

*Personal Encounters with Jesus  
In the Book of John*

Small Group Study Guide  
University Covenant Church  
October 2006

# Sources

NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
Frost	Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture, Michael Frost (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2006)
Milne	The Message of JOHN, Bruce Milne
Burge	Burge, Gary M. <u>The NIV Application Commentary: John</u> . Zondervan, 2000.

# Series Introduction

John's gospel works on two levels, as many scholars have pointed out. On the surface, the story is simple and easy to understand. It recounts the development of Jesus' three-year ministry and the events and meaning of his life. At the same time, the theological content is sophisticated and expertly crafted. Below the surface, John's symbolism and multiple meanings can take a lifetime to comprehend.

Therefore John really ought to be read and studied. We must become familiar with the narrative tale told with engaging stories and question-and-answer dialogue. We must also do a little digging: explore the imagery and theological symbols which convey important truths about Jesus' identity and also our responses to him.

However, no formal theological training is necessary to glean John the author's deepest message. He presents in three-dimensional human and divine clarity a picture of the "Word made flesh" (1:14), the One who embodies the active presence of God before the world began and now in our very midst. Here is "fullness of grace and truth." To know Jesus is to know God. Thus, every personal encounter we'll see in these passages extends an invitation to us: to be encountered by this same Son of God. "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31). Like the people of Samaria with whom the "woman at the well" shares her belief/disbelief ("Could this really be?"), our aim will be to "hear for ourselves and...know that this man really is the Savior of the world" (4:42). May his promised Counselor illumine all of UCC in its study "to teach you all things and ...remind you of everything [he has]said to you" (14:26).

To God be the glory!

This study was written by Jamie Crook, Matt Marzluft, Christy Caldwell, Matt Caldwell, Jennifer Kuhn, Garry Pearson, Dawn Wyatt, and Marilyn Roland.

# Contents

<b>Sermon Date #</b>	<b>Passage</b>	<b>Sermon Title</b>
Oct 1 <sup>st</sup> 01	John 1:1-18	Prologue – John the writer’s view
Oct 8 <sup>th</sup> 02	John 3:1-21	Born again conversation with Nicodemus
Oct 15 <sup>th</sup> 03	John 2:1-12	Wedding in Cana – Mary’s view
Oct 22 <sup>nd</sup> 04	John 4:1-26	Woman at the Well
Oct 29 <sup>th</sup> 05	John 5:1-15	Pool of Bethesda – Invalid’s view
Nov 5 <sup>th</sup> 06	John 9:1-41	Man born blind
Nov 12 <sup>th</sup> 07	John 11:1-44	Raising of Lazarus
Nov 19 <sup>th</sup> 08	John 12:1-11	Anointing of Jesus’ feet – Mary’s view

# Prologue

01

## Introduction

In the ancient church, the gospel of John was symbolized by an eagle. Perhaps one reason for this is the lofty elevations attained in the gospel of John. One can ascend such heights in these first 18 verses called “the prologue.” With skill and great imagination, John handles issues of profound meaning and mystery - divinity and humanity, pre-existence and incarnation, revelation and sacrifice.

In this Gospel, John provides clear evidence that Jesus is the Son of God and that by believing in him we may have eternal life. John also provides unique material about Jesus’ birth. He does not come into being when he is born, because he is eternal. As a child once asked his dad, “Was Jesus alive before he was born?” The answer is an amazing “Yes!”

## Read John 1:1-18

---

## Questions and Discussion

What is the relationship between the Word and God?

**The Word** was a term used by theologians and philosophers, both Jews and Greeks, in many different ways. In Hebrew Scripture, **the Word** was an agent of creation (Psalm 33:6). He/It was also the source of God’s message to his people through the prophets (Hosea 1:2), as well as God’s law, the standard of holiness (Psalm 119:11). In Greek philosophy, **the Word** was the principle of reason that governed the world, or the thought still in the mind. To the Hebrew, the Word was another expression for God.

**1:1-5ff** – Consider these various aspects of the “Word” as you read these verses. Through the other metaphors John uses, in what ways do the word’s various activities stand out to you? Why is John concerned to highlight the contrast in vv. 6-8?

**1:9-13** – What sadness and hope do you see in the situation described?

*1:11 – “There can be no more poignant expression of human folly and perversity than Israel’s rejection of Christ. In spite of all the centuries of waiting for their promised Messiah, when at last he appeared they not only dismissed his claim but instigated his destruction. It is a tragedy which brought tears to the eyes of Jesus (Lk. 13:14; 19:41) and to Paul “unceasing anguish in my heart” (Rom. 9:2)...**The continuing widespread rejection of Christ and our generation is a daily witness to the universal rebellion against the living God and each of us is involved.**” (Bruce Milne, emphasis added)*

Think of an example from your week showing this wide-spread rejection of Christ. How did you respond? Can you discern any hope?

**1:14** – Here is one of the centerpiece verses of the gospel of John.

*Note: John’s language reflects the events of the exodus from Egypt, and the revelation of God at Mt. Sinai and in the tabernacle in the wilderness; happenings which dominated the faith of Israel from that day to the present. As God ‘lived among’ his people then, so the Word has come to live among us (14) now; literally ‘pitched his tent among us’. (cross reference Exodus 33: 7-11 and 40:34-38) The word for dwell and tent are from the same Hebrew word which commonly refers to the revealed glory of God.*

How can you say “God has made his dwelling” with you? (Are there various ways to think about this for different believers?)

Consider the moral implications of this verse. How would Jesus, full of Grace and truth, treat others?

Where have you seen Jesus full of grace? Where have you seen Jesus full of truth?

What does this passage say about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ?

How do you think the reality that God became a man affects our life today?

All who welcome Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives are reborn spiritually, receiving new life from God. Through faith in Christ, this new birth changes us from the inside out—rearranging our attitudes, desires, and motives. Being born makes you physically alive and places you in your parents' family (John 1:13). Being born of God makes you spiritually alive and puts you in God's family (John 1:12). Have you asked Christ to make you a new person? This fresh start in life is available to all who believe in Christ.

### ***Sermon Notes***

---

# *Nicodemus' Encounter with Jesus* 02

## **Introduction**

In this passage, Jesus challenges Nicodemus' and our preconceptions about God. First, he challenges Nicodemus' understanding of how a person enters the kingdom of God. Then Jesus challenges the understanding of the Messiah and God's ultimate purposes. Throughout the entire conversation, Jesus makes us examine the basic condition of our spiritual life.

## **Read John 3:1-21**

---

## **Questions & Discussion**

**3:1-4** – Read the initial interaction between Nicodemus and Jesus. Why do you think Nicodemus goes to talk with Jesus? What do you think was his primary motivation?

Jesus' reply to Nicodemus (v. 3) might seem entirely disconnected from Nicodemus' initial statement (v. 2). What about the Pharisee mindset or spiritual condition do you think might have lead Jesus to launch into a conversation about new birth?

How would you describe Nicodemus' response? Do you think he was genuinely confused? skeptical? cynical? Has anyone ever challenged one of your deeply held beliefs? How did you respond?

**3:5-8** – In these verses, Jesus elaborates on this idea of new birth and distinguishes “being born of water and Spirit.” Some commentators believe that “being born of water” is likely to refer to natural birth, as compared to a spiritual birth (being born anew or from above).

Why do you think this distinction was so important for Jesus to communicate? How did it challenge Nicodemus' preconceptions about “kingdom of God” realities? Why do you think Jesus uses the wind to illustrate spiritual birth?

**3:9-14** – In verse 3:14, Jesus references and compares Moses' lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness with the Son of Man being lifted up. This refers to Numbers 21:4-9:

*4 From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. 5 And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." 6 Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 7 And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. 8 And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." 9 So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.*

What are the many symbols and meanings that Jesus is alluding to here?

**3:16-18** – As a summary statement of salvation these verses present some striking statements about it. What is salvation? And what is it not? How can God be said to love a world turned against him (John 1:11)? What strikes you as most radical about verse 3:16?

Read John 8:2-11. This passage describes another encounter of the Pharisees with Jesus. Compare the message of verse 3:17 with this later passage.

**3:19-21** – Nicodemus had come to talk with Jesus "by night" (v. 2). Knowing this, what do you think Nicodemus' reaction might have been to verses 3:19-21? In your own words, describe what you think it means to "come to the light?"

After having received such instruction, how do you think Nicodemus' prayer life might have changed?

### ***Background Notes***

---

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and the Pharisees were one of the most important and influential religious groups during the time of Jesus. Perhaps most importantly, the Pharisees were strict and zealous adherents to the laws of the Old Testament. Jesus and John the Baptist often criticized the Pharisees for being hypocrites. Nicodemus also was a member of the Sanhedrin, which was the highest legal, legislative, and judicial body among the Jews.

### ***Sermon Notes***

---

# The Wedding at Cana

03

## Introduction

More than just an interesting report of a wedding miracle, the passage invites us to reexamine how we anticipate God's transforming presence, if at all. It's so easy to pretend that God inhabits the holy and transcendent to the exclusion of our daily lives. In this passage, Jesus shatters the illusion that there is a split between the sacred and secular realms of life. The One "who became flesh and made His dwelling among us...full of grace and truth" (John 1:14) can be expected to "show up" in the ordinary, even exalt himself there. No wonder witnesses to the wedding at Cana call it a "sign" where Jesus "revealed his glory." We desperately need to sense "God-with-us" and glory in the here and now, for ourselves and for a world unacquainted with the tremendous story of the One in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Here indeed is One who takes our default expectations of monotony, despair, and death and injects his radiant Life.

## Read John 2:1-12

---

## Questions & Discussion

Remember, as with many events in the book of John, there is a literal level and a figurative level to be kept in view simultaneously. Both levels invite scrutiny and discovery.

Jesus attends a wedding with his mother and the disciples. As this passage opens, share about the different expectations these people may have brought to the event. Conjecture about who has brought whom. Why do you think the disciples are there?

**2:1ff** – Look at the interaction between Mary and Jesus. What is the issue with the wine? Why is Mary so concerned? What is her possible aim(s)? How does Jesus meet Mary's expectations of him in a surprising way?

At the figurative level, what does Jesus mean by "his hour" (2:4, also 7:30, 8:20, 13:1, 17:1) on this "third day" (2:1)? What tone do you hear in the way Jesus addresses his mother? Why is there a stern quality?

Wine is no neutral beverage to a Jew in Jesus' day or in this passage. Consider this:

*“We can reasonably assume that a Galilean wedding was a rough-and-ready affair. Like many Middle Eastern weddings, it could go on for up to eight days, and it included an orgy of eating and drinking and wild celebration. In that culture, a father prepared for his daughter’s wedding on the day she was born. Each year, when he was fermenting his family’s barrels of table wine, he would draw out an extra barrel for his young daughter’s wedding day and keep it aside. Since girls often were married as young as fifteen or sixteen, most diligent fathers would have cellared around fifteen or sixteen barrels of wine, some now superbly aged. At a daughter’s wedding banquet it was customary to bring out the wine in order of maturity so that the best wine was served first. The new wine was brought out much later, by which time everyone probably was too inebriated to notice the difference.” (Frost, 44).*

Imagine the social problem for the host if one was to run out of wine at a wedding. What is it?

2:6-10 – A miracle is described. What stands out to you about the process, who has the most intimate awareness of what takes place, and what conclusions are drawn?

What greater meaning might wine have to the characters in this event beyond their social context? Read Hosea 14:7 and Jeremiah 31:12. What does it mean when water for “ceremonial washing” turns into the fruit of the Hebrew vineyard? (Don’t forget the figurative meaning. What deeper lesson is Jesus communicating?)

*As Raymond Brown puts it, “All previous religious institutions, customs, and feast lose their meaning in his presence.”*

**Reflection:** What religious expectations about God have you lived with in your life and how has the presence of the real Jesus pushed them aside and remolded your thinking about God?

At a basic level the Son of God *attends a secular wedding and is actively engaged in it*. He saves a host from embarrassment. He amazes the wine steward. He shows those behind the scenes, the servants, the incredible transformation of wash water to wine. “And his disciples put their faith in him.” At different levels, what is God up to here?

How do you respond to the following?

*“The table at Cana reminds us that Jesus is as much interested in our social embarrassment as our infected bodies or our empty stomachs. The miracle is a perfect one to begin with, really. It shatters the age-old partition between the sacred and the profane. It sacralizes the everyday wonder of being part of a community that celebrates and eats and drinks together. It includes hardworking, nonreligious “sinners” in the circle of God’s care and protection.”*

**Reflection:** What secret hopes/desires/interior longings do you have (or someone you know) for meeting God in the “hardwork, nonreligious” part of your (his/her) life? May someone offer that as a prayer for you (him/her)

### Notes:

---

At the deepest level, the wedding miracle is a “sign” of Christ’s “glory”—that is, his life, death, resurrection and ascension that bring life to the believer in community. It can be assumed that as is the case with the “sign” preceding 2:22, it is post-resurrection reflection on this event that leads disciples to saving belief as they encounter God’s risen life, the “wine” of his “extravagant abundance” (M. A. Thompson, Fuller class notes) in the community of sharing life in the Spirit of Christ.

# Woman at the Well

04

## Introduction

This famous conversation on a hot, dusty side of the road starts off rough and then meanders through many twists and turns: for one thing, Jesus is not “supposed” to be talking to this woman! Next, the woman clearly misunderstands the nature of Jesus’ “living water.” An uncomfortable moment follows when Jesus seems to pry into her “private life” by mentioning her husband. So she changes the subject and another tangent results. Still, Jesus teaches this woman, and thereby us, the proper way to share the truth about him: balancing grace and truth. The Samaritan woman is offered living water (grace), taught about worship (truth), and meets her long sought-after Savior.

## Read John 4:1-26

---

## Questions & Discussion

*4:1ff – This conversation takes place at Jacob’s well. Consider other examples of important Biblical wells: Abraham’s servant meets Rebekah in Genesis 24, Moses meets the daughters of Jethro in Exodus 2:15-16.*

*This Samaritan woman was at the community gathering place during the middle of the day to avoid conversation with other women. Her reputation of having had 5 husbands made her the talk of the town.*

Consider how the other Samaritan women were acting. Why were they being exclusive? What people do you not associate with? Why? Do you have stereotypes of people?

*The rift between Jews and Samaritans was deep. The Samaritans were “half-Jews” who remained in Israel during the Assyrian exile (2 Kings 17:23) and inter-married with the Babylonians. They only accepted the Pentateuch (first five books of the Old Testament) as scripture. Because they hadn’t read the prophets, and weren’t expecting the Messiah, when this woman called Jesus a “prophet”, she wasn’t making a Messianic statement. Samaritans didn’t worship in Jerusalem, they built their own temple on Mount Gerizim (near Sychar), but this was burned down by the Jews in 128BC.*

Think of how this Samaritan woman must have felt when Jesus spoke to her. How do you respond when someone speaks to you unexpectedly? Surprised? Scared?

What is your initial response to the Samaritan woman? Do you chastise her for her loose lifestyle or sympathize with her loneliness? Who do you know who might feel like the Samaritan woman, and how could you start treating them differently?

At UCC, are there individuals like the Samaritan woman? We have people in our midst who come from all walks of life...how do we engage with these people?

**4:10ff** – The first topic of this conversation is “living water”.

*Jews (and Samaritans) understood living water to be water that was flowing from a stream and therefore ceremonially clean. Water is required for our earthly life, and so living water symbolizes the requirements of knowing Christ for eternal life. Read Jeremiah 2:13.*

What do you learn about living water from this passage?

**4:13** – Jesus offers living water and says “the water I give him will become in a person a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” Note that Jesus says “will become” and not “is”. Salvation is a gift that comes instantly, but it also initiates a life-long process of spiritual growth. What part of your spiritual life is growing right now? What parts are stunted? If you are meeting now with others, take a few moments to write down your responses and share them with your small group.

**4:16** – Jesus demonstrates divine knowledge by stating the many husbands this woman has had. Most people’s would be uncomfortable to such a deep probing question, so why didn’t the woman give up on this conversation when Jesus told her, “Go, call your husband and come back”?

- a. She was intrigued by Jesus’ willingness to talk
- b. She realized she had nothing to hide
- c. What Jesus offered appealed to her
- d. He treated her with respect
- e. She knew he spoke the truth and that he could help her
- f. She didn’t want to lose the chance to get her questions answered

How would you have responded?

**4:19** – Rather than doing as Jesus asks, she asks about the proper place to worship. She may have felt that a theological discussion would be less personal and more comfortable. Jesus’ response is one of the few examples where Jesus sides with the tradition of Judaism.

*The Samaritans had lost much of the rich traditions in Jewish worship by ignoring the Old Testament books of prophecy and wisdom.*

What parts of Christian tradition do you cherish? Does University Covenant Church do a good job of incorporating these Christian traditions into our services? Could your worship be more complete by incorporating more of these traditions?

**4:23** – “A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” Worshipping in truth requires knowing the truth. This woman needed knowledge. What is true worship?

The Holy Spirit changes our worship, He is required for worship. Something important happened at the cross that changed those dynamics forever.

**Reflection:** The conversation contained in this chapter can be used as a model for evangelism. How does Jesus personalize the conversation to make the salvation message more palatable for this woman? What other types of conversation might be necessary for someone to see their need for Christ (see vs. 17)?

### *Sermon Notes*

---

# Pool of Bethesda

05

## Introduction

In John chapter five we encounter the story of Jesus healing a paralytic man at the Pool of Bethesda. This event begins what some commentators call the “festival cycle” (chapters 5-11)<sup>1</sup>, so titled because in these chapters John describes the Jewish festival in which the story takes place. Festivals were extremely important to Jewish life, as they captured and transmitted the history of God’s people, and Jesus’ deliberate appearance and specific actions during these festivals is meant to build on the understanding of this vital history. For example, looking ahead to chapter six, when Jesus performs the sign of feeding five thousand men and then speaks of himself as the Bread of Life, John tells us this takes place during the Jewish feast of Passover which recalls the works of Moses and the manna God provided the Israelites in the desert.

## Read John 5:1-15

---

## Questions & Discussion

Read John 5:1-16 a few times over, and in different translations if you like. See the story for what it is, the healing of man by a merciful Savior, but then also look beyond and read between the lines for the symbolism and allusion. Write down some quick thoughts in the space below. Do observations or questions come to mind?

**5:1** – Working within the festival cycle structure, we come to verse 5:1 and find that John mentions that Jesus is attending a festival in Jerusalem, yet leaves it unnamed (possibly Passover though). So what do we make of this?

*A plausible explanation can be found in verse 9 and by looking at Leviticus 23 which lists the festivals the Israelites are to keep. First among this list is the Festival of Sabbath – the only weekly festival God gives. In some respects Sabbath is the most important festival in structuring the Jewish life and setting the tone of the annual festivals.*

That this story begins John’s festival cycle is therefore intentional on multiple levels, can you think of some reasons why?

---

<sup>1</sup> Sabbath (ch.5), Passover (ch.6), Tabernacles (ch.7-8), Hakkah (ch.10)

In our own lives, how does setting Sabbath (Sunday for us) apart result in comparable blessings?

*Jesus had a true “Sabbath understanding” of the all festivals – “that they were made by God to bring good gifts to his people, not to legislate and control behavior”.<sup>2</sup> It would be naïve to say that Jesus was unaware of the day of the week as he went to the Pool of Bethesda; that he went there at all, knowing the porticoes would be lined with the sick, seems intentional. Jesus’ action of healing on the Sabbath (he also healed the Blind man in chapter nine on a Sabbath) created instant conflict with the religious establishment, so much so that they plotted to kill him. He was being both purposeful and compassionate.*

Consider how the words Jesus spoke concerning the Blind Man in 9:3 might apply here as well: “[he was born blind] that the works of God might be displayed in him.” How do you respond when you realize that Jesus knew that this “work of God” in healing the paralytic would begin the controversy leading to his death, and yet he did it intentionally? (i.e. Romans 5:8)

**5:6** – What does Jesus mean by his seemingly obvious question, “Do you want to be healed?” Think about your life and what it means to ask forgiveness for sins, to admit to being “sick” and needing salvation. Do we really want to be healed or do we enjoy only playing with ‘mud pies’? (CS Lewis) Why might we feel some ambivalence?

The man’s answer to Jesus question seems self-pitying and depressed. Those who endure pain and suffering for long periods may become dependent on the feelings of pity and helplessness, giving up their will and avoiding responsibility. John tells us this man had been “weak” (the literal meaning of the text) for 38 years.<sup>3</sup> But Jesus ignored his pity (and ignored the superstition surrounding the pool) and provided even the will to be healed. Can you apply this to your own life circumstances now or in the past?

---

<sup>2</sup> (Burge) Sabbath was no longer the day of rest which God intended, but rather a further burden as illustrated by the 39 categories of things outlined by Jewish oral law as prohibited!

<sup>3</sup> Possibly an allusion to the Israelites wandering in the desert for 38 years as well.

When you feel stuck or tired with your place in life, how can you remain open to God's call to something new, to reinvigoration, to "be healed" by Him?

In the first part of verse 6 it says that "Jesus saw him lying there and *knew* he had been there a long time...". How might Jesus have known this? Could Jesus have seen him there for many years during his visits to the festivals? And when the time came to work signs and miracles, as a witness to his being God's Son, it appears Jesus sought him out for healing; a man who was alone and with no friends left to help him. Is it comforting to know that Jesus knows your circumstances, or does this sometimes lead you to question God and ask why He is 'allowing' something?

Consider that this man waited a long time before he was healed, not even knowing he would be. Consider also that many other people at the pool were not healed. What of them? Does God not care? Can you provide an answer to the problem of evil and suffering and death, for yourself and for those with whom you would share your faith, that is not glib and cliché? Can your understanding allow for feelings of anger and frustration without leading to a loss of faith in a good and righteous and loving God? Share some thoughts with your group so that you can share with others when the time comes.

## **Background**

---

The remnants of the Pool of Bethesda, with its five covered porches, was discovered during a renovation of the Church of St. Anne inside the northeast corner of the Old City of Jerusalem.

Also, note that verse four which may or may not be in your Bible's text, is not included in the best old manuscripts and is believed by scholars to be an addition to the text in an attempt to explain the man's response in verse seven. Stories of places of healing and superstition were not uncommon in antiquity, and once a site was identified the tradition was impossible to stop.

## **Sermon Notes**

---

# Man Born Blind

06

## Introduction

This story begins with an interesting question brought by the disciples to Jesus. As they pass by a blind beggar on the roadside, the disciples ask Jesus about the man's condition, and what caused it. The way they put it is, "who sinned, this man or his parents?" This seems like an odd way to put it, but it does get to the heart of the question, and of a greater question as well - was his blindness the fault of genetics, or of his own bad choices, or something else?

Further, this man who remains nameless throughout the passage is healed. The healing and its aftermath become an occasion for understanding our own spiritual eyesight, namely how we "see" Jesus "the Light of the world" and how with our sight, though limited, we witness to this Light amidst life's confusing challenges.

## Read John 9:1-41

---

## Questions & Discussion

What physical, emotional or spiritual misfortune in your life has turned into an opportunity for God to demonstrate his power?

**9:1-12** What idea lies behind the disciples question in the first verse—curiosity, a trap, compassion, etc?

*The disciples assumed that sin (regardless of who committed it) was the cause of the man's blindness. This was a common belief in Judaism; the rabbis used Ezek 18:20 to prove there was no death without sin, and Ps 89:33 to prove there was no punishment without guilt. Thus in this case the sin must have been on the part of the man's parents, or during his own prenatal existence. One later rabbinic work stated that when a pregnant woman worshiped in a heathen temple the unborn child also committed idolatry. This is only one example of how, to some rabbis of Jesus' day, an unborn child was capable of sinning. (from the Net Bible Project, <http://www.bible.org/netbible/>).*

How does Jesus respond to their question and what does he reveal about how sin and suffering are related? (See also John 5:14)?

What would the experience be like for you if Jesus put the paste on your eyes and now you could see.....What is the miracle in this part of the passage?

What strikes you about the interchange with the neighbors and those who have known the man?

Have you ever found yourself in a faith situation more complex than you understand or can explain? What has helped you get through it?

**9: 13-34** As the questioning of the man continues, describe some of the details. Put yourself in his shoes and say what you think he might be experiencing as he encounters the different responses to his new condition.

Why does he hold up the way he does? What might be especially encouraging to any follower of Christ about the man's comments in vv. 30-33?

Who has been one of the toughest people to you to explain your faith to?

What have you found to be helpful in dealing with people who ridicule your faith? If you are a believer, what was it like when you were a new/younger Christian? If you are not a believer, is there anything that resonates with you in any part of the man's experience in "seeing"/understanding the Light of Jesus?

How would you measure your spiritual vision

- 20/20
- 20/200
- Far Sighted
- Legally Blind
- A few Blind Spots

Explain your answer

**9: 39** Reflect on this passage: Jesus then said, “I came into the world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretense of seeing will be exposed as blind.” - The Message

Back in 9:5 Jesus designates himself as “the Light of the world.”

*Jesus’ statement I am the light of the world connects the present account with 8:12. Here (seen more clearly than at 8:12) it is obvious what the author sees as the significance of Jesus’ statement. “Light” is not a metaphysical definition of the person of Jesus but a description of his effect on the world, forcing everyone in the world to ‘choose up sides’ for or against him (cf. 3:19-21) (from the Net Bible Project, <http://www.bible.org/netbible/>).*

Though our physical conditions at birth are neither our fault or God’s, our subsequent choices throughout life—how we “choose up sides”--can help determine the state of our spiritual well-being. What are practical ways we can choose to be on Christ’s side and thus “see”?

Collectively our choices make a difference as well. How can we choose to reach out to others and help them to make choices to see? Who is someone you know who may need this help?

---

Here is a fun exercise, a fifteen/twenty-minute small group excursion. Partner with someone who takes you on a trust walk. You are the sight-impaired person trying to navigate around this world. What is this experience like? Talk about this together as you walk and then “switch” persons. What is the experience like for the “blind” person and for the sighted-person leading?

Be creative: what lessons about faith did you experience?

# Raising of Lazarus

07

## Introduction

In many ways this passage records one of the most profoundly human interactions with Jesus in any of the gospel accounts. We get glimpses of his love for his friends, his empathy, his reaction to grief, etc. We also see his steely determination to seek the “glory” to and from his Father in heaven—and that leads to misunderstanding (“Could...[Jesus] not kept this man from dying?” 11:37). But to confront the darkness in which we walk and probably take for granted until it becomes unbearable, Jesus stretches his followers’ trust and puts his life in peril at the same time. Ultimately his “glory” will lead to a fuller, more deeply human existence for all those who trust and enter into situations of death and resurrection in following him.

## Read John 11:1-44

---

## Questions & Discussion

**11:1-5** What is Lazarus’ condition and what effect is it having on those around him? How are we readers of these early verses touched by the scene? Can we relate?

What did Jesus say is the purpose of Lazarus’ illness?

*“So that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” These statements are highly ironic: For Lazarus, the sickness did not end in his death, because he was restored to life. But for Jesus himself, the miraculous sign he performed led to his own death, because it confirmed the authorities in their plan to kill Jesus (11:47-53). In the Gospel of John, Jesus’ death is consistently portrayed as his ‘glorification’ through which he accomplishes his return to the Father (from the Net Bible Project, <http://www.bible.org/netbible/>).*

How do you think the disciples understand Jesus’ “glory?” Is this a new idea for you? (What do we typically associate with “glory?” and how is this different?)

**11:4** – Any trial a believer faces can ultimately bring glory to God (in the sense of praising God in situations we don’t understand) because God can bring good out of any bad situation (Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28). Can you think of a time when this has been true for you? When trouble comes, what natural responses do we give? How can we begin to see your problems as opportunities to honor him?

**11:5-16** –How would you expect vs. 6 to read after the affirmation of Jesus' love in vs. 5? What does Jesus decide to do? Does the explanation in 9-10 help you?

*What is the "world's light" in v. 9? On one level, of course, it refers to the sun, but the reader of John's Gospel would recall 8:12 and understand Jesus' symbolic reference to himself as the light of the world. There is only a limited time left (Are there not twelve hours in a day?) until the Light will be withdrawn (until Jesus returns to the Father) and the one who walks around in the dark will trip and fall (compare the departure of Judas by night in 13:30) (from the Net Bible Project, <http://www.bible.org/netbible/>).*

How is the way in which Jesus postponed His response to the sister's request help you in understanding your own prayer life? When do you tend to second guess God?

Have you ever attended a funeral where there was no sense of eternal life? How did you go away from that experience? What difference does this hope make for you?

Does sickness in your life or the life of another always bring someone to God? What are some of the issues at stake whether God can be found in the midst of grief?

**11:25-26** – Jesus has power over life and death as well as power to forgive sins. This is because he is the Creator of life (see John 14:6). He who is life can surely restore life. Whoever believes in Christ has a spiritual life that death cannot conquer or diminish in any way. When we realize his power and how wonderful his offer to us really is, how can we help but commit our lives to him! To those of us who believe, what wonderful assurance and certainty we have: "Because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19).

*"Jesus' remarkable reply, I am the resurrection and the life, is a culmination of the unfolding revelation in the preceding chapters. Jesus has been revealed as the giver of life, in a number of ways. Materially, he gives life to water, making it wine. Spiritually, he offers the new spiritual life of the kingdom of God to Nicodemus, and the life which springs up within a person satisfying all thirst, to the woman of Samaria. Physically, he imparts life to a dying boy, a long-standing physical paralytic, and a man born blind. He is the good shepherd who has come to give life 'to the full' (10:10) (Milne).*

Think about Martha and Jesus' interaction in vv. 17-27. What is happening inside of her? What convictions win out? How can you particularly affirm that "Jesus is the resurrection and the life" in your own life context?

*11:27 Martha is best known for being too busy to sit down and talk with Jesus (Luke 10:38-42). But here we see her as a woman of deep faith. Her statement of faith is exactly the response that Jesus wants from us.*

**11:33-38** John stresses that we have a God who cares.

*This portrait contrasts with the Greek concept of God that was popular in that day—a God with no emotions and no messy involvement with humans. Here we see many of Jesus' emotions—compassion, indignation, sorrow, even frustration. He often expressed deep emotion, and we must never be afraid to reveal our true feelings to him. He understands them, for he experienced them. Be honest, and don't try to hide anything from your Savior. He cares.*

How is God asking you to trust in his love? Are there any old "grave clothes" that you need to shed?

One last thought:

*"Despite the massive propaganda to the contrary, our Lord's purpose for us is not to make us happy, but to make us holy. He loves us too much to leave us part-saved, part-remade, part-sanctified. He wills our holiness, and since 'suffering produces...' (Rom. 5:3), we may expect him in his love for us to allow things in our lives which, in our self-centered pursuit of happiness, we ourselves would exclude. Yet even in the shadow of his love there is always mercy. Our sorrows are shared by him; he comes to us in our pain. The end of it all is not only his glory, which needs no further justifying, but also our good. 'There is no joy like the joy of holiness' (R. Murray McCheyne)."*

Simply respond to this statement and pray for one another.

# Anointing of Jesus' Feet 07

## Introduction

During his last trip to Bethany, Jesus stunned onlookers when he raised a man from the dead. The miracle caused many to put their faith in Him (Jn 11:45), but it angered some of the Pharisees so intensely that they began plotting to kill Him. (v53). Because of this, Jesus withdrew from public life (v54). When Jesus didn't come to Jerusalem for ceremonial cleansing before Passover, people wondered whether the controversial Teacher would avoid the Feast, knowing that his life was in danger (v57). Jesus *did* return to Jerusalem, but on the eve of his triumphal entry (Jn 12:12) He stopped in Bethany to attend a party with some old friends.

## Read John 12:1-11

---

## Questions & Discussion

Look at verses 1 and 2 – What do you think the atmosphere was like at this party? How might Martha be feeling? Lazarus? Jesus? The disciples?

Now read verse 3 – Now, what do you think the atmosphere was like at the party? Although the passage doesn't describe it, how might Martha have reacted to Mary's behavior? What about Lazarus?

Mary's behavior is surprising on several levels:

It was scandalous – Jewish women did not unveil and let down their hair in public. In all accounts Mary appears to be an upstanding, respected member of her community, so this disregard for propriety would have been shocking.

It was Intimate – she not only *displayed* her hair, but she *touched* Jesus with it. This would have come across as extremely improper and even somewhat erotic.

Aside from “scandalous” what other attributes can you see in Mary's choice to unveil herself?

Aside from “improper” or “erotic” what other attributes can you see in Mary as she wipes Jesus’ feet with her hair?

*This is not the first time a woman has anointed Jesus in this manner. In Luke 7:36-50 a sinful woman, weeps at Jesus’ feet, wipes her tears away with her hair, and then anoints His feet with perfumed oil. This woman did so because she was overwhelmed with her sin and the forgiveness Jesus offers.*

Why do you think Mary anointed Jesus?

In verses 4 and 5 Judas objects, not to the impropriety of Mary’s display, but to the extravagance. The half a litre of pure nard is worth a year’s wages for a day laborer – at minimum wage this would be \$12,360.

Judas had his ideas about how the money should be spent. What do you think Mary might have used that money for, if she hadn’t bought the oil? What personal things might she have given up to purchase the Naard?

Now look at verses 7 and 8 – How does Jesus respond to Mary’s exuberant display of devotion? Why do you think he responds as he does?

*There is no reason to think that Mary knew the complete importance of her actions, but Jesus saw them in reference to his coming death (v7). Perhaps she’d bought the oil for Lazarus’ burial, but used them on Jesus instead. Interestingly enough, Jesus body never did get anointed at his burial because when the women came to do it, he’d already risen. (Mark 16:1-8)*

Jesus’ statement about the poor in verse 8 must be taken in context within Judaism. He is alluding to the Scripture “There will always be poor people in the land” (Deut 15:11). And God makes it very clear to His people throughout Scripture that He cares deeply about the poor and the oppressed. He is their defender and brings justice to them. Nevertheless, Jesus is making a statement about priorities. Read the following passages:

Luke 9:59-62

Matt 10:37

Luke 10:38-42

What are the priorities Jesus is emphasizing?

What things distract you from attending first to Jesus?

Mary worships Jesus in a manner that is deeply intimate and sacrificially (perhaps even foolishly) extravagant, and she does not care that others find it shocking or lacking in propriety.

What do you think of when you hear the word “worship?”

How can you engage in “scandalous” worship? What might be your alabaster jar of pure nard – something sacrificially extravagant that you could “wastefully” pour out in worship? In what way can you “wipe Jesus’ feet with your hair” – become vulnerable and humble and more intimate with him?

## ***Sermon Notes***

---