

A SERIES OF FOUR STUDIES IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

PART 3 - WHY SHOULD HE BOTHER?

The Gospel of John uses 3 key words to teach us about Jesus Christ. We have so far studied two of them, light and life.

God sent Jesus Christ 'The Word' into the world to cast light upon it to give meaning to our lives. He gave us a series of miracles, signposts to the greatest miracle of all, His death and resurrection. In the light of Christ we begin to see where we are going in life.

But we need more than direction to our lives. We need also to know into whose care we have entrusted our lives and by what power we can go in the direction He leads us. The 'I am's' of John's Gospel are a series of illustrations drawn from the Old Testament which explain what Jesus Christ is really like and what He promises to do for us if we will let Him. He gives us a marvellous example of life and at the same time promises to be our life as He lives in us.

In this third study we will explore the third key word, love. Love sums up His character, what He is like and His promises towards us. In English we use the word love to describe friendship, parental love and romantic love. In the Greek language all these ideas had separate words, but there was yet another word to describe the love of God. It is about this word that John has so much to tell us. All human loves seek something in return whether from friend, parent or husband or wife. The love of God is about how God gives, and gives expecting nothing in return. As His creatures we have nothing to give. All He desires is that we should receive His love and pass it on to others.

Undoubtedly the best way to understand the love of God is to see how Jesus dealt with people, people like us who needed loving.

Nicodemus, (3:1) was a religious leader who thought that the way to please God was to keep His rules. Yet he obviously felt dissatisfied inside and knew there had to be something more. He had been very impressed with what he had heard of Jesus. Perhaps He had the answer? He came to visit Jesus (3:2) but he came at night presumably because he was afraid of being seen and laughed at.

3:2

Q.1 What had impressed Nicodemus about Jesus? What conclusions had he come to as to who Jesus really was? How do people today become sure Jesus is someone special and should be searched for?

3:3,4

Q.2 What did Jesus say was the answer to Nicodemus' search for peace with God? How did Nicodemus have trouble understanding this?

3:5-7

Q.3 How is spiritual birth similar to physical birth? What should be the cause of each kind of birth and what is the result of each?

3:8

Q.4 What picture did Jesus use here to describe the Holy Spirit? What can we learn from this picture about the Holy Spirit? Why is it a mistake to try to tell God how to work in our lives?

3:9-12

Q.5 Why was Nicodemus not really a good teacher of the Bible? What do we have to do to be able to teach others about Jesus Christ and eternal life?

3:13-15

Q.6 What Old Testament story was Jesus referring back to in verse 14? (Numbers 21) How is it similar to Jesus' death on the cross? The Son of Man is a title often used in the Old Testament for the Christ. What do we have to do to benefit from His death on the cross?

3:16-21

Q.7 What was God's motive for sending His son Jesus Christ into the world? What is the result of us believing or refusing to believe in Jesus Christ? Why do some people refuse the love of God?

Q.8 Of all the people in the Gospel of John whom Jesus met with, Nicodemus seems like the one who least needed God's help. He was religious, respected, successful and probably wealthy. Why do you suppose that God used him in this gospel as the first example of someone who needed His love? What did Nicodemus do about the message he heard and saw lived out in action? (John 7:50; 19:38-42)

Samaria was a small country sandwiched between the two Jewish provinces of Galilee in the north and Judea in the south. It was inhabited by people of mixed race who had changed the Jewish faith to favour themselves. Consequently the Jews and the Samaritans hated each other and would go to great lengths to avoid one another. For example the normal route from Judea to Galilee went well to the east to bypass Samaria. In John chapter 4 Jesus again showed the love of God, this time to someone who humanly speaking was just about the opposite of Nicodemus.

4:7-18

Q.9 How was the person Jesus met in John 4 so different from Nicodemus? And how were the circumstances of their meeting so different?

4:4-8

Q.10 How was the love of God necessary to bring about the meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman? The normal time for drawing water from a well would be early morning and evening when it was not too hot. Why do you suppose this woman came at the sixth hour, which was midday?

4:7-10

Q.11 In that culture men would not be allowed to talk to women in public. (4:27) Why does Jesus go against custom? Should we as Christians sometimes do the same? When and why?

4:10-14

Q.12 Jesus asked the woman to give Him water but then explained that God wanted to give her something. What was it? How did Jesus' request for water explain God's gift to us and its effect upon our lives? Again how does His illustration show the love of God?

4:13-18

Q.13 Patiently Jesus explained what He meant by living water. She wanted what He was offering without fully understanding. Why did He tell her that before He could give her the living water of eternal life she must go and get her husband? What was her home situation? How did He know about it? How does He know about us? How does the fact that He bothered with such a woman show the love of God?

4:19-26

Q.14 When the conversation got embarrassing, she tried to change the subject to religion and prophecy about the future. How does Jesus deal with these questions? How will God's love show in us when we seek to deal with other people's tricky questions?

4:27-38

Q.15 What surprised the disciples when they returned from the city with food? How does Jesus explain why He had behaved differently from what they expected.

4:28-30, 39-42

Q.16 The woman left her water pot behind because she planned to return shortly and hurried into the city. What did she tell the men there that impressed them so much? What did they do about what they heard? How does this illustrate what will happen when we testify of God's love towards us?

In John chapter 8 Jesus met another woman who had been immoral. She was dragged before Him while He was teaching in the temple by the religious leaders to try to embarrass Him in front of the crowd. They hoped He would contradict the Old Testament. In the Old Testament law the punishment for adultery was to stone to death both the man and the woman.

8:3

Q.17 Why do you suppose only the woman was brought to Jesus? What does this tell us about the real motive of those who brought her? How do we meet the same attitude today?

8:6

Q.18 At first Jesus made no answer to their question. Why does He sometimes not answer us at once? Why did He give them time to reconsider their demand for her death? (I Corinthians 13:4)

8:7-9

Q.19 What was His eventual answer? How was it different from what they had expected? What effect did it have upon these men? Why did the older men leave first? Was Jesus against the Old Testament teaching on what should be done about adultery? How does His answer show the love of God?

8:11

Q.20 How did Jesus deal with the woman's adultery? And how does He deal with our sin?

The scene moves in John chapter 12 to a small village 7 kilometres from Jerusalem, to the home of a family of two sisters, Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. As a family they had a special friendship with Jesus. He was always welcome in their home. (Luke 10:39-42) He had performed an amazing miracle, one of those special signposts, for them. (John 11:43,44) This was probably their last time together with Jesus and his disciples, only six days before the Passover when He was crucified. (12:1) They were sharing a meal with Him. In their culture sharing a meal was the closest way to show friendship.

12:3

Q.21 What did Mary do? Why did she do it? Where may she have got the idea from? (Luke 7:37-39)

Q.22 Nard was a perfumed ointment extracted from a root grown in India. By the time it reached Israel it was very expensive. 300 denarii was almost a year's wages for an ordinary person. Do you think Mary was rich? Why do you think that? Does God mean Christians to be rich? (I Timothy 6:6-10)

Q.23 Both sisters had reason to be grateful to Jesus. Why do you suppose it was Mary rather than Martha who did this? (Luke 10:38-42) How can we learn how much Jesus loves us? As we do discover, what does He want us to do about it?

12:4

Q.24 What was Judas' criticism of Mary's action? Wasn't it a sensible suggestion? After all Jesus had told another rich man to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor. (Luke 18:22) How do we show the same attitude as Judas at times?

Q.25 Matthew 26:6-13 happened just 4 days later. (Matthew 26:2) How had Mary's action influenced another woman? How had Judas' criticism affected others? What does this tell us about the effect of our response to the love of God?

John chapter 13-16 was set in the upstairs room of a house in Jerusalem lent by its owner for the evening (Matthew 26:17-19), but which became the base for Jesus' followers for the next few weeks. (Acts 1:13) The occasion was the night before the Passover, the annual feast at which a lamb was sacrificed by each family to remind them of the way they had been saved from slavery 1400 years before. (Exodus chapter 12) Jesus wanted to share the evening with His friends knowing that He would be crucified the following day, that He would be the lamb of God (John 1:29), the one who would be sacrificed on the cross in our place for our sin. Having loved His disciples for the past three years, Jesus was about to show them that He loved them to the end of His life on earth. (John 13:1)

13:2-20

Q.26 What was the first practical way in which Jesus showed His love to His followers that evening? Why could Peter not cope with the idea? Why do we also struggle to receive love or to give it? How does Jesus want us to follow His example?

13:21-38

Q.27 What was the second way He showed His love to two different people? Why was it even harder than the first way? How according to verses 34 & 35 will people be able to recognise real Christians?

14:23,24

Q.28 How are we to express our love for Christ? What does He promise to do at the same time? How will this make us capable of loving Him and one another?

15:1-17

Q.29 Extending the same idea, how did Jesus now explain the secret of loving as He does? What picture did He use to illustrate the idea? What according to verse 13 is the greatest example of God's kind of love? How do we know Jesus loves us? (John 19) Are we really to show our love by dying for one another? Give ordinary everyday examples of how we might love family and friends.

On the cross Jesus continued to show His love at a time when we would have thought He would be totally taken up with coping with His own pain.

19:26,27; 21:15-17

Q.30 Who was 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'? (John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7,20) Why did he describe himself in this way? How did Jesus show His love for this disciple and His mother in chapter 19? How in chapter 21 was Peter asked to show his love for Jesus? How can we also show our love for others in similar ways to both these stories?

Write down in your private notebook or diary all the ways you realise Jesus has shown His love for you. Review and add to what you have written in one month, three months, twelve months. You will never run out of new discoveries about His love!