reminds his readers that the Day of the Lord will come unexpectedly (vv 1–5). But his tone is loving, and he invites his audience to be prepared rather than scared. After all, we are children of the light, made so by Christ, the true light who was to come into the world, to whom John bore witness (Jn 1:6–9). That is why we can, in our text, “rejoice always” as we await our Lord’s return. Whereas the verses before our text encourage us to keep the peace until our Lord returns, the verses following encourage us to pass the peace, both through greetings and through readings of this letter. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

Beginning at 4:13 Paul speaks about the *coming* of the Lord. Paul tells the Thessalonians to comfort each other with this doctrine. Beginning at 5:1 Paul speaks about the *day* of the Lord. This section is similar to last Sunday’s text, 2 Peter 3:8-14. Twice Paul likens the day of the Lord to the coming of a thief, verses 2 and 4. In verses 1-11 Paul admonishes his hearers to sober living. Just as he told his hearers to comfort each other with reference to the coming of Christ (4:18), so he advises them to comfort each other with reference to the day of the Lord (5:11). In verses 12-15 Paul gives some additional directives concerning Christian living. This bring us to our text. (Buls)

5:16-18 Joy, prayer, and thanksgiving form a unity. Even though God has other purposes for us, this triad is certainly His will for us. (TLSB)

5:16 *rejoice always* – Enjoined to the hope in the Lord. Joy is also a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). (TLSB)

In this world we know much of sorrow, frustration, adversity, and guilt, and yet we are told to rejoice. Paul knew that affliction and deep joy may go together (2 Cor 6:10). He could rejoice in tribulation (Rom 5:3; Acts 16:25). He and the Thessalonians knew the truth of Jesus’ promise that “no one will take away your joy” (John 16:22). Jesus carried his cross in joyful determination, bent (literally) on the world’s salvation. Joy is fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). The present tense calls for a continual attitude of rejoicing. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 1)

In verses 16-18 we have present tense imperatives. In all three cases either an adverb or a phrase precedes the imperative. The commentators point out that verses 16-18 comprise a unit. The "for" clause at the end of verse 18 covers three, not just one, verse. "At all times" and "to be joyful" immediately reminds us of Philippians 3:1: "rejoice in the Lord!" (Buls)

Surely the phrase "in the Lord" here at 1 Thessalonians as it is plainly stated at Philippians 3:1. It is not easy to give this phrase its grammatical significance. Likely it is causal: "because of the Lord." Perhaps it also denotes manner: "by trusting in the Lord." Faith in Christ underlies the imperatives in verses 16-18. (Buls)

At Matthew 5:11-12 where Jesus speaks about the innocent suffering of a persecuted Christian. He says: "Rejoice and exult because your reward is great in heaven." The joy of a Christian is truly paradoxical. There is so much sorrow, frustration, and adversity in life. And then there's also the guilt of a Christian who is told to rejoice. (Buls)

This verse implies that the Christian should listen to the Lord who says: "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it." The Christian needs the promises of the Gospel just as a baby bird constantly needs to be fed. (Buls)

Morris: Paul had learned that affliction and deep joy may go together, 2 Corinthians 6:10, and could rejoice in tribulations, Romans 5:3, Acts 16:25. So he can counsel perpetual rejoicing even to a church which was suffering so greatly. They had learned the truth of His words 'your joy no man taketh from you,' John 16:22. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22. (Buls)

Rienecker-Rogers calls our attention to the fact that the present tense, of this imperative, calls for a continual attitude of rejoicing. Faith in Christ causes a Christian to think more of the Lord than of difficulties; more of spiritual riches in Christ than of earthly poverty; and, more of the glorious future in heaven than of the uncertain present and the unhappy past. (Buls)

Lenski: The joy of the Christians is the product of the whole Gospel and of the salvation that is theirs in Christ. Earthly joys fade after brief moment; our joy of salvation never fades. Yet we need to be told, ever to rejoice; for we let so many little adversities beset and even darken our joyfulness. (Buls)

Whenever Jesus told people not to be afraid He always gave them the reason. Whenever the pastor tells people to rejoice at all times he should give them the reason, nothing but Gospel. (Buls)

"Rejoice always" expresses the tone of sanctified living as we wait for our Lord's return. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

5:17-18 Ceaseless praying and endless thanking round out the trilogy of sanctified encouragements. Paul also provides the "why" for the above encouragements: because it is the will of God in Christ Jesus. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

5:17 For the practice of continual (or regular) prayer see 1:3; 2:13; Ro 1:9-10; Eph 6:18; Col 1:3; 2Ti 1:3. (CSB)

We cannot verbally pray at all times, but it is possible to be in the spirit of prayer and ever ready to pray. "The Lord's Prayer has also been prescribed so that we should see and consider the distress that ought to drive and compel us to pray without ceasing" (LC III 24). "We should ask that through the same Spirit and His grace, by means of the daily exercise of reading and doing God's Word, He would preserve in us faith and His heavenly gifts, strengthen us from day to day, and keep us to the end" (FCSD II 16). (TLSB)

Rienecker: The word 'continually' was used of that which was continually and repeatedly done; e.g. the uninterrupted necessary payment of hard taxes; the continual service or ministry of an official; a continual uninterrupted cough. (Buls)

Morris: The word Paul uses here, which expresses devotion, the God-ward look, rather than a verb which would fasten attention rather on one's need. (Buls)

Lenski: The verb is used only in the full sacred sense of turning to God, in worshipful forms. (Buls)

Both Jesus and Paul were men of prayer. both told us to pray at all times. Paul says that here in our text and at Ephesians 6:18. Jesus said it too. For example, see Luke 18:1 which Jesus speaks of the necessity of praying always and not getting weary of it. And Jesus had Paul faithfully followed their own injunction of constant prayer. Were they actually engaged in verbal prayer at all times? No. (Buls)

Morris: It is not possible for us to spend all our time with words of prayer on our lips, but it is possible for us to be all our days in the spirit of prayer, realizing our dependence on God for all that we have and are . . . Where there is such an inward state it will find outward expression in verbal prayer. (Buls)

As a flower always facing the sun, so the Christian, by faith, is turning toward God. Christians are conscious of their dependence on God. Their rejoicing and prayer life go together. (Buls)

Kretzmann: The apostle does not merely urge regularity in the practice of prayer, but he wants our hearts always to be disposed toward prayer, always in the mood to make all our wants known to Him who never fails His children. (Buls)

A constant, persevering attitude of prayer is undergirded by a compelling conviction that God has commanded us to prayer and has promised to hear us. Look at the whole parable at Luke 18:1-8. (Buls)

5:18 As in verse 16, Christians are differentiated from the natural man. Because of what God has done, they are continually thankful whatever the circumstances (cf Eph 5:20). (CSB)

give thanks – No circumstance in life is an excuse for not being thankful. God's mercy never ceases, therefore we should never cease thanking him. We praise God both when he gives and when he takes away. Worldly people are discontent even when they live like kings. Christians are thankful even when they live in the dumps. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 1)

Morris: Like the preceding two, this one (thanksgiving) springs from the great central truth of the Gospel. (Buls)

Lenski: The explanation of this 'all' is found in the 'all' of Romans 8:28, all of which cooperate for good to God's children, and thus call forth our thanks to God. If everything actually conspires to do us good, how can we do otherwise than always rejoice? (Buls)

And now we proceed to the second clause in verse 18. We have an explanatory "for" which means "you see." Most commentators agree that the antecedent of "this" is the three imperatives which precede, not just the last one. The fact that this pronoun is singular shows that the three injunctions are a unit. They stand and fall together. All three proceed from faith in Christ. The Christian lives his life by faith in Jesus. Galatians 2:20. (Buls)

Lenski: God wants us to rejoice always, to pray ceaselessly, to give thanks in everything. (Buls)

Philippians 4:6 "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Incidentally, no prayer should be offered without thanksgiving, express or implied; every petition should be accompanied by thanksgiving, for the gift will surely be forthcoming if the prayer is made in faith, according to the will of God. (Kretzmann)

in all circumstances – "In all circumstances" is more effective here than to say "at all times." No circumstance in life is an excuse for not being thankful. We think here of the verse which occurs about a dozen times in the Old Testament: "Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever." God is good in the sense that He is merciful. That mercy never ceases. Therefore, we should never cease to give thanks. Even at funerals. Even in deep adversity. Midst his great adversities Job said: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Job 1:21. Thanksgiving is closely associated with prayer. Philippians 4:6. (Buls)

will of God...for you – Paul earlier told the Thessalonians that sanctification is God's will for them (4:3). Here, it finds expression in their joy, prayer, and thanksgiving. (TLSB)

We quote several versions. TEV: "This is what God wants of you." NIV: "This is God's will for you." JB: "This is what God expects you to do." (Buls)

The phrase "in Christ Jesus" is not so easy. We note that this phrase is typically Pauline. TEV understands it to mean the faith relationship: "This is what God wants of you, in your life in Christ Jesus." JB evidently understands it to mean the strength which Jesus gives: "This is what God expects you to do in Christ Jesus." It seems that AAT understands it to mean that the will of God is made known in Christ Jesus: "Whatever happens, thank God, because that is what God in Christ Jesus wants you to do." (Buls)

By the way, AAT limits "this" to the third injunction. We cannot improve on what Morris observes. (Buls)

Morris: Nor only is it in Christ that the will of God is revealed. It is in Him that there is given power to men to enable them to live according to that will. . . . The use of the compound name 'Jesus Christ' reminds us of both the deity and the humanity of our Lord. (Buls)

Thus far, in verses 16-18, we have instances of what we call the third use of the Law. According to this use, God guides and leads us as to His will toward us. But, if the preacher preaches these verses correctly, the reaction of the part of his hearers will surely be: "Lord, I rejoice, pray and give thanks so half-heartedly. There is so much which I have not done. I have fallen far short of what you will for me." Paul surely realized this. And that is why he added the verses which follow, especially verse 23. The preacher must be very sensitive toward the confession of sins by his hearers. The Law makes no one better. The Law does not motivate. The Law does not make alive. Only the Gospel does these things. (Buls)

5:19-22 After providing his readers with three dos, Paul addresses three don'ts: don't quench the Spirit, don't despise prophecies, and don't give in to evil. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

5:19 *do not quench the Spirit.* There is a warmth, a glow, about the Spirit's presence that makes this language appropriate. The kind of conduct Paul is opposing may include loafing, immorality and the other sins he has denounced. On the other hand, he may be warning against a mechanical attitude toward worship that discourages the expression of the gifts of the Spirit in the local assembly (see v. 20). (CSB)

Fire symbolized the Holy Spirit (cf Acts 2:3-4). Some connect this phrase with “prophecies” in verse 20, as if Paul is advising the Thessalonians not to put out the spiritual gifts working among them. However, the meaning is more general, including any behavior that grieves the Holy Spirit, such as idleness and immorality. (TLSB)

All versions except NEB render "Spirit" as "the Holy Spirit." NEB translates: "Do not stifle inspiration." From this passage and Ephesians 4:30 we learn that the Holy Spirit can be resisted, as Stephen plainly states at Acts 7:51. Here only in the New Testament the verb "to quench" is used metaphorically. (Buls)

Bruce: The verb 'quench' is related to the figure of fire used in various places, for example Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16; 12:49; Acts 2:3; Romans 12:11, to denote the Holy Spirit or his activity. (Buls)

Does the way the present imperative is used here mean that they should *cease* quenching or does it mean that they should not *make a habit* of it? Morris prefers the former and Bruce the latter. The translations are no help here. (Buls)

Another question: is this verse speaking about ecstatic gift, for example, speaking in tongues, etc., or is it speaking about the daily ethical work of the Spirit in a person's heart? Bruce prefers the former. Morris the latter. Likewise Lenski. We prefer the view of Morris and Lenski. (Buls)

Morris: The ecstatic view seems to be reading a lot into the words of this verse. There is no other evidence that can be cited. In the view of the very general character of the expression it may be well to understand the term more generally. Loafing, immorality, and other sins about which Paul has had occasion to warn his friends will quench the Spirit in a person's life, and result in the loss of spiritual power and joy. (Buls)

Lenski: The writers of this epistle are here not referring to the special miraculous charismata, such as speaking with tongues, inspired prophetic utterances, healings, and the like. They are here writing about the ordinary and regular work of the Spirit, and not about his extraordinary, miraculous manifestation. All that verses 12-18 contains, and all that follows in verses 20-22, deals with nothing exceptional. Such quenching occurs when the fervor that the Spirit kindles in us is greatly lessened, or put out altogether, by fleshly, worldly objections. Many a noble, generous, godly impulse thus dies without producing fruit in action, or brings only a fraction of what it might produce. (Buls)

The Spirit will not leave a person he has brought to faith, but such a person can snuff out the Spirit's fire through unbelief. Fire is an appropriate metaphor because hardship strengthens faith just as fire refines metal by burning off impurities. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 1)

5:20 prophecies. For the gift of prophecy see Ro 12:6; 1Co 12:10, 28; 13:2; 14; Eph 4:11. For the function of prophecies see 1Co 14:3. (CSB)

One translation has “God’s Word.” This understanding fits well with the broader context of the Third Commandment. A deaf ear turned inerrant Scripture puts out the Spirit’s fire. Swapping diligent study of the Word for easy life empties a soul of meaning, purpose, and life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 1)

Some Thessalonians might have valued the spectacular gifts (e.g., tongues) more than prophecy, Prophets in both the OT and NT exhorted and spoke God’s will for their specific situation and for the future. (TLSB)

Again we have a prohibition. The same question, with reference to the type of action of the verb, applies here as in verse 19. It is not easy to make a decision on this point. (Buls)

"Treat with contempt" or "despise." On the word "prophecies" we have a question which is related to the meaning of verse 19. Does it mean a special ecstatic gift or does it mean simply the Word of God? Beck's AAT is worth reading here and at 1 Corinthians 14. He consistently translates this noun "the Word of God." For our text he has: "Don't despise God's Word when anyone speaks it." We agree with this and also his understanding of this noun in 1 Corinthians 14. Lenski prefers this interpretation here. Morris makes a general statement which is of help here. (Buls)

Morris: The essence of prophecy as the early church understood it appears to have been that the Spirit of the Lord spoke to and through men. (Buls)

And with reference to the Thessalonian situation he says: (Buls)

Morris: If we are to conjecture it seems more in accordance with what we know of conditions in this church to associate the despising of prophecy with second-advent speculations. (Buls)

Some people, and there are Christians among them, do not like to hear about the day of the Lord, the last day. Perhaps Paul is referring to the members of the congregation speaking the Word of God to each other. Christians sometimes despise the Word of God spoken by their peers. But though we do not know the exact situation of this verse, we do not that it says: "Do not despise God's Word." That is a mouthful. (Buls)

5:21 *Test everything.* The approval of prophecy (v. 20) does not mean that anyone who claims to speak in the name of the Lord is to be accepted without question. Paul does not say what specific tests are to be applied, but he is clear that every teaching must be tested—surely they must be in agreement with his gospel. (CSB)

Consistency with the Gospel message would be one test. Another test is the prophet's testimony to Christ; will for their specific situation and for the future. (TLSB)

The verse begins in Greek with an untranslated "but." This assumes at least a partial reference back to verse 20. If that is so then the meaning is: "But don't be gullible about everything which is said. You yourselves must test it." Paul means either to approve or reject after testing. Note that the Nestle-Aland Greek text margin note refers us to 1 Corinthians 14:29. That assumes that ecstatic prophecy is meant. We do not think so. We agree with Rienecker-Rogers. (Buls)

Rienecker-Rogers: Here 'everything' is unlimited and refers to 'all things whatsoever.' (Buls)

Some think that verse 21^a points forward to 21^b and verse 22. Even Bruce, who prefers the ecstatic interpretation. (Buls)

Bruce: It is possible, however, that this clause goes more closely with the following one than with the preceding one. (Buls)

Lenski: 'Everything' that might affect their religious life. These two commands (21^b and 22) complete the order to test everything. (Buls)

Morris: All things must be tested. And not simply tested, but accepted wholeheartedly or rejected decisively as a result of the test. (Buls)

JB renders 21^a: "Think before you do anything." That's a paraphrase, but a very interesting one. How often don't we act before thinking, much less testing! How sinful we are! At this point one should read 1 John 4:1, a good parallel passage. We need to teach our people in such a way that they themselves can test the spirits. There are so many false prophets around. (Buls)

The call is to be less gullible about what people may say. In our sinfulness, we often do not even thin – to say nothing of test. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 1)

hold fast what is good – The use to kalov, which denotes that which is inherently and intrinsically good. The sense of katachete is “keep on clinging to.”

And now we come to the two imperatives in 21^b and 22. If one reads the Greek aloud one hears the verbal correspondence in the imperatives. (Buls)

"The good" denotes that which is inherently or intrinsically good as opposed to a good which is merely beneficial. "Hold on" means "keep on clinging to." (Buls)

NEB renders 20-22 thus: "Do not despise prophetic utterances, but bring them all to the test and then keep what is good in them and avoid the bad of whatever kind." In comparison, here is JB: "Never treat the gift of prophecy with contempt; think before you do anything--hold on to what is good and avoid every form of evil." NEB limits "all" to prophetic utterances. JB makes it more general. We prefer the latter. "All things" includes the Word of God but is not limited to it. It is both ethical and doctrinal. (Buls)

1 John 4:1 “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

5:22 *abstain from every form of evil* – Avoid every kind or form of evil every time it appears. Evil sometimes comes in subtle forms. Avoid all forms of evil. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 1)

This refers to every kind of evil, including false prophetic utterances. “The Holy Scriptures alone remain the judge, rule, and norm. According to them – as the only touchstone – all teachings shall and must be discerned and judged” (FC Ep Sum 7) (TLSB)

"Avoid" is present tense middle imperative: "keep yourselves from." The prepositional phrase can mean either: "From every *appearance* of evil" (KJV) or "From every *kind* of evil" (TEV, NIV, AAT). RSV, NKJV, JB, and NASB attempt to strike a middle course: "every form of evil." "Evil" here means "that which is actively evil." Meditate on this verse. It is very strong. How often we disregard it! How easy to yield to the subtle kinds and appearances of that which is evil! How sinful we are! (Buls)

Please read 5:1-22 at this point. How much and how many sins we have to confess! And though God is gracious and merciful in Christ Jesus, we still sin much daily. And therefore the Apostle, who was aware of our sinfulness, adds a prayer, verse 23, which turns into a promise, verse 24. (Buls)

5:23 A typical prayer. (CSB)

God of peace himself – Morris renders the first Greek word in this verse as "but" and remarks "It is only in God that the Thessalonians will be able to do what they have been asked." That might be so but no one else, so far as we know (including the translations) takes the first word that way. NKJV and NASB translate: "now may the God of peace, etc." (Buls)

"Himself" makes the word "God" emphatic. This stresses the fact that He alone can accomplish this. What kind of God is He? The God of peace. He is the God who is known by Christians primarily for the Gospel which gives peace of conscience. (Buls)

The mandate for sanctified living is actually accomplished by God himself. Note again the trilogy of areas affected by sanctification: spirit, soul, and body. The preacher would do well to remind his audience of the relationship between justification and sanctification. Justification (being declared righteous) precedes and causes sanctification (doing righteous things). The One who declares us blameless for the sake of Christ is also the One who will keep us blameless. Notice that we will be "kept" (*tērēthein*) blameless by God. That is, we have already been made blameless; we are holy because of what Christ has already done on the cross and given us in Baptism. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

A fitting reference to God in view of vv. 12–15. But Paul often refers to God in this way near the end of his letters (see Ro 15:33; 16:20; 1Co 14:33; 2Co 13:11; Php 4:9; cf. 2Th 3:16). (CSB)

He is the God who is known by Christians primarily for the Gospel, which gives peace of conscience. He effects this peace by not only willing our redemption, but also our sanctified living. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 1)

sanctify you completely – Sanctification is the practical result of God's peace-giving work in our life through the Holy Spirit. God's sanctification of us through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, extends to our whole person – we are sanctified thoroughly. Complete sanctification will be ours in eternity. (TLSB)

We have two aorist optatives in this verse, both are called either complexive or constative, which means the same thing. This use of the aorist stresses the action as a whole. "Sanctify" here means "to set aside for a specific purpose." The purpose is holiness of living as is plain from the remainder of the verse. "Whole spirit" means "in your entirety." Our sinful nature is constantly attempting to reserve a little corner of the heart for the sinful flesh. That won't do. (Buls)

Verse 23 might be considered an example of Hebrew poetry. The second part of the verse repeats, strengthens, and amplifies the first part of the verse. If that is so, the second part of the verse could start with "namely." Note the chiasmic arrangement of individual elements in the two clauses. The tripartite description of man here cannot be used in the interest of so-called trichotomy, as opposed to dichotomy. (Buls)

your whole spirit, soul and body. Paul is emphasizing the whole person, not attempting to differentiate his parts. (CSB)

The entire person outside and inside, should be sanctified. A description of a human being, however, is not limited to these three categories. (Cf Mark 12:30). (TLSB)

Morris: Paul is not at this point giving a description of the nature of the human constitution. He uses this graphic form by way of insisting that the whole person, not some part only, is involved. (Buls)

Lenski: Where, as here, spirit and soul are distinguished, the spirit designates our immaterial part as related to God, as capable of receiving the operations of the Spirit of God and of His Word; while soul designates this same immaterial part in its function of animating the body also as receiving impressions from the body it animates. (Buls)

Bruce: The distinction between the bodily and spiritual aspects of human nature is easily made, but to make a comparable distinction between 'spirit' and 'soul' is forced. Few could care to distinguish sharply among the four elements 'heart,' 'soul,' 'mind,' and 'strength' of Matthew 12:30 (amplifying the threefold heart, soul, and might of Deuteronomy 6:5). (Buls)

The verb *agiadzo* means “to set aside for a specific purpose.” The purpose for which we are set aside is holiness of living. Our sinful nature is constantly attempting to reserve a little corner of our heart for the sinful flesh. Paul emphatically counters this with the words *through and through*. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 1)

kept blameless - The goal of being blameless may not be reached in this life, but sinners/saints in this world will be righteous, holy, and acceptable in the sight of God at Christ's parousia. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 1)

The second coming of our Lord will culminate our Christian journey here on earth. Those who are sanctified by faith in the Lord will be like the wise virgins who had their oil lamps ready when the bridegroom came (Mt. 25:1-13). Cf 1 Thess. 4:13-18. (TLSB)

On the word "blameless" look at Luke 1:6 and Job 1:8. It does not mean "sinless." The words are a description of the life of a Christian who is living in no conscious sin. When Satan accuses a Christian of sin, the Gospel must be applied immediately. Look at Romans 8:33-34. (Buls)

coming to our Lord Jesus Christ – Commentators and translators struggle with the meaning of the "in" phrase in this verse. For example, KJV reads: "unto the coming of our Lord." This is reflected in JB: "for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Others consider it temporal. For example AAT: "when our Lord Jesus Christ comes." (Buls)

Morris: It is clear from earlier passages that the thought of the Parousia loomed large in the thinking both of the apostles and their converts. They were looking for the coming of the Lord. Paul is thinking of a sanctification which continues at the Parousia. (Buls)

Lenski: Our being preserved now is 'in connection with' Christ's Parousia. If there were no Parousia, then this preservation would be pointless. (Buls)

Kretzmann: This goal may not be reached in this life, but at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ all the believers, clothed in the righteousness and holiness of their Redeemer, will be acceptable in the sight of God. (Buls)

Morris: The prayer is not that they may be kept until the coming, but that, at the coming, they may be preserved. (Buls)

Bruce: The writers' prayer is that their converts may be preserved entirely without fault *until* the Parousia and be so found *at* the Parousia, when they will be perfected in holiness. (Buls)

Lest these remarks leave the reader in confusion we suggest that he read the parallel passage at Philippians 1:6. When my sins bother me I should remember Psalm 23:4-6. Before we leave this verse a few quotes. (Buls)

Bruce: 'The God of peace' as in Romans 15:33; 16:20; Philippians 4:9; Hebrews 13:20; 2 Thessalonians 3:16. The sum total of gospel blessings can be expressed by 'peace.' Notice the verse points to God as the source of all. (Buls)

Lenski: Here sanctification refers to the whole work of God, which follows the kindling of faith in our hearts. (Buls)

Bruce: The importance of sanctification in the practical area of sexual life has been emphasized in 4:3,4,7, where it is implied that sanctification, in all areas of life, is the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, 4:8. (Buls)

5:24 Paul's confidence rests in the nature of God (cf. Ge 18:25), who can be relied on to complete what he begins (see Nu 23:19; Php 1:6). (CSB)

God has called us and is calling us through His Word. The initiative is from Him. From God's calling in His Gospel, we can know that He has elected us unto salvation. (TLSB)

Whereas v 18 directs our attention to the "why" of Paul's encouragements and expectations, v 24 directs our attention to the "how." The same God who called us into his family will keep us until our Lord's returns. This again draws our attention to justification. He who is faithful also was faithful on Calvary. He who will do it has in fact already done it on Calvary. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

he who calls...will surely do it – This is the present tense of kalon which means the Lord continually calls us, to justify us and to sanctify us. His purpose is to keep us ready for the Second Advent. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 1)

We quote two thought provoking translations: "He who calls you will do it, because he is faithful" (TEV). "You can depend on Him who calls you--He will do it" (AAT). (Buls)

Kretzmann: For the comfort of the Christians, who feel their own insufficiency all too well, the apostle adds: Faithful is He that calls you, who will also do this. (Buls)

Note that "calls" is in the present tense. The Lord calls me constantly. He uses the Gospel to call me, to justify me, to sanctify me, to get me ready for the Lord's coming. (Buls)

GOSPEL – John 1:6-8, 19-28

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

1:6-8, 19-28 The noun "Gospel" or "Good News" does not occur in the Gospel and Epistles of John, the Evangelist. It occurs only once at Revelation 14:6. Many Lutherans believe that Revelation 14:6 is a prophecy about Martin Luther. That is why it was quoted on the cover of *Der Lutheraner* and is still found on the cover of the *Concordia Journal*. But the noun "witness" is a key word in the Johannine

corpus. It is found fourteen times in the Gospel and sixteen times in the Epistles and Revelation. It always speaks of absolute Truth, be that of Jesus, the Father, the Baptist, the Evangelist, etc. The verb "to witness" occurs but once in both Matthew and Luke, but forty-three times in John's Gospel and fourteen times in the Epistles and Revelation. Like "witness" the verb has various applications: of Jesus, the Father, the Baptist, the Evangelist, the miracles of Jesus etc. "Witness," in our text, is found at verses 7 and 19. "To witness" is found at verses 7 and 8. The witness of the Baptist still stands in the Scriptures and is still as powerful as it was two thousand years ago. Witness means "to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." The Baptist had received "witness" by direct revelation and from the OT Scriptures. (Buls)

1:6-9 John now turns to the circumstances of the incarnation. A man was sent from God, as were the prophets; from this verb comes the noun "apostle." He came as a witness so that all might believe. Emphatically and literally, "Not was that one the light" (v 8). He merely points to the light (cf. 1:29). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 1)

St. John introduces us to the Baptist's mission: he is the supporting player, the best man at the wedding. He came to offer a true witness to the Light so that all people could have the opportunity to believe in the Messiah. John prepared people for the arrival of the Light, whose coming had long been proclaimed by the ancient prophets. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 1)

The opening chapter of the Gospel according to St. John is a solemn prologue to the entire book. It introduces Jesus as the eternal, divine, creative Word through whom all things were made, who is the light and the life of all. What the rabbis said of the Torah, John says of the Word made flesh who dwelt among us (see *TDNT* lovgo"). Interleaved with Jesus is John, whose life as a witness (mavrtu") is completely bound up in the life of Jesus. Jesus is the light; John is the witness to the light. The structure of the first chapter bears this observation out: the eternal Word who is light and life (1:1-5); John, the witness to the light (1:6-8); the true light enters the world (1:9-13); the Word became flesh (1:14-18); the testimony of John regarding himself (1:19-23); the testimony of John concerning Christ (1:24-28); the "next day"—Behold the Lamb—the witness of Jesus' baptism (1:29-34); the "next day"—Behold the Lamb—the first disciples (1:35-42); the "next day"—Jesus goes to Galilee, Philip and Nathanael (1:43-51). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 1)

John the Baptist is clearly distinguished from "the light." Through his ministry, he served as the witness (*marturian*) or forerunner to this light. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)

1:6 *there was a man* – "There appeared." The Baptist "appeared" in history as do all mere humans. (Buls)

Bengel: God deals with men through agents similar to themselves, namely, men in order that they may the more readily take and accept His office of love. (Buls)

John's appearing differed from other men. He had a direct, divine commission. (Buls)

There was, there came, there arose, there came into being, as the result of a special plan and purpose of God, a man, not differing from other men in any respect but in this material point: he was sent out by God. (Kretzmann)

sent from God – He had a direct, divine commission.

Gk *apostello*, "to send." (TLSB)

“sent from God”—no one preaches on his own initiative, see Rom 10:15. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 1)

“A man sent from God.” The divine origin of John’s mission, and ultimately the answer to the question of authority. “Whose name was John.” *John* means “Yahweh is gracious.” How gracious he is will be seen in the One to whom John will witness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

He was entrusted with a mission; he was sent out for a special, distinct purpose, as the forerunner of the Messiah. (Kretzmann)

Greek apostello, “to send.” Luther: “He did not come on his own, unauthorized...He was to rap at the doors, arouse the Jews, and testify of the Lord” (AE 22:43). (TLSB)

John. In this Gospel the name John always refers to John the Baptist. (CSB)

Son of the priest Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth (Luke 1:5-25, 57-80). Name means “the Lord has been gracious.” He bore witness to the truth, as John 5:33 indicates. (TLSB)

The name John, *yahochanan* in Hebrew, means “Yahweh is gracious.” Like the name Jesus (“Yahweh saves”), John’s name was announced beforehand by God through an angel (Gabriel, Lk 1:13). The use of the word name in both Lk 1:13 and our text indicates the importance and the power of the name. Just as the name of Jesus describes what he would do (he is the Lord who saves; “He will save his people from their sins,” Mt 1:21), so John’s name conveys John’s message: God is showing that he is gracious. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 1)

1:7-8 Not John, but Jesus Christ. Through the Light, and only through Him, do we come to saving faith. (TLSB)

1:7 as a witness to bear witness. John the Baptist’s singular ministry was to testify to Jesus (10:41). “Witness” is another important concept in this Gospel. The noun (“witness” or “testimony”) is used 14 times (in Matthew not at all, in Mark three times, in Luke once) and the verb (“testify”) 33 times (found once each in Matthew and Luke, not at all in Mark)—in both cases more often than anywhere else in the NT. John (the author) thereby emphasizes that the facts about Jesus are amply attested. (CSB)

"He came" introduces his public ministry. "As a witness" denotes purpose and the clause, "concerning the light" emphasizes the witness and limits it to Jesus. Outside of Jesus Christ there is no spiritual Light. The darkness resists the Light but cannot quench it. (Buls)

Luther: These words hurl another thunderbolt against the sectarians and fanatics of our own day, for these visionaries despise the oral Word. . . . Whoever fails to adhere closely to the Word of God takes offense very easily at this or that or something else. . . . However, the evangelist praises John the Baptist and declares that his office cannot be dispensed with; for he bears witness to Christ and points to Him who is the Life and the Light illumining all men. This implies that the external Word serves the purpose of engendering faith and of imparting the Holy Spirit. For God has decreed that no one can or will believe or receive the Holy Spirit without that Gospel which is preached or taught by word of mouth.(Buls)

Lenski: Faith comes only through the preached Word, and God invariably honors the preachers who truly proclaim that Word. Those who leave the Word and cry 'Spirit, Spirit' or who invent methods that discard the gospel can never hope to have it said of them that men came to faith through them.

Westcott: The coming of the Baptist in the fulfillment of his office is contrasted with his personal coming. (Buls)

IB: The word 'sent' carries the sense of official authority, recalling the OT prophets, through the word is frequently used in this Gospel of Jesus, who is par excellence the emissary of God to earth. (Buls)

Ylvisaker: The name 'John' signifies 'God is gracious' and brings with it the promise it contains. (Buls)

“To bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.” Does that mean that all might believe through John’s witness to the light or does it mean that John witnesses to that light through which all men might come to believe? The text is somewhat ambiguous, but the former seems more likely. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

The noun “witness” (*marturiva*) and the verb “to witness, testify” (*marturevw*) form the backbone of this reading. Together, these words occur 137 times in 115 verses of the NT; they occur 47 times in 35 verses of the Gospel according to St. John, and 5 times in this reading. *marturevw* is the chief preaching word in John. To preach or proclaim Christ is to bear witness or testify. Because of the importance of this word group in John, a brief word study is in order. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 1)

John is the principal witness to Christ, the Word incarnate and light and life of all (Jn 1:7, 15, 19). John’s voice bears witness to Jesus’ baptism, in which he is revealed to be the Son of God on whom the Spirit rests (Jn 1:32, 34). As a witness, John did not draw attention to himself, but to the object of his witness, to Jesus (Jn 3:28). The Samaritan woman who met Jesus at Jacob’s well testified to the people of her city, and many believed because of her testimony (Jn 4:39). Jesus testifies that he is sent from the Father, and the Father and his works testify that what Jesus says is true (Jn 5:31–33, 36–37; 8:17; 10:25). Jesus says that the Scriptures testify to him (Jn 5:39). The crowd that had seen Lazarus raised from the dead bore witness (Jn 12:17). The Spirit, whom Jesus sends from the Father, testifies to Jesus (Jn 15:26). His disciples are witnesses, in that they have seen Jesus from the beginning (Jn 15:27). Jesus testified before Pilate (Jn 18:23), saying that he has come into the world to bear witness to the truth (Jn 18:37). The one who saw the issue of blood and water from Jesus’ side bore witness to what he saw (Jn 19:35). The evangelist John himself bears witness to what he has seen and heard (Jn 21:24). This last citation is illustrative. To bear witness is not to draw attention to one’s self, but to recede into the background and to proclaim another. “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn 3:30 KJV). The only one in the Gospel according to John who testifies concerning himself is Jesus, the validity of whose testimony is disputed by the religious Pharisees (Jn 8:13). To accept Jesus’ self-testimony is to accept his claim to bear witness to the Father. The word group also carries with it the connotation of death (Rev 6:9; 20:4). The martyr’s testimony to Christ is his or her martyrdom (*marturiva*) for the sake of Christ. Closely tied to witness is confession (*oJmologiva*), see 1 Jn 4:14 (*TDNT* 4:498–99). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 1)

“Witness,” *martureō*, appears three times. While the word in its simple sense means “to bear witness” or “testify,” it also came to mean to “witness unto death” or “witness/testify by one’s death.” (The noun *martus*, originally “witness,” came primarily to mean “martyr.”) This second meaning cannot be overlooked when we remember that John the Baptizer lost his life because of his witness to Christ (cf. Mk 15:39; Jn 21:19). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 1)

This man came to fulfill, to carry out, his mission; he came for witness, for the purpose of witnessing. He was not to do a great work of his own, but to point to another. All his work, energy, and preaching were to be spent in testifying, in preaching as one sure of the truth of his declaration. His topic was simple, but comprehensive: he was to bear witness about, with regard to, concerning the Light. That one topic, that one subject, was to be the sum and substance of his witnessing. Everyone that witnesses in the sense of John must make the topic of John's testimony his own, speak and preach of Jesus, the Savior. By nature no one comes to Christ; only through the Word, by means of the testimony of the true witnesses, is Christ

made known to men. Through the Word, by faith, Christ is received. John did not testify concerning himself, for he himself was not the Light, he was not the Savior. But his work and office, the purpose of his life, the end and aim of his preaching was to give testimony concerning the Light, the wonderful, life-giving Light. (Kretzmann)

that all might believe. † People were not to believe “in” John the Baptist but “through” him. Similarly, the writer’s purpose was that the readers believe and continue to believe in Christ; he uses the verb “believe” 98 times. (CSB)

Correct. John preached stark Law, as should every preacher. But he was far more evangelical than we usually think. The word "witness" covers both his baptism and his preaching. That centered in The Light, Jesus Christ. Cf. John 1:29. Underlying the word "all" is the universal atonement. To this day anyone who reads John 1:29 and is converted is included in the word "all." (Buls)

Ylvisaker: When John (the evangelist) declares the purpose in sending the Baptist, that all should believe through his testimony, we learn not only that the grace of God is universal, that it embraces all humanity, but also that the testimony of the Baptist should be more than the testimony of the Law. The Law does not lead to faith in Christ. (Buls)

Bengel: Through him, that is through John, not in John, but in Christ, see verse 12. The power of John's testimony extended itself so as even to come under the knowledge of the Gentiles. Acts 10:37. (Buls)

pavnte", all—note the inclusive, universal aspect of John’s testimony. He preaches so that all might believe, just as Jesus is the light that gives light to all men (v 9), the light of the world. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 1)

The external Word serves the purpose of engendering faith and of imparting the Holy Spirit. For God has decreed that no one can or will believe or receive the Holy Spirit without that Gospel which is preached or taught by word of mouth.

All should believe. The gracious will of God has as its object all men; He wants all to be saved; all should believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for their soul's salvation. (Kretzmann)

1:8 to bear witness about the light – In Greek we have a "but quite to the contrary." The evangelist makes certain that we understand that the Baptist did not use his office for self-aggrandizement. (Buls)

Westcott: From this passage and other similar passages, verse 20 and 3:26ff, it has been plausibly argued that the Evangelist was familiar with some who unduly exalted the Baptist. (Buls)

Ylvisaker: He was, indeed, as the text indicates, a light. The individual who believes is also called a light (Ephesians 5:8; Philippians 2:15); the Church of the Cross, likewise (Matthew 5:14). (Buls)

But John was very careful not to detract from *the* Light, as verses 19-28 will clearly show. (Buls)

Light (*phōs*) is one half of several key word-pairs in St. John’s Gospel that express themes of Law and Gospel. Christ himself is the light of the world (8:12; 9:5; 12:46), who gives sight to the blind (John 9). Light’s opposite, darkness, represents sin and evil (3:19–21). In Jn 1:4 and 8:12 “light” and “life” (*zōē*) are closely associated. The light of Christ brings life. “With you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light” (Ps 36:9). “‘Life’ in John characteristically refers to eternal life (3:15), the gift of God through His Son” (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971] 82; see the verse citations on p. 83). This prologue of John’s gospel (1:1–18) harkens back to Genesis 1, where

light and life, and indeed all creation (Jn 1:3) came into being through God's Word. John the Baptizer bore witness to the source of all light and life: Jesus Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 1)

"He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light." He, whom our Lord called the greatest born of woman (Mt 11:11), was indeed mistaken in the early days for the Messiah himself. We think of the reluctance of his disciples to see our Lord increase and John decrease (Jn 3:30). John is not the Bridegroom, but the friend of the Bridegroom; not the Light, but the witness to the Light. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

So great was "the light" so great must it be to be "the light" indeed for all our fallen race, that no man or any sin-born creature like ourselves, not even John, the greatest of prophets, or that other John the foremost of evangelists, could be "the light." All that these at most can do is to testify and "witness concerning the light," and they need a special enabling even for that. Augustine writes that they are like trees and mountains upon which the sun shines, which reflect the light and show their own brightness and beauty that a great and wonderful light, vaster and mightier than they, is shining above them. (Lenski)

Another important word in this text is "light" (fwr). When John begins his Gospel "in the beginning," he draws our attention to the first of the creative days in which God spoke the Word, "Be light," and there was light (Gen 1:3). As the light of the world, the eternal Son who is the creative Word has been with his creation literally since day one. The rabbis said that the Torah was light and life (see Kittel, *I Jevgw*, *ibid.*, 134-6). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 1)

Here John identifies the Torah with the Word made flesh who is Jesus. He is the light who shines in the darkness, which the darkness cannot overcome (Jn 1:5). Though he is the true light of the world, the world did not recognize him (Jn 1:9-10). Men prefer to hide in darkness rather than come into the light (Jn 3:19). The light reveals the works wrought in God (Jn 3:21). Jesus called John "a lamp that burned and gave light" (Jn 5:35), yet John was not the light. Jesus identifies himself as the light of the world (Jn 8:12; 9:5). To follow him is not to walk in darkness, but to have the light of life (Jn 8:12). To see the light of the world is to walk in the day (Jn 11:9). To believe in the light is to become sons of light (Jn 12:36) and not remain in darkness (Jn 12:46). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 1)

19 And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22 So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 23 He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." 24 (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) 25 They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26 John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, 27 even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." 28 These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

1:19-23 "priests and Levites"—the first line of questioning comes from the temple, controlled by the Sadducees. There are three questions: Are you the Christ (Messiah)? Are you Elijah? Based on Mal 4:5, Elijah was expected to appear before the coming of Messiah. Jesus testified that John indeed was Elijah (Mt 11:14), but this required faith that Jesus was the Messiah. John would not make this claim of himself. Are you the Prophet? Some expected a great prophet in the way of Moses to arise before the Messiah, based on Deut 18:15,

18. John deflects all questions away from himself and identifies only with the “voice of one calling [in the wilderness]” (Is 40:3). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 1)

1:19 testimony – *hē marturia tou Iōannou*, “The testimony of John.” Occasionally one hears about how foreign forensic talk is to the fourth evangelist. Today’s text is replete with it. John solemnly testifies, as in a court of law. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

Verses 1-18 are called the prologue. Except for verses 6-8 and 15, the witness of the Baptist, the prologue speaks of the person of Christ, both preincarnate and incarnate, and that God, a gracious God, is known only in Christ, the Life and Light of the world. Now comes verse 19. (Buls)

the Jews. The phrase occurs about 70 times in this Gospel. It is used in a favorable sense (e.g., 4:22) and in a neutral sense (e.g., 2:6). But generally John used it of the Jewish leaders who were hostile to Jesus (e.g., 8:48). Here it refers to the delegation sent by the Sanhedrin to look into the activities of an unauthorized teacher. (CSB)

In verses 6-8 the witness centered in Christ and the Gospel. In verses 19-28 it centers in the Baptist himself, his person and work, but leads to Christ again. In the Synoptics the word "Jews" is rarely used of the Jewish authorities, Jesus' enemies, but is very frequent in John. (Buls)

from Jerusalem – Jerusalem was the home of the Sanhedrin. They had the right and responsibility (Deuteronomy 18:20) to stand as sentinel over the religious affairs in Israel. But, in this instance, their motive was pernicious. The priest and Levites were delegated for this formal inquiry. Josephus tells us that the Baptist's activity caused a great stir. The fact that this delegation came from Jerusalem to Bethany, verse 28, quite a distance, bears that out. "You, who are you?" They don't ask about Christ or John's activity. Look at Luke 3:15. The whole populace was asking the same question. (Buls)

Levites. Descendants of the tribe of Levi, who were assigned to specific duties in connection with the tabernacle and temple (Nu 3:17–37). They also had teaching responsibilities (2Ch 35:3; Ne 8:7–9), and it was probably in this role that they were sent with the priests to John the Baptist. (CSB)

Probably members of the Sanhedrin Council. They would have understood issues surrounding ritual purification (i.e, baptism) raised by John’s ministry. (TLSB)

Josephus tells us that the Baptist’s activity caused a great stir. The fact that this delegation came from Jerusalem to Bethany, quite a distance, bear that out. Jerusalem was the home of the Sanhedrin. They had the right and the responsibility to stand as sentinel over the religious affairs of Israel. But, in this instance, their motive was pernicious.

1:20 did not deny – The poetic repetition “He confessed . . . did not deny . . . confessed” (NIV leaves out the first “confessed”) indicates how emphatic was John’s answer, and how clear was his witness to Christ. This verse uses the definite article with the word “Christ.” Usually “Christ” is without the article as a name, and not as it originally meant, a title for the Messiah—the Anointed One. Here John intends it as a title, emphasizing that Christ is the Anointed One who would bring the messianic age to fulfillment. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 1)

The piling up of verbs shows how emphatic and sincere the Baptist was. (Buls)

Lenski: The Baptist's reply was more than a reply, it was a full, complete, clear-cut confession. (Buls)

Westcott: It may be regarded as being, in some sense, a temptation of John corresponding to the temptation of Christ. (Buls)

By the way, verses 19-28 happened the day before Jesus came to the Baptist, verse 29. John's Gospel does not record Jesus' baptism or temptation. Very likely verse 29 indicates a day shortly after Jesus' temptation. Note the emphatic "I am not the Christ." He said this without their asking about Christ or whether he was the Christ. (Buls)

hōmologēsen kai ouk ērnēsato, kai hōmologēsen, "He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed." It can't get more emphatic than that. John said it and said it and said it again: "I'm not the Messiah!" (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

I. Emphatic, contrasting John the Baptist (or Baptizer) with someone else. Throughout the following verses this emphatic "I" occurs frequently, and almost invariably there is an implied contrast with Jesus, who is always given the higher place. (CSB)

1:21 *Are you Elijah?... I am not.* The Jews remembered that Elijah had not died (2Ki 2:11) and believed that the same prophet would come back to earth to announce the end time. In this sense, John properly denied that he was Elijah. When Jesus later said the Baptist was Elijah (Mt 11:14; 17:10–13), he meant it in the sense that John was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Mal 4:5 (cf. Lk 1:17). (CSB)

CSB Notes on Malachi 4:5... *Elijah*. As Elijah came before Elisha (whose ministry was one of judgment and redemption), so "Elijah" will be sent to prepare God's people for the Lord's coming. John the Baptist ministered "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Lk 1:17; see Mt 11:13–14; 17:12–13; Mk 9:11–13). - Moses/Joshua - Elijah/Elisha - John/Jesus.

Elijah, who never died (2 Kings 2:11), was expected to come again (Mal. 4:5) as the forerunner of the Messiah. The prophecy concerning Elijah was fulfilled in John the Baptist (Mt. 17:12; Mk. 9:13), though John was not Elijah returned from heaven. (TLSB)

And so, a second question: "Well, what then?" In a spiritual sense John was Elijah, Luke 1:17; Matthew 11:14, but not as the Jews literally understood the promise. (Buls)

Westcott: The denial of the Baptist is directed to the Jewish expectation of the bodily return of Elijah. (Buls)

Bengel: He was a second Elijah; he was not the Tishbite himself, about whom they made inquiry. He rejects from himself all thing in order that he may confess Christ, and bring the inquirers to Christ. (Buls)

We may puzzle at John's denial that he was Elijah, since Mal 4:5 and Mt 11:14 identify him as such. However, since Elijah was taken up to heaven alive (from the same region across the Jordan in which John was baptizing, v 29), the Jewish expectation seems to have been for Elijah himself to come back down from heaven, and in this sense John was not Elijah. The Jews may also have considered Elijah to be another name for the Christ, or a figure on par with the Christ and the Prophet (cf. Mt 27:47). John most emphatically denies this and states that he is an inferior and a minister to the Coming One. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 1)

"Elijah." See Mal 4:5. Some are troubled that Jesus identifies John with Elijah (Mt 11:14), while John denies it. St. Gregory the Great observed: "John therefore in spirit was Elijah, he was not Elijah in person.

So what the Lord declares as to the spirit, John denies of the person” (MPL 74:1099; author’s translation). “Are you the Prophet?” See Deut 18:15–18. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

Matthew 17:10-13, “¹⁰The disciples asked him, “Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?” ¹¹Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. ¹²But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” ¹³Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.”

the Prophet. The prophet of Dt 18:15, 18. The Jewish people expected a variety of persons to be associated with the coming of the Messiah. John the Baptist emphatically denies being the Prophet. He had come to testify about Jesus, yet they kept asking him about himself. His answers became progressively more terse. (CSB)

The third question: "Are you *the* Prophet?" The Jews knew the promise of Deuteronomy 18:15-18. (Buls)

Bengel: They supposed the Prophet not only to be distinct from Christ, but even inferior to Elijah, as is evident from the gradually descending climax here in verse 25. (Buls)

Westcott: The reference is probably to Deuteronomy 18:15, interpreted not of the Christ, Acts 3:22; 7:37, but in some lower sense. Look at John 7:40-41. (Buls)

Luther understood “the Prophet” to be a reference to Deut 18:15–19. That this identification is correct is seen in Acts 3:22 and 7:37 where the apostles understand Deut 18:15–19 to mean the Christ himself. John the Baptizer can answer that he is not “the Prophet” since he is not “the Christ.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 1)

no – Notice that John’s answers grow shorter. “The increasing curtness of John’s successive utterances should not be missed. It appears to stem from a dislike for answering questions about himself. He had come to bear witness to Another” (Morris, p. 136). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 1)

Lenski: The Baptist's denial does not clash with what was promised regarding him in Luke 1:17, and with what Jesus afterward said of him in Matthew 11:14; 17:11, three statements which correctly interpret Malachi. (Buls)

All commentators note that the answers of the Baptist in verses 20-21 become shorter and shorter, denoting his sincerity and humility. Arrogant and vain people become wordier as they go along. It is clear from this entire account that John the Evangelist, a disciple of the Baptist, was a witness to what happened in verses 19-28. (Buls)

1:22 *are you* – The question reveals no personal mission. These men think only of the answer they are expected to bring to the Sanhedrin. It may, indeed, be quite true that their personal thoughts and desires went no further, that personally they were left quite cold by what they saw and heard out here. (Lenski)

The Baptist had forestalled their asking him whether or not he was the Christ. Then they had asked whether he was Elijah or the prophet (which implies that they did not consider Deuteronomy 18:15 as Messianic). Verse 22 likely denotes desperation, for as Bengel says: "They had already enumerated all those of whose coming prophecy had foretold." They could think of no other specific person. "Well,

then, who are you?" We have something like "Tell us." The purpose clause practically says: "It's not we who want to know. We're supposed to report to the authorities." They were not interested personally, nor, for that matter were the Jews. If they had returned to be baptized, confessing their sins, the Evangelist would surely have recorded it. They ask one final question: "What do you say about yourself?" (Buls)

who sent us – "Those who sent us." That is, the Pharisees (see v 24). "What do you say about yourself?" That is the crucial question, and the shocker is that John really doesn't want to talk about himself, but about the one who is the light himself. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

1:23 *I am the voice* – "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" The LXX certainly allows for the New Testament read of this passage from Isaiah, locating the calling out in the wilderness as opposed to the location of the "making straight" being the wilderness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

The Baptist prefixes an emphatic *I* to the prophecy from Isaiah 40:3, found in all four Gospels with reference to the Baptist. Only John tells us that the Baptist consciously applied the prophecy to himself. He is only God's voice, crying in the wilderness. What does the voice cry? "Make straight the way of the Lord.." Here "Lord" is Christ. (Buls)

Ylvisaker: He disowns at once, both pride and a false sense of humility. He acknowledges that he has an office, and this office is of God. In His testimony there is the knowledge of self and the knowledge of Christ. (Buls)

Lenski: Whereas the prophet has two poetic lines in a synonymous parallelism, the Baptist uses only one. Such condensation and abbreviation are constantly employed when quoting. (Buls)

In the Baptist's reply the entire stress is on his work and office, none on his person. He is merely a voice with a message. (Lenski)

John announces a new exodus. God will soon deliver His people from sin's captivity through His Son. (TLSB)

He disowns at once, both pride and a false sense of humility. He acknowledges that he has an office, and this office is of God. The coming of the Baptist, his mission, his use of God's Word, were in precise fulfillment of prophecy. Repentant sinners wanted to know what these words from Isaiah meant. They confessed their sins and were baptized. But in this case the delegation made no such inquiry, did not confess their sins, were not baptized. Evidently the Baptist's testimony left them cold. That still happens today and we should not let it dampen our enthusiasm.

Make straight – Through John's preaching of repentance and Baptism, God prepared people spiritually. (TLSB)

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Isaiah 40:3-4, “³A voice of one calling: “In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.⁴ Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.”

CSB Notes on Isaiah 40:3-4... *prepare the way*. Clear obstacles out of the road (cf. 57:14; 62:10). The language of vv. 3-4 has in view the ancient Near Eastern custom of sending representatives ahead to prepare the way for the visit of a monarch. The picture is that of preparing a processional highway for the Lord’s coming to his people. In Mt 3:1-8 John declares that repentance is necessary to prepare the way for Christ.

TLSB Notes on Isaiah 40:3-4... The double comfort of vv 1-2 will come about when the Lord breaks into history and comes to the aid of His people. The Lord has done before (cf. Dt 33:2; jgs 5:4-5; Ps 68:7-8) and will do so again (Is 52:7-10). The prophet may also be playing on a Babylonian hymn that speaks of making straight paths for Nabu, Babylonian god of writing and wisdom. Roads were often constructed for visiting dignitaries, triumphant kings, or for idols as they were carried in procession.

According to His eternal plan, “the way of the Lord” has as its predestined goal the redemption of all humankind through His Son, Jesus Christ. All obstacles will be cleared from His highway of salvation. His chosen people will come forth from the grave of the exile and survive the rise and fall of empires in order that the Savior might be born “of the house and lineage of David” (Lk 2:4) as foretold.

Luther on Isaiah 40:4... This is the way it must be. If I level hills and valleys, then they are all alike. So the Gospel makes us all equal. “We have borne the burden of the whole day. Then the Gospel comes and upsets everything. *Valleys* are sinners, fools, lowly. *Mountains* are presumptuous saints. Here before God all things must be leveled.

1:24-25 “Pharisees”—the second line of questioning comes from the synagogue, controlled by the Pharisees. Why then do you baptize? (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 1)

1:24 *Pharisees*. The conservative religious party, who probed deeper than the rest of the delegation (v. 19). (CSB)

This verse has caused difficulties in translation: (Buls)

- a. AV and NKJV take it to mean that the delegation was made up entirely of Pharisees;
- b. LB RSV TEV JB and NASB take it to mean that the Pharisees had sent them;
- c. NEB and AAT take it to mean that some of them were Pharisees;
- d. NIV evidently takes it to mean that the first delegation (verses 19-23) returned and that a second delegation, made up of Pharisees, came back for further questioning.

These Notes consider the translation of NIV the correct one. We have a second delegation. The Pharisees are not mentioned in verse 19. Furthermore, the Pharisees had an interest in baptism. Verse 25-26 dwell on baptism, not the person of the Baptist. But, we can’t prove that verse 24 denotes a second delegation, nor does it affect the *sensus literalis*. (Buls)

The real situation, then is that the committee of the Sanhedrin had ended its inquiry and stepped aside. In addition, to this committee the Pharisaic party in Jerusalem had sent a representation of its own. These men had stood by while the committee from the Sanhedrin had made its inquiry. When these were through, the Pharisaic representatives speak. The explanation that the men who now speak are Pharisees is necessary for the understanding of the question which they put to the Baptist. They were of the party

which laid utmost stress on the strictest outward observance of the law, around which they had also built up a forbidding hedge of traditions and human commandments. They were utterly self-righteous and cultivated a formalism that was ostentatious to a degree, especially in observing ceremonies, fastings, almsgiving, long prayers, tithes, etc. The Sadducees were freethinkers, skeptics, usually men of wealth and prominence, and given to loose and luxurious living. The people revered the Pharisees for their supposed holiness and for their zeal regarding the law; and even the Sadducees had to accommodate themselves to their demands in many ways. (Lenski)

1:25 *why are baptizing* – “Then why are you baptizing?” The authority question is here put. Later, our Lord would put the same question to his detractors and not get an answer: “Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?” (Mk 11:30). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

Ylvisaker: If he were not among the personalities they had enumerated, he had, in their view, no right to baptize. In the following reply, John again diverts their attention from his person to his office. . . . The evangelist in no way indicates that the delegates from the Sanhedrin were affected in their attitude by John's answer. There is, however, a solemn indictment in the words of the Baptist 'Ye know not.' Now the conflict opens which reaches its climax in Jesus' death. The fourth evangelist pictures this struggle, and therefore this incident is placed in the beginning of the Gospel. (Buls)

What they say in verse 25 amounts to a fact or particular condition "if, as you say, you are not etc." Note "We are totally unacquainted with any Biblical person, not already mentioned, who has the authority to baptize." They were very dubious of John's right to baptize. They were clearly still dead in their trespasses and sin. (Buls)

Lenski: Passages like Ezekiel 36:35; 37:23 led the Jews to expect a lustration and cleansing of the people. (Buls)

If that is so, they were expecting baptism. But, they reasoned, it had to be by a truly commissioned person. (Buls)

the Christ. Means “the Anointed One.” In OT times anointing signified being set apart for service, particularly as king (cf. 1Sa 16:1, 13; 26:11) or priest (Ex 40:13–15; Lev 4:3). But people were looking for not just *an* anointed one but *the* Anointed One, the Messiah. (CSB)

Passages like Ezek 36:25; 37:23 led the Jews to expect a purification and cleansing of the people. That this should be accomplished by way of a baptism would seem quite in order. But they expected that it would be the Messiah Himself who would thus cleanse the people, and if not He, then at least His forerunners as they imagined them. When John denied that he was one these, they naturally asked how, then he came to be baptizing. Their wrong preconceptions concerning the Messiah's forerunner blinded them to such an extent that, when they had their real forerunner before their very eyes, they failed to recognize him. (Lenski) They did the same with Jesus.

1:26-27 “I baptize with water”—John doesn't answer the question posed to him. Even his baptism points beyond, to a Greater One so great that John is not worthy to untie his sandal straps, the work reserved for the lowest rank of slave. It was forbidden for a disciple to loosen the sandal ties of his teacher. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 1)

1:26 *I baptize* – To baptize, meaning to apply water in a ritual washing, was not a totally new idea. Rabbis of that time regularly applied water to symbolize purification. Pupils of a particular rabbi could identify themselves with him and his teaching through the act of washing. However, John's baptism was

unprecedented in that it was “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mk 1:4). The question of the delegation indicated their belief that the Messiah would baptize. They wondered, therefore, why John was doing this if he were not the Messiah. Apparently the Jews thought that only the Messiah himself should perform such a baptism that forgave sins (cf. Mt 9:26). John replied simply that a greater One stood among them whose baptism superseded both John’s baptism and that of contemporary rabbis. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 1)

In all the cases of questions (verses 19-23) "replied" was used only once for an emphatic: "NO." In verse 26 we have "replied" again for an emphatic statement. (Buls)

Stoeckhardt: This was a severe rebuke for the Jews, especially for their spiritual leaders that they did not know the Christ who was to come, the Christ of prophecy, because they did not know and understand the Scriptures, which testified of Christ, nor had they any longing for the Savior of Israel. (Buls)

Ylvisaker: The evangelist in no way indicates that the delegates from the Sanhedrin were affected in their attitude by John's answer. There is, however, a solemn indictment in the words of the Baptist 'Ye know not'. (Buls)

Bengel says: 'In the midst of you' especially at the time of His baptism. 'Ye know Him not', he addressed the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who had not been present at the baptism of Jesus. And he whets their desire that they may be anxious to become acquainted with Him. (Buls)

Lenski: John answers the Pharisees as readily and as succinctly as he had answered the Sadducees. To baptize with water simply says that John is using a means of grace. Christ's redemption is the basis of the means of grace. (Buls)

After clearing up the matter regarding his baptizing John clears up the matter regarding the Messiah and shows how he is connected with this Messiah. His reply may be divided into three statements: 1) Unknown, the Messiah is already in your midst; 2) He I already in the act of coming after me; 3) And He is infinitely great. Thus John more than answers the question put to him. His work is not only legal in the narrow Pharisaic sense, it is legal in a far higher sense and has the stamp of approval from the present Messiah Himself. (Lenski)

“Among you stands one you do not know.” That is John’s answer to the authority question. The authority he had to dump water on people’s heads and promise them forgiveness, making them a people prepared, derived from the One among them whom they did not yet know, but whom John has the job of pointing out. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

Knowledge of Jesus comes by revelation, not by reason or strength. This was a severe rebuke for the Jews, especially for their spiritual leaders that they did not know the Christ who was to come, the Christ of prophecy, because they did not know and understand the Scriptures, which testified of Christ, nor had they any longing for the Savior of Israel.

1:27 *who comes after me* – “Who comes after me.” That is because John is to “go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins” (Lk 1:76–77). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. A menial task, fit for a slave. Disciples would perform all sorts of service for their rabbis (teachers), but loosing sandal thongs was expressly excluded. (CSB)

Compared to the Son of God, John was unworthy of even a slave's task. (TLSB)

This tells us in what respect John is not worthy. The remainder of this verse clearly shows the utter humility of the Baptist. There is very likely something to the idea that the delegation(s) from Jerusalem was (were) a severe temptation to John to make more of himself than he really was, though we cannot prove it. Likewise, perhaps, at John 3:25-30 when the disciples of John complained that people were following Christ rather than John. But John answered: "He must increase but I must decrease." The point we are making is that when a Christian is tempted to pride he must resist by stating the true facts of his own condition. (Buls)

1:28 Bethany. The Bethany mentioned elsewhere in the Gospels was only about two miles from Jerusalem. The site of this other Bethany is not known, except that it was located on the east side of the Jordan. (CSB)

pevrantou' jIordavnou, trans: Jordan Bethany. The precise location is not known, though John always notes the time and place of key events in the Gospel (see, for example, Jn 2:1; 4:5-6; etc). That this happened "across the Jordan" in the wilderness is more important than the precise location. John is calling Israel out of Israel, back into the wilderness in a reverse exodus of repentance, to meet her Messiah who will be revealed in John's baptism as the Son of God (Jn 1:29-34). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 1)

Not the Bethany near Jerusalem, but the town east of the Jordan River, closer to Galilee and north of Jericho. (TLSB)

Much has been written about the locale of this Bethany and its variant, Bethabara. In any case, it was on the east side of the Jordan. Hendriksen discusses this matter at length. We quote in part: (Buls)

We are distinctly told that this Bethany was beyond the Jordan, not to be confused with the place of identical name where Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus lived. The latter was near Jerusalem. Although the exact location of the Bethany mentioned in our paragraph is not known, it would seem that those are not far wrong who look for it just east of the Jordan, about thirteen miles below the Sea of Galilee and about twenty miles south-east of Nazareth. (Buls)

"Where John was baptizing." Again the focus on Baptism, which has raised the whole authority question. How can John baptize? His answer: by the power of the One who comes after me, whose way I prepare, and to whom I shall point in the next verse as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 1)

1:19-28 John testifies to Jewish leaders asking, "Who are you?" that he is not the Christ but was sent to prepare the way for Him. As a faithful servant, John sets an example of humility and reverence for us. Ironically, the One whose sandal John was unworthy to untie became the Suffering Servant, who bore all our sins. • O Christ, prepare a royal highway in my heart, that I may receive You in steadfast humility and joy. Amen. (TLSB)