

GOD WITH US

Part 8: JESUS

Message 6 – Two Interviews: Jew and Samaritan

John 3 and 4

Introduction

Only the Gospel of John informs us of an early period of ministry in southern Judea, prior to the beginning of Jesus' Galilean ministry in the north. In this early period, Jesus had two key conversations, recorded by John. Jesus' meeting with the Jewish leader Nicodemus tells us that even religious people need a new-birth gift only Jesus can give. Jesus' longer conversation with a Samaritan woman tells us that no matter where we have searched for fulfillment in the past, no matter how thirsty we have become, we will find our deepest longings met only in the thirst-quenching gift that Jesus offers. John's purpose for including these two conversations up front was to allow his readers to understand the message of Jesus via two "real-life stories."

Jesus and Nicodemus: John 3:1-21

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him" (3:1,2).

Nicodemus came by night, possibly because he feared his peers on the Sanhedrin, who were opposed to Jesus (7:45-52; 19:38-42). His opening words give insight as to what the council was thinking about Jesus early on (a miracle-worker/teacher from God). Jesus bypassed the introductory niceties and dove right in to the truth of Nicodemus' personal need for something more than religion.

Jesus replied, "Truly, truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again" (3:3).

Nicodemus was a Pharisee. This ultra-conservative sect believed that salvation came through strict observance of the Laws of Moses (and the additional "traditions of the elders"). Jesus' words must have shocked him, because he would have believed that he was destined for heaven because of his piety and his high standing in

the Jewish religious community (one of the top 70 leaders). His question/response reveals his confusion over Jesus' words about being "born again."

"How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born" (3:4).

Jesus clarified by contrasting physical birth with spiritual birth:

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at My saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (3:5-8).

'Born again' can be translated 'born from above'. A newborn baby and a spiritual baby are both 'birthed:' one through the travail of a mother (John 16:21), and the other through the travail of Jesus Christ on the cross (Isaiah 53:11), as He suffered and bore our sins. The person being 'born of the Spirit' through ***belief in Christ***, is 'birthed' into God's family because Christ's payment for sin has allowed us to be forgiven and be 'born again.'

Being 'born of the Spirit' is the miraculous entry of 'the Spirit of Christ,' the Holy Spirit, into our being when we believe: "... *and if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.*" "*The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God*" (Romans 8:9,16). The apostle Peter wrote that "*we have been 'born again' to a living hope*" (1Peter 1:3); "*like newborn babies crave milk, newly born spiritual babes have a new spiritual appetite for the spiritual milk of the Word that causes our growth*" (1Pet 2:2).

Nicodemus still did not understand what Jesus was saying.

"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? Truly, truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the One who came from

heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him” (3:9-15).

Jesus used an O.T. story of “death and rebirth” that Nicodemus would have been familiar with (Numbers 21:4-9). When the Israelites had sinned against God, He sent poisonous snakes that bit the people and they were dying. But, when they looked to God’s gracious provision, the bronze serpent on the pole, they were healed and given new life. Jesus then made the example clear: He would be “lifted up” (on a pole - a cross) so that when people looked to Him (believed in Him) they would receive new life. Through this story, Jesus made clear to Nicodemus his *need* for the new birth, even as a religious man. All people have been poisoned by the sin problem, but everyone who looks to the crucified Savior is given the gift of new life (spiritual rebirth).

The most famous verse in the Bible is found in the context of this discussion with Nicodemus. It summarizes the entire discussion:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (3:16-18).

God’s love-gift to the world = His Son.

The awaited response to the gift = Believe in Him (98x in John).

The result of belief = Eternal life (no condemnation, no perishing).

The result of not believing = Condemnation.

Recall that Nicodemus had come to Jesus by night. The closing verses speak about how people use darkness to hide from God.

“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God” (3:19-21).

Nicodemus had much to ponder after his discussion with Jesus. He

did in fact identify with Jesus later. Once he defended Jesus' right for a fair trial (John 7:50-52), and after Jesus' death, he came into the light, giving Him an honorable burial (John 19:38-40).

Many people are either ignorant of their need, or make fun of the phrase "born again." Yet, it was Jesus Who coined this phrase and it was He who said it is THE necessary requirement for entrance into the kingdom of God. It is not enough to depend on religious affiliation or your own good deeds. Nor is not enough to simply believe that God exists. It is imperative to look with faith (trust) to the One who was lifted up on a cross to die for your sins. Have you been born again? If not, keep processing the claims of JESUS, and asking others to walk with you as you seek to understand His love.

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: John 4

Next to the nighttime interview with a devout Jewish man, John placed a noontime interview with a Samaritan woman; two real-life stories to show us what the message of Jesus means. It is interesting to note that Jesus departed Judea because of animosity and questions from the hard-hearted Pharisees (4:1-2). He was headed for territory where He knew there were *receptive hearts*.

He left Judea and departed again into Galilee. And He had to pass through Samaria. So He came to a village of Samaria, called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as He was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour- noon (4:3-6).

Jesus did not *have to* go through Samaria. Although many Jews did take the short route through Samaria, devout Jews often walked *around* Samaria to travel from north to south so they would not be defiled by Samaritan soil. The Samaritans were a mixed race from the Assyrian invasion of the 10 northern tribes of Israel (727 B.C.) and the Jews despised them. Jesus "had to" go through Samaria because there was a woman there He needed to meet; and villagers that were ready to hear. On the outskirts of Sychar, Jesus sat down by Jacob's well, weary from the journey.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the village to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to Him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (for Jews do not associate with Samaritans) (4:7-9).

The woman had walked alone from her village to draw water for her daily needs. She was completely bewildered as to why a Jewish Rabbi would be asking a Samaritan woman for a drink. Even the disciples were surprised to see Him speaking to her (4:27). The Rabbis said: “It is better that the words of the Law be burned than to be delivered to a woman”. Jesus did not agree with this type of prejudice.

Jesus never hesitated to cross barriers. To Him, all people were made in the image of God, His beloved creation, and He cared for them all deeply and equally. Many cultures are VERY divided over issues of gender, race, nationality, political affiliations, income levels, popularity, etc. How can Jesus' example move you to cross some barriers and engage with people you would not normally reach out to? With whom can you show the love of Jesus to this week? Oh . . . and don't be surprised if they are wondering why you are initiating with them!

Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and Who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water”. (4:10)

As with Nicodemus, Jesus wasted no time to engage her in a weightier topic. He had a gift of salvation He wanted her to receive from Him – the spiritual gift of ‘living water.’

“Sir,” the woman said, “You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can You get this living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?” (4:11,12).

This well was a sacred historical landmark for local Samaritans. She did not fathom how Jesus could give her *better* water than the water from Jacob’s well. Jesus did not respond to her question, rather continued to offer her something almost miraculous.

Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life”. (4:13,14)

Jesus was speaking about a deep spiritual spring (produced by the Spirit, John 7:37-39; Isaiah 58:11), that would produce a soul-satisfying *quality* of life . . . and a *quantity* of life – eternal.

She understood that Jesus was offering her a *better* kind of water than the water from Jacob's sacred well. Yet, like Nicodemus, she was confusing a literal analogy with a spiritual truth.

The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water" (4:15).

Jesus wanted to show her that she had a deep need for this 'water.' She thought her deepest need was to be loved by a man; but her true need was for a personal relationship with God. Jesus turned the discussion to "her husband" to show her this need.

He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," she replied. (4:16,17)

Until this point the woman was conversing with many words. Her 1st reply was 11 words (in Greek). Her 2nd reply was 42 words. Her 3rd reply was 13 words. Now she used just **3 words** in the attempt to shut this conversation down: NOT HAVE HUSBAND!

We all have self-protected, guarded "squishy spots" that, when "triggered" cause us to react defensively. The level of the defensive reaction, determines the degree of pain or shame hidden below our self-awareness. Here's a few ways to determine our squishy spots. Ask "What sort of question or topic would cause me to try to shut down a conversation with 3 brief words?" Or, "I don't want to talk about it!" Think about it. When we over-react when being triggered, that's an area that we need to find healing in. Otherwise, we'll spend the rest of our life making sure no one touches that part of our wounded heart. (How interesting to note that Jesus was willing to touch this part of the woman's heart ... so that He could heal it.)

Jesus twice affirmed her honesty . . .

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true". (4:17,18)

Yet, He didn't let her put the lid on the deepest wound in her heart which was **rejection**. Instead of allowing her to have false peace with Him, changing the subject, He went deeper to reveal the truth about her pain-filled relational world. It was unusual for a woman to go through 5 divorces in that culture. Jewish law permitted only 3 marriages, even including one being from the death of a former

spouse. Women were not allowed to *initiate* divorce. This means that this woman had been rejected by men (divorced) 5 times. Deut. 24:1-4 gives the Mosaic law on divorce. The Samaritans accepted the books of Moses as Scripture. But Jesus challenged men's abuse of divorce law, stating that Moses permitted it due to their hard hearts (Matt.19:3-9.) Now she was living with a man unmarried. The story does not say why she was currently in this situation; but it seems to have still carried shame for her.

This woman was smart, as indicated by her reply after Jesus revealed her marital history:

“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem”. (4:19,20)

She used 30 words to steer the conversation away from *her life* to the *religious history of the Jew-Samaritan controversy!* She tried talking her way out of an uncomfortable corner; but Jesus wouldn't give in. He ended His explanation of the Samaritan-Jew dispute with two sentences, and then brought the discussion right back to the heart of the matter – *her heart*.

Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is Spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (4:21-24).

Jesus was inviting this woman to a turning point in her relationship with the living God; to a *spirit and truth* relationship with God. It was not about being Jewish or Samaritan; about Jerusalem or Mt. Gerazim. It was about being a *true worshiper*. To worship “in spirit” means to worship from the *heart where God's life-giving Spirit dwells* (not going through external motions- see Mark 7:6). To worship “in truth” means to worship with the *head* (with a true knowledge of God in Christ and His Word).

Although this woman was confused on many spiritual truths, one thing she knew correctly was that someday a Messiah would arrive and He would settle all disputes and answer all questions.

The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us. Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you, I am He” (4:25,26).

Jesus revealed His deity as “**Messiah**” to this un-named Samaritan woman! He had *chosen* to go through Samaria for HER. He knew her heart was ripe for harvest and He knew that she would want to immediately share her new-found Savior with her fellow villagers.

Just then His disciples returned and were surprised to find Him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?” Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” They came out of the town and made their way toward Him (4:27-30).

This one woman with a transformed countenance eagerly invited the entire village to follow her out to Jacob’s well to meet a man who could be “the Christ”. That’s called influence! She was *not* a disrespected woman and, contrary to normal law, her testimony was considered valid. The whole village followed her to the well!

Does Jesus look at my own heart and see an eagerness to share about my ‘vulnerable’ experiences with Him with those who don’t know Him yet? He chose to reveal His identity to her because He knew that she would not waste the opportunity to put Him on display through her story. His acceptance of her was enough to shield her from any more shame. How does this impact me?

Meanwhile, Jesus was having a teaching-moment with His men.

Do you not say, ‘Four months and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest! (4:35).

When Jesus said, “Open your eyes and look at the fields,” He probably pointed down the road seeing the entire village coming out to meet Him. It is worth noting that the disciples, who had gone into the village to buy food, did not bring a single Samaritan villager out to meet Jesus; but this woman brought *everyone*.

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to Him, they urged Him to stay with

them, and He stayed two days. And because of His words many more became believers. They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world”. (4:39-42)

This precious Samaritan woman was highlighted in John’s choice of stories for many reasons; but one reason was because of her responsive heart that believed in Jesus, the Christ. She was released from shame and immediately desired to share her story and how Jesus intersected with it.

Another reason was because this woman’s conversion laid the foundation for the later Samaritan movement of believers in the early church. On the day that Christ ascended back to heaven, He gave this charge to His many disciples, **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, SAMARIA, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8)**. Later, when the persecuted believers spread out into Samaria to proclaim the gospel (Acts 8), they found that seeds had already been planted in people’s hearts, through *this woman!*

Many of us have tried to fill a God-shaped hole in our hearts with relationships- with boyfriends and girlfriends; with husbands and wives; with partners and pictures. It may work for a while; but the fact is that no human being can take the place of God in the human heart. “There is a God shaped void in the heart of every person, and it can never be filled by any created thing. It can only be filled by God” (Blaise Pascal). Bono, of the rock group U2, called this void the, ‘God-shaped hole.’ He wrote: “...when things are silent, you can hear the hissing of what’s missing.” Do you experience the ‘living water’ that is welling up within you? If not, what have you been trying to fill the God-shaped hole with?

Discussion Questions

1. What impacted you most about Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus? What relevance do you see in this story to the world you live in and the people you interact with?
2. What did you learn about *Jesus* from the way He conducted His conversation with the Samaritan woman?
3. What does the story of the Samaritan woman teach you about dealing with shameful things in your past?