

Session 7 Jesus' Early Ministry in Jerusalem and Samaria (Jn. 3-4)

I. OVERVIEW OF JOHN 1-4

- A. Only John describes Jesus' first visit to Jerusalem (Jn. 2:13), Judea (Jn. 3:22), and Samaria (Jn. 4:4).
- B. In Jerusalem, He cleansed the temple and did many miracles—the city was in an uproar.
- C. In this session we see conversations that Jesus had with two different types of people (Jn. 3-4). Jesus spoke with Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin and a representative of rabbinic Judaism. Next He spoke with a Samaritan woman who probably had a reputation associated with immorality.

II. JESUS' CONVERSATION WITH NICODEMUS (JN. 3:1-21)

- A. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin (Jn. 3:1; 7:50-51). Jerusalem was stirred up after Jesus cleansed the temple and did miracles that caused many to want to follow Him.

¹There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ²This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." (Jn. 3:1-2)

- B. Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again (Jn. 3:3-6). Most Jews assumed that they were a part of the kingdom by virtue of being born in a Jewish family (unless they chose wickedness).

³... "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old?..." ⁵Jesus answered, "Most assuredly... unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (Jn. 3:3-6)

1. Many believe that being "born of water and the Spirit" refers to natural birth and spiritual birth. Water refers to the amniotic fluid that breaks from the womb shortly before childbirth.
2. Others propose that being born of the water and spirit *both* speak of the new birth. The Old Testament often used water to speak of spiritual cleansing and empowering when associated with the ministry of the Spirit (Isa. 32:15; 44:3-5; Jer. 2:13; 17:13; Ezek. 47:9; Zech. 14:8). In Ezekiel 36:25-27, water and spirit come together to signify salvation.
3. The issue between flesh and spirit is not an issue of noble and sinful expressions of human nature. The new birth is much more than making a new resolve to make godly choices.

- C. Jesus gently criticized Nicodemus for not understanding these things since he was "the" teacher of Israel (v. 10). His knowledge of the Scriptures should have given him understanding of God's promise to give His people a new heart by the work of the Spirit and that no one can come to God in his own strength or righteousness without God's gracious help and cleansing.

⁹Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?" (Jn. 3:9-10)

- D. Jesus explained that He could speak about heavenly things because He had descended from heaven and was presently in a dynamic connection with heaven and His Father (Jn. 3:13-16).

¹³No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. ¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁶For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (Jn. 3:13-16)

1. Jesus associated the new birth to the time when Moses lifted up a bronze snake (Num. 21:4-9). Deaths from snakebite had broken out on Israel due to their complaining. They were to *look* at a bronze serpent lifted up on a wooden pole—all who *looked with faith* were healed.
 2. Jesus implied that it should not be new to Nicodemus that God should give new life by looking in faith to a figure on a wooden pole to receive it. The serpent was a picture of sin, and the pole was a picture of the cross. Nicodemus knew this story well. When Jesus said, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so, the Son of Man will be lifted up,” it was Jesus’ first prediction of His death—by crucifixion (Jn. 8:28; 12:32, 34).
 3. Jesus clarified why He was to be lifted up: that everyone who believes may have eternal life.
 4. We see Jesus as the One who *reveals heavenly things* (Jn. 3:13). Jesus descended from heaven several times (Josh. 5:13-15; Dan. 3:24-27), so He was qualified to teach heavenly things.
 5. We see Jesus as the *suffering and exalted Savior* (Jn. 3:14). To be lifted up includes lifted up on the cross to death and then lifted up from the grave to sit at the Father’s right hand
- E. The Father did not plan the incarnation of Jesus to judge people, but to provide salvation through His death. People were under judgment long before the incarnation occurred. They were already desperately in need of a Savior before Jesus was sent by the Father on His saving mission.

¹⁷For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. ¹⁸He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the condemnation, that the light [incarnate Christ] has come into the world, and men loved darkness...²⁰Everyone practicing evil hates the light...lest his deeds should be exposed.” (Jn. 3:17-21)

1. Jesus came into an *already* lost and condemned world to save some. He did not enter a neutral world to save some and condemn others. Because of His great love, He provided a way by which people need not perish. The Father’s purpose is salvation by believing in His Son.
 2. The person who does not believe in Jesus stands condemned already (Jn. 3:18, 36) because of refusing to believe on the One whom God sent at such a great cost to save them. Many view human beings basically as being “neutral,” not sinful. So if person is pretty good, then why does he need Jesus to save him? If people are neutral, they can take salvation or leave it.
- F. People refuse salvation for moral reasons—they love darkness and hate the light (Jn. 3:19-20).

III. JOHN THE BAPTIST'S RESPONSE TO JESUS' MINISTRY (JN. 3:22-30)

- A. Jesus was with His disciples who were baptizing in Judean countryside (Jn. 3:22), summer AD 27. The location of Aenon (lit. springs) near Salim points to a site a few miles west of the Jordan River.
²²After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. ²³Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim... (Jn. 3:22)
- B. A dispute arose between John's disciples and others over the ceremonial washings that God required. Thus, they were arguing about issues related to purification or how to best be dedicated to God (Jn. 3:25) and were concerned about the decrease of John's ministry influence (Jn. 3:26).
*²⁵There arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification.
²⁶And they came to John and said, "...He [Jesus] is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!"
²⁷John...said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven...
²⁹He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom... rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice..."³⁰He must increase, but I must decrease. (Jn. 3:25-30)*
1. Jesus was revealed by John the Baptist as the Bridegroom God (Jn. 3:29; cf. Isa. 54:5; 62:4-5; Jer. 2:2; 3:20; Ezek. 16:8; Hos. 2:16-20).
 2. *Jesus is a Bridegroom*—thus, He feels, thinks, and acts as a Bridegroom forever.
 3. *Jesus has the Bride*—From ages past, the Father promised to give Jesus a Bride as His inheritance, and Jesus was committed to purchase her on the cross. God's commitments could not be stopped. The enemy wants us to believe the Church is in his hands. The devil does not have the Bride. But Jesus our Bridegroom King has the Bride. He knows how to protect her.
 4. John functioned as a *friend of the Bridegroom*. This speaks of having a specific message and attitude in ministering to people. The message is to make known Jesus' desire, beauty, and commitments as the Bridegroom God and to call people to love Him with all their heart.
- C. The issues of dedication to God and one's place or decreasing ministry are both answered in seeing the Bridegroom God's burning desire, beauty, and sovereignty and commitments.
- D. A person's sphere of influence is given by God sovereignly (Jn. 3:27). We cannot get or keep a position by strife. John rested in God's sovereignty (1 Cor. 4:7) and recognized that God had different assignment for each as well as different times and seasons for their spheres of influence.
- E. A dual revelation: We are to see the riches of His worth to us and the riches of our worth to Him.
- F. John the Baptist found approval from the Bridegroom's voice, not from men's applause. He modeled how to carry his heart and operate in the spirit of a friend of the Bridegroom by not getting between the Bride and Bridegroom in drawing attention to oneself.
- G. As we see the Bridegroom in His beauty and His work for us and in us, it frees us from our preoccupation with our weakness and struggles and shifts the attention off ourselves and the size of our ministry impact. In prayer we declare, "You are a Bridegroom and have a Bride."

IV. JESUS' PREEMINENCE (JN. 3:31-36)

- A. Jesus has greater authority and supremacy than any former prophet because He is from above. Jesus is the only man who could speak with full authority and understanding of heavenly things. Why? Because He testifies to what He has seen and heard in the heavenly sphere (Jn. 3:31-32).

³¹He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.³² And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. (Jn. 3:31-32)

- B. Any who receives Jesus' testimony about salvation believes that the Father is truthful (Jn.3:33-35).

³³He who has received His testimony has set his seal to [certified, NKJ] this, that God is true.

³⁴For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure.

³⁵The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. (Jn. 3:33-35, NAS)

1. ***Spirit without measure:*** God has spoken to His people through different prophets throughout the Old Testament history. Each received a measure of the Spirit's power according to the assignment God gave them. But to Jesus God gave the Spirit without any measure of limit.
2. This is what validates the truth of Jesus' words. At His baptism, the Spirit rested on Him and remained permanently on Him (Jn. 1:32-33), proving His deity, heavenly origin, and the Father's love for Him (Jn. 3:34). We must listen to Jesus because He is no ordinary prophet.
3. ***Set his seal:*** Seals indicated guarantees and ownership.
4. ***God is true:*** Jesus so exactly revealed God's words that to believe Jesus is to believe God and to disbelieve Jesus is to disbelieve God (1 John 5:10).
5. ***Given all things:*** God entrusted all things into Jesus' hands. This points out the dependence of Jesus on the Father—one of John's major themes. The Father loves the Son and therefore has placed everything in His hands. The Father gave Jesus the authority to impart the Spirit to others (Acts 2:33; cf. Jn. 15:26; Lk. 24:49).

- C. John concludes by contrasting two responses to Jesus (Jn. 3:36). Faith in Him results in eternal life (Jn. 1:12; 3:3, 5, 15, 16), while refusing His leadership and salvation results in God's wrath.

³⁶He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (Jn. 3:35-36)

1. Because God made available so great a salvation, therefore unbelief is seen by God as an expression of disobedience (Jn. 3:18). God's wrath is His personal response of a God who comes to His own world and finds few who want anything to do with Him. Such people are "condemned already" (v. 18).
2. The truth of God's wrath is the most offensive truth in Scripture. Many seek to explain it away. This can only be done by dismissing hundreds of passages that refer to God's wrath.
3. Judgment abides on unbelievers now in the present tense (Jn. 3:18, 36; Rom. 1:18).

V. JESUS' MINISTRY IN SAMARIA (JN. 4:1-42)

- A. We can learn much about how to lead people to Jesus in this chapter. Jesus spoke to a Samaritan woman who was despised by orthodox Jewish leaders like Nicodemus.
- B. To avoid premature trouble due to growing popularity, Jesus returned to Galilee, going through Samaria (Jn. 4:1-4). Some Jews walked *around* Samaria. Jesus *needed* to go *through* it, probably because the Spirit led Him, so He could speak to the Samaritan woman.
¹*Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John* ²*(though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples),* ³*He left Judea and departed again to Galilee.* ⁴*But He needed to go through Samaria.* (Jn. 4:1-4)
- C. The Samaritans had a mixture of Judaism and heathenism (2 Kgs. 17:26-41). Samaritans refused to recognize Jerusalem as the place of worship and chose their sacred Mount Gerizim.
- D. Israel's King Omri built his new capital in the city of Samaria (1 Kgs 16:24). Later, the name Samaria also came to describe the district around the city. The Assyrians defeated the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 BC, deported many of the Jewish people to foreign lands, and imported idol-worshipping foreigners who intermarried with the Israelites who were not deported. The Samaritans built a worship center on Mt. Gerizim next to Shechem around 400 BC.
- E. The woman was at the well in the city of Sychar in Samaria (Jn. 4:5-26) which is still a famous well dug by Jacob. The site is a popular tourist attraction, and the deep spring still flows. The sixth hour would have been noon. Jesus shared our fatigue and thirst in His humanity (Heb. 4:15-16).
⁵*So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.* ⁶*Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour [noon].* (Jn. 4:5-6)
- F. The Jews regarded the Samaritans as unclean heathen idolaters. Women did not usually draw water alone in the heat of the day. It is assumed that she avoided others as she was a social outcast related to her immoral reputation—five husbands and living with a sixth man outside of marriage (4:18).
⁷*A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink."* ⁸*For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.* ⁹*Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.* (Jn. 4:7-9)
- G. Jesus implied that God had a greater gift for her—eternal life by the indwelling Spirit with its cleansing and refreshing grace (Jn. 4:10-14; 7:38-39; cf. Isa. 1:16-18; Ezek. 36:25-27; Zech. 14:8). If we knew who He really is (Jn. 4:10), we would worship more zealously even as the angels who see Him.
¹⁰*Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."*
¹¹*The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water?"* ¹²*Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well...?"* (Jn. 4:10-12)

- H. Jesus described this water as springing up within the heart by the Holy Spirit who gives eternal life. *Drinks* is a continuous action verb in the Greek. *Never thirst* is the promise of a heart satisfied in God. Jesus spoke of a fountain within a born-again believer (Jn. 4:14; 7:37-38). He described coming to a place in our relationship with God where we do not live thirsting in a negative way.
- ¹³*Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” ¹⁵The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.” (Jn. 4:13-15)*
- I. Jesus asked her to call her husband since it would have been improper for a stranger to give a valuable gift to a woman without her husband being present. She was surprised and stirred by Jesus knowing about her marital relationships (Jn. 4:16-19) and concluded that Jesus must be a prophet.
- ¹⁶*Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” ¹⁷The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You have well said... ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband...” ¹⁹“Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.” (Jn. 4:16-19)*
- J. Jesus highlights two requirements in worshipping or seeking God—in spirit and truth. We must worship and seek God on His terms, not according our traditions with wrong paradigms. God is spirit—not flesh—thus He is invisible and essentially unknowable without the aid of the Spirit.
- ²³*But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (Jn. 4:23-24)*
1. **Worship in spirit:** This includes worship flowing from a sincere heart, by the aid of the Spirit, and centered on God—its source and goals are spiritual.
 2. **Worship in truth:** This includes worship that is according to the **truth of who God is**—God is our Father and Jesus is our Bridegroom King. We approach a tender father differently than a harsh task master. It is worship according to the **truth of who we are in God**—we are sons of God and the bride of Christ and are clothed with the righteousness of Christ.
- K. Jesus referred to a proverb relating to harvest (Jn. 3:35). Four months was referred to as an approximate time between sowing and reaping. The sowing had taken place, and the harvest was to come. This proverb may have meant “there is no hurry” to work because one *still* had four months, but Jesus was saying that harvest time had come. The seed may be planted, and there is a certain time of waiting that cannot be rushed as the growth of a seed cannot be hurried. However, the disciples needed to have a sense of urgency.
- ³⁵*Do you not say, “There are still four months and then comes the harvest?...lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” (Jn. 4:35)*
- L. The Samaritan woman spoke of Jesus to others, and many in her city believed (Jn. 4:25-30, 39-42).
- ³⁹*And many of the Samaritans...believed in Him because of the word of the woman... ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of His own word.” (Jn. 4:39-41)*