

JOHN 3:22 - 5:47

JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST 3:22-4:3

More than in any of the other gospels, John's gospel addresses the relationship of Jesus and John the Baptist. At some point they must have appeared to many to be offering competing ministries of baptism and teaching. But when asked, John the Baptist makes it very clear that: 1) he is not the Messiah, and 2) he must decrease while Jesus must increase. He (John) like any other human being is from below whereas Jesus is from above. Jesus is the one who not only baptizes with water but also bestows the Holy Spirit.

Through this discourse, John continues to be an important witness to Jesus' glory as God's Word made flesh.

JESUS AND THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA 4:3-4:42

Jesus passes through Samaria on his way back to Galilee. Samaritans and Jews had old rivalries and hatreds. Jews considered Samaritans as half-breeds and therefore impure in their Jewishness. This rivalry also extended itself into worship and faith. Both groups had different sacred places of worship, different temples and different readings of the Old Testament. Who was right? Centuries had not resolved the conflict.

For a Jew to pass through Samaritan territory was an invitation for abuse, ridicule and perhaps even worse: harm. But Jesus not only goes to the city square of Sychar, but he also addresses a woman who has come to draw water from a well-known well. At first, it is Jesus who is interrogated (How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?) But Jesus turns the tables on her by offering her 'living water.' She doesn't quite understand what Jesus means, but then he also tells her something painful about her past and present, namely, the state of her personal life. At this point, she recognizes Jesus' prophetic abilities.

But then, they move to issues of the spirit. Who is right, Jews or Samaritans? Even though Jesus speaks as a Jew and recognizes the purer roots of the Jewish faith, he points to a time and a state of being when true worshippers will transcend their old rivalries. To worship God in spirit and in truth is to go past the kind of hatred and division that has separated Jews and Samaritans for far too long.

The woman's response is to go and tell others, and this results in many Samaritans responding affirmatively to Jesus as 'the Saviour of the world.' Consider how radical this story is. A Samaritan, who is a woman, who lives in a morally questionable situation with a morally questionable past, becomes a powerful witness to Jesus' identity as messiah, and a whole chapter in the gospel is devoted to her.

JESUS HEALS AND OFFICIAL'S SON 4:46-54

The importance of this healing is that it is identified as the 2nd sign that Jesus did, and it was done when he was once again in Cana of Galilee. While John the Baptist and the Woman of Samaria have been living witnesses to Jesus as the One, the miracles serve as signs of the same truth: Jesus' healings point to his identity as the beloved of God authorized and sent to speak and act for God to save the world.

JESUS HEALS ON THE SABBATH 5: 1-18

What is significant in this passage is not only that Jesus heals on the Sabbath, but that he asserts things about himself that are 'scandalous.' The question here is not whether Jesus heals the paralytic. Everyone present, including the religious authorities who oppose him, witness it. Rather, the question is: what is he saying about himself? Jesus has authority over every law, including the sacred Sabbath law. By breaking the Sabbath in order to heal the man, Jesus was making himself out to be equal to God, for he was above the law and could make exceptions for the law.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE SON 5:19-29

In this passage Jesus speaks about himself in relation to the Father and in relation to the world. 1) Jesus is subordinate to the Father in the sense that he follows the Father's will which becomes his own mission and ministry. 2) At the same time, Jesus is equal to the Father because he is the mouthpiece, the 'Word' of God to the world, and therefore has absolute authority to represent God in the flesh. 3) All judgement has been given to Jesus, which means, the power to decide over life, death and eternity. 4) Finally, he has the power to raise the dead as he himself will be raised by the Father (his Abba God).

WITNESSES TO JESUS 5:30-47

In response to the opposition by 'the Jews', Jesus says 3 things.

- 1) The Son is sent from the Father, and thus his work is directly related to the Father's work and receives its authority and power from God.
- 2) The Son has received the authority to execute judgement.
- 3) There is ample testimony to who Jesus is, and the failure to acknowledge that reality is not a failure of information but a spiritual failure.

1) and 2) have been mentioned above, but 3) is important as well. Jesus refers to the testimony of John, to his own signs or 'works' which he (Jesus) performs, and finally to the scriptures and the testimony of Moses pointing to the fulfilment of a messiah sent by God, a messiah which Jesus claims to be. Unbelief here is not because of a lack of evidence, but because of a hardness of heart, an inner refusal and resistance. To believe in Christ is to open our heart to change, to transformation, to let go things and take up other things, committed with faith and hope in the healing and transforming power of love. It's not easy to choose this way. We need to be born from above, for the Holy Spirit to act in us. Next week: 6:1 – 8:30