
Day 296 - October 23

Jesus the Christ (5 BCE – 30 CE)

Jesus' Early Work in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee

Readings: *John 1:35-4:54; Luke 3:19-20*

Reflections:

Jesus' Early Work in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee

- Andrew and Simon Peter: We see here an example of how John the Baptist was pointing people towards Jesus. Only in the book of John do we see Jesus called the Lamb of God and only by John the Baptizer. This term would not make sense apart from John having prophetic insight that would transcend anything we might normally expect. John's biography is laden with a deep and rich theological understanding of the identity and mission of Jesus.
- The story of Andrew hearing Jesus and then going to get Peter to come follow Jesus as the Messiah is only found here in John. This apparently predates Jesus call to the two brothers to become members of his twelve disciples. This is a great example of someone going to invite a friend to introduce them to Jesus.
- John records Peter's name change very early on. The other gospel's place it later in the story when Peter openly declares Jesus is the Messiah. Did this happen twice or is John just including it here as a matter of how he organized the events in his mind. The name Peter means "rock" or "small rock".
- Philip and Nathanael: The story of Jesus with Philip and Nathanael is a fascinating account. Here in John Jesus is gathering more disciples to his movement. Philip declares that Jesus from Nazareth is the Messiah by saying Jesus is the one Moses and the prophets wrote about. Nathanael replies, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nazareth was a blue collar town and was at some level looked down on or ridiculed by other Israelites. This is another way that Jesus models humility and identification with the outcasts.
- Jesus gains instant credibility by prophetically telling Nathanael something about his life (sitting under a fig tree) that no one but God could know. For Nathanael, this confirms Jesus' identity and he again places the lofty terms of "son of God" and "king of Israel" on Jesus. Jesus responds with another fascinating statement: "I tell you the truth, you shall

see the heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of Man.” Here we Jesus use the term that will become his most common way of identifying himself in all of the biographies. The term “the son of man” comes from Daniel 7:13-14, “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” This term is one of the most explicit Messianic passage in the Old Testament and is captures the full range of his divine authority in harmony with his humanity. Also it indicates the vision and mission for reaching all nations of the world, not simply restoring the Jewish nation. Lastly, it points to an eternal kingdom that transcends simply a human, temporal kingdom. The statement that they will see the heaven open and angels would have brought to mind the vision of the angels coming to aid the Messiah in completing his mission. They anticipated that the armies of heaven would enable them to evict their enemies from the Promised Land. Yet, Jesus takes this idea of the angelic support and personalizes it to his own life. Possibly Jesus has in mind the angelic presence at this tomb and ultimate ascension.

- We should note that many commentators align Nathanael in John with Bartholomew in the other gospels. Bartholomew simply means “the son of Tolomai” and so we can assume he had a given name as well. In the list of disciples, Batholomew always follows Philip and so it would appear they were associated with each other. For these reasons commentators speculate that Nathanael in John is also Bartholomew in the other three biographies.
- Jesus Turns Water into Wine: The story of Jesus turning water into wine is rich with significance. Here are a number of key points to be aware of:
 - Bride or groom was likely a relative of Jesus since both he and Mary are directly involved. Cana is a very small village that virtually appears in no reference in Scripture or in secular literature;
 - Joseph is not mentioned and so again here is more indication he has passed away at this point;
 - The couple may have been poor since they ran out of wine;
 - The exchange between Mary and Jesus indicates Jesus’ transition into public ministry. He calls her “woman” rather than “mother” to indicate that this transition is happening even as she speaks;
 - Jesus intentionally desecrates the only religious icons at the wedding by creating a scandalous amount of the best wine. This single marriage reminds the reader that when God acts in grace, he is over the top. It also reminds us that the kingdom of Jesus is a party. Lastly, it reminds us that Jesus is completely

irreligious. Rather than using the empty wine bottles he does a miracle to stand against the religiosity of his own people.

- Merchants Driven from Temple: The cleansing of the temple at the beginning of John raises a number of questions. There are apparently three Passovers listed in John. Here and in John 6 and then again at the end of John with the death of Jesus. That would assume this first cleansing of the temple occurred in 30 A.D. Some scholars maintain that John's biography was first a compilation of sermons by John (based on how the stories were written with brief introductions and conclusions). In this case, the chronological order may not be as important as John never suggests that the story is told in strict chronological order. In this case, then this could be John's account of the temple being cleansed from the end of Jesus' ministry. This would make sense as it is a very close parallel and it references the discussion around the destruction of the temple and Jesus' death.
- This version of the temple cleansing does not emphasize Jesus cleaning the temple so that the nations would come to pray to God. Rather it is simply confrontation of the financial consumerism of the temple system and Jesus demonstrating his passion for God's house. This raises the question by the religious leaders of Jesus' authority to do this. This is again parallel to the other temple cleansing accounts. Here we see Jesus' reference to the destruction of the temple and rebuilding it in three days. Clearly this was a statement Jesus made regarding his death and resurrection as it is reported in both Matthew and Mark (Matthew 26:61; 27:40; Mark 14:58; 15:29).
- The Jews state that the construction of the temple had taken forty-six years to that point. That would suggest that the year was around 27 CE based on secular records of when the construction started. Forty-six years may simply be a general estimation or the people could have simply been wrong in what they knew at the time.
- This story ends with an important insight into Jesus. "...many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man." (John 2:12) Here we see evidence of Jesus' divinity as he knows what only God could know. We also see his wisdom in not simply being drawn to the popular support but rather knew that in time that people would turn against him. This is a word of wisdom for those who serve in leadership to be careful to whom you entrust your heart and ministry.
- Jesus Teaches Nicodemus: Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus is again rich with insight:
 - Jesus loves people and reaches out to even religious leaders. As we will see, even though Jesus is hated by the religious leaders, there are a few that are spiritually seeking and Jesus lovingly reaches out to them. Jesus himself will one day appear to another Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, to see his life transformed. This is a great example of enemy love.

- Jesus introduces the idea of being born again and the role of the Spirit completely and radically transforming our lives. We should note that being born again is not just about praying to be forgiven. It is about the Spirit giving our lives a whole new start and foundation as God changes us from the inside out. Within the prophecies of Israel were numerous announcements of the Spirit of God coming to radically transform God's people (see Joel 2:28-29; Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 11:18-20; 36:24-27). This vision of a complete new heart and mind fits well with the image of being born again and God giving people a whole new way of living. In Acts 2 we will see how powerfully the Spirit will transform the early disciples and give them a whole new source of life and power.
- Jesus also compares himself to the snake in the desert that is lifted up so that all people who look to him are forgiven and healed. This is very irreligious. First, all people have to do is look at Jesus. There is no rite or ritual. Second, Jesus is using an image that became a source of idolatry to Israel. Jesus uses the image irrespective of how it ultimately was viewed by Israel. Interestingly, Jesus on the cross (the crucifix) has probably become equally idolatrous to Christians as the bronze snake became to the Israelites.
- John now gives us some of the most theologically significant content about God's love for us in sending Jesus to us. Although most commentators put this text in quotations suggesting that Jesus himself said this. This may not be the case as there are no quotation marks in the Greek and so this is just a guess. Also, John often adds his own conclusions to passages and this would fit neatly as a sermon conclusion.
- We see here clear teaching about bringing everything into the light of God's truth. Truth and light were common ideas within First Century thought and discussion and remain throughout the early church as ways to understand living in the truth. In Ephesians Paul will write, "Everything exposed by the light becomes a light." As we allow God to have every aspect of our lives and give him the freedom to bring whatever he wants into the light, then we allow him to show those around us that he works in grace in our struggles and failures as well as in power through all of our weaknesses. God's love for us means we don't have to hide anything from him but can allow him to use us as he wants without fear of shame. Here we see that this teaching on God's love for us through Jesus removes all shame and fear. God's divine love undoes the impact of the Adam and Eve's sin. As we come into a fuller understanding of his grace for us as we live in the light of his presence with nothing to hide, this gives us confidence to bring our true selves, the good and the bad, into the light of Christ's community. God doesn't want us to live in the dark because there we live alone and in isolation. God desires us to experience a grace where all of us can truly be ourselves with other people, where sin is viewed as something very

small and God's grace is viewed as something very big. As we live in the light with God and with each other, then we are truly free. The key though is that God's truth and grace must always be at the center. Community can be a very damaging and unsafe experience if it is characterized by judgment, rejection and condemnation.

- Jesus and John Baptize: We see a brief reference in John to Jesus' disciples baptizing people apparently to gather more and more people to their movement. This sets up an exchange with John the Baptizer and a Jew about the importance of Jesus taking over John's anti-temple movement.
- John Testifies about Jesus: John uses the image of the bride and bridegroom. Jeremiah 33:11 is a passage that ties this image of the bride and bridegroom to the coming of the Messiah. John uses this image to describe himself as the attendant to the bridegroom. When the groom appears, the bride (the people) must go to the bridegroom. John declares this is why he is so full of joy. It is so freeing to remember that the church is the bride to Christ and those that serve the church are just attendants preparing that bride for her bridegroom. This perspective allows those serving in leadership to hold the church and the people we serve with open hands. We don't have to try to control the church but can just keep pointing them to Christ.
- There is a key insight here in John 3:30-36: "For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit." This is an important truth to grasp. We will see God give his Spirit to leaders ("sent ones" or "apostles") who then in turn speak God's heart out to people. This spoken "word of God" inspired by the Spirit is what wakens peoples' hearts to the truth and love of God. We as leaders have to be open to those times God wants to speak through us by his Spirit to help people really understand his heart for them. This promise of God giving the Spirit and sending his people to communicate his message is something that is for all those who would submit their lives to Christ. At any time God may call us to share his message or his words with others and in that moment, God's Spirit will work through us to powerfully communicate God's heart and thoughts.
- John is also clear that those who embrace Jesus receive God's gift of life. Those who reject Jesus are left outside of his mercy because they have actively rejected the one who offers grace. This warning is key in light of the religious leaders who were constantly questioning and challenging Jesus' identity and authority.
- Jesus Leaves for Galilee: The religious leaders apparently were becoming increasingly concerned about this growing movement aligning with Jesus. Those who see to control people are often obsessed with counting people. It is important to note that Jesus immediately delegated the authority to baptize to his disciples. We see in this a key insight. The Jesus movement expands through multiplication, not simple addition. Jesus

immediately wants to include his disciples in inviting more and more people into his mission and movement.

- Woman at the Well: John 4:4-26 again captures a scandalous story of Jesus' ministry:
 - First, Jesus reaches out to a complete outcast a Samaritan WOMAN!
 - He offers her living water. This was the water (see Ezekiel 47) that was supposed to flow from the temple and bring life to all of Israel. He was claiming to possess this water personally;
 - He declares that the person who receives this living water (work of the Spirit, no doubt) will become a spring of living water (a conduit of the Spirit flowing through her or his life);
 - Jesus again has a word of insight so that he knows details about the woman's life that he could not possibly have known. This reinforces that he knows all things about everyone;
 - She tries to test him about who is right in the religious battle between the Jews and the Samaritans. Jesus rejects all such externalizations and declares that in the new time to come, the time of the Messiah, God will be looking for people who worship in Spirit and in Truth. He rejects any attempt to religiously contain and control God and declares that it is through the Spirit and with a deep loyalty to truth that we find ourselves united to God and able to worship him the way he desires;
 - She connects what he is saying to the Messiah and he reveals to her that he is the Messiah. This is scandalous. Jesus hides his true identity from all of the religious leaders and even his disciples at this point but he gives this Samaritan woman the inside scoop about who he really is.
- Spiritual Food: The conversation changes from a focus on living water to a focus on the food of heaven. What is Jesus' food that he feeds his spirit on? Doing God's will. We are spiritually nourished as we live intimate, obedient lives with God. This idea will be more fully developed by the Apostle Paul as he teaches about the difference between controlling natural desires (called the flesh) and nourishing spiritual desires (the Spirit). Jesus uses this image of food as a launch pad to talk about the disciples becoming actively focused on reaching out to people. People are like grain that needs to be harvested for God's purposes. It is an interesting mix between eating bread (food=doing God's will) and wheat that is ready to harvest (grain=people who need to hear the message). Clearly in this text the Samaritan woman and probably all the Samaritan's in her town were considered by Jesus as wheat that was ready for harvest.
- Many Samaritans Converted: "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony." (John 4:39) The people of this town finally declare that Jesus is the Savior of the world. It is fascinating to see the contrast between the

religious leaders who reject Jesus and the outcasts who so quickly believe. Again we see how scandalous this good news is!

- Jesus Returns to Galilee: The scandal continues as Galileans welcome him. John notes how a prophet is not honored in his own hometown. Again this is an indictment against the religious leaders because throughout their history they rejected the prophets God sent. Jesus, the Messiah, again is welcomed by the most unlikely even as he is as rejected by the religious establishment. The religious leaders see what Jesus did and they reject him. Others, like Samaritans and Galileans, the outcasts and outsiders, see and believe.
- Boy in Capernaum Healed: John 4:46-54 is another rare mention of Cana. This story revolves around a royal official who has a sick boy, who asks Jesus and simply believes Jesus when Jesus says his boy will be healed. This story finds some parallels to the story of the Centurion in Matthew 8 and Luke 7. The key to this story is that an apparent enemy to the Jews has complete faith in Jesus. He simply takes Jesus at his word and as a result of his faith in Jesus his son is healed. Here is the challenge for us today: Do we take Jesus at his word or do we need continual signs and wonders to restore our faith? Do we just trust what Jesus has said? Here we see that faith is a heart condition (complete trust) that results in a life that lives in line with what God has said. The official returns home because of course his son has been healed.
- John the Baptist Imprisoned: Our final text is the brief note about John the Baptizer being imprisoned by Herod. John fearlessly confronted Herod and for this he is imprisoned. There is a high cost for serving God and his purposes. It may cost a person their life. Yet, from an eternal perspective, the reward far outweighs the cost.