

A photograph of a person's hand reaching down towards a stone on a sandy beach. The person is wearing a red garment and sandals. The background is a bright, sandy beach with some footprints and a shadow.

A SINNER MEETS *the* SAVIOUR

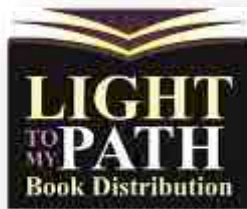
*Encounters with Jesus in the
Gospel of John*

F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

A Sinner Meets the Saviour

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PREFACE

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full,” Jesus said in John 10:10. Men and women flocked to Jesus to hear Him preach. Jesus touched their lives during His brief stay on earth. He touched the rich and the poor, the sinner and the religious person, the sick and the healthy. His great desire was that they have an abundant and full life.

Many years have passed since Jesus rose from the dead. People all around the world are still meeting Him today. Countless lives have been changed.

The purpose of this study, is to examine a variety of encounters between Jesus and ordinary people as recorded for us in the Gospel of John. It is my desire that the reader will gain a new appreciation of what it means to meet and follow after the Lord Jesus. May this book serve as a means of introducing many to this great Saviour.

F. Wayne Mac Leod

1

The Apostle John

When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat preparing their nets. Without delay he called them and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him. (Mark 1:19-20)

Before we begin this series of reflections on the Gospel of John it may be helpful to learn something about the author. The author of the Gospel of John was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. He was a fisherman by trade (Mark 1:19-20). John would develop a very close relationship to Jesus. In fact on several occasions he was referred to as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (see John 13:23; 19:26; 21:7). He was among the few apostles to see the resurrection of Jairus' daughter from the dead (Mark 5:37). He was with Jesus on the mountain when he saw Jesus gloriously transfigured (Mark 9:2). He was also in the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus before His crucifixion (Mark 14:33). When Jesus was on the cross, He gave John the responsibility of caring for Mary His mother (John 19:27). After the ascension of Jesus, John became a co-worker with the apostle Peter in spreading the gospel. It was also to this beloved disciple that the risen Jesus revealed the future. John is the author of the book of Revelation. He also wrote the first, second and third epistles of John.

What did it mean for this man to meet the Saviour? When John met the Lord Jesus he was in a fishing boat. Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee when He saw John fishing. Jesus called out to him. The Bible tells us that when John heard the call of Jesus to follow, he did two things.

First, John responded immediately. Jesus expected nothing less of him that day. Later in His ministry Jesus called another man to follow Him. That man responded by saying: "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." (Matthew 8:21). "Jesus," he was saying, "I'm willing to follow you but you caught me at a bad time. I've got a few things to attend to and then I'll come and follow you." Jesus told that man: "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead." (Matthew 8:22).

When Jesus calls, He expects us to respond immediately. How often have men and women put off their decision to follow Jesus until later only to find out that later never came. In Luke 12:16-20 Jesus told a story about a rich man who put off a decision because his business was booming. He decided he would first build larger barns to store his wealth and then lay back and take it easy. He would have time to make things right later. Jesus called him a fool because that very night he would die. He would die before he could enjoy his wealth. More importantly, however, he would die without making himself right with God.

The writer of Hebrews pleads with his readers in Hebrews 3:15: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." None of us are guaranteed tomorrow. When the Lord knocks at the door of your heart, don't put Him off. Open your heart immediately. Now

is the only time you know you have. When Jesus called, John responded immediately.

Second, when Jesus called, John left everything behind (Mark 1:20). John did not run home to pack his bags. He did not drag his net behind him as he followed after Jesus. John dropped everything. He left his job and he left his family.

Notice that Jesus does not offer any apologies to John for making him leave everything. No apology was necessary. Jesus was offering him something of far greater value than John already had. You do not apologize for delivering a slave from a cruel master. You do not apologize for delivering a poor man from his poverty. You do not apologize for taking a fisherman and making him a fisher of men.

John responded immediately, and he dropped everything he had to follow after Jesus. What does Jesus expect from us? He expects that when He calls, we will not delay in responding to that call. He expects that we will not put Him off until later. He expects that we drop everything to follow Him. He makes no apologies for this for He offers us something of far greater value. Will you come to Him under these conditions?

For Consideration:

- What things keep you from making an immediate decision for the Lord Jesus?
- Are there any things in your life that you would have problem leaving to follow the Lord Jesus?

- Can anything be considered a sacrifice if we receive far more by giving it up than keeping it?
- What do you gain by following Jesus? What do you really lose?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to deal with any obstacles that keep you from following Jesus today.
- Thank the Lord that He promises to give you far more than you could ever give up for Him.
- Ask the Lord to give you a heart that will follow Him like John.

2

JOHN THE BAPTIST

There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. (John 1:6-7)

The first person we meet in the gospel of John is John the Baptist (see John 1:6-9). John's father was a priest by the name of Zechariah. Zechariah's wife, Elizabeth could not have children. This was a source of much pain for Zechariah. He pleaded with the Lord for a child. One day, as he was exercising his priestly duties, an angel of the Lord appeared to him with an important message.

But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. (Luke 1:13)

Shortly after these events, Elizabeth conceived. When she was six months into her pregnancy, Mary the mother of Jesus, who was herself pregnant with our Lord, went to visit her. The Bible tells us that when Elizabeth heard the

greeting of Mary, the child (John), leapt for joy in her womb. What a strange encounter this was.

The Bible does not tell us anything about John's childhood. We do know that when he was old enough, he went to live in the desert. In those days there were religious groups who chose to live in the desert away from the polluting influence of common society. They spent their time cultivating their relationship with God. It is possible that John joined one of these groups. If this is the case, we see that, even as a young man, John was aware of a call of God on his life. He chose not to find a secular job like the rest of his friends. He gave his whole life to the pursuit of God.

While the apostle John met the Saviour as an adult, John the Baptist met him as a child. There are many important decisions made during childhood. We ought never to underestimate a child's understanding of spiritual matters. A person does not have to wait until he or she is older to meet the Lord Jesus. John is an example of a young child who dedicated his life to Christ.

The example of John the Baptist clearly shows us that, even as a child, he understood enough to commit his heart and life to the Lord. How beautiful it is to see a child give his or her life to the Lord. So many of us wait until we are older and thus throw away 20, 30, 40, or more years of life lived for ourselves.

Jesus began his ministry at the age of thirty. He died just a few years later. John the Baptist was the same age as our Lord. It was during the ministry of Christ that Herod beheaded John. John the Baptist likely died at the age of 32 or 33. John could not have waited until he was 35 or 40 to give his life to the Lord. John accepted the Lord as a

child and lived the few years he had for the glory of his God.

What did it mean for John the Baptist to meet the Saviour? It meant giving Him his entire life. It was not a long life but it was lived for the Lord. How about you? How many years are left? Why not give what remains to the Lord?

For Consideration:

- How old do you think a person needs to be to come to an understanding of salvation?
- How many years did it take for you to come to know the Lord Jesus?
- Why is it important for us to accept the Lord at an early age? How many years are we really guaranteed?
- Do you know the Lord as your Saviour today? Have you been living your life for His glory?

For Prayer:

- Thank that Lord that even children can be saved from their sin and have a relationship with the Saviour?
- Ask the Lord to help you to use the time that remains for His glory.
- Take a moment to pray for the children you have contact with today. Ask God to reveal Himself to them so that they can know Him as their Saviour.
- Ask God to forgive us for making salvation so complicated. Thank Him for the simplicity of childlike trust in God for salvation.

3

THE DISCIPLES OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God." When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. (John 1:35-39)

We have seen what it meant for John the Baptist to meet the Saviour. John had a group of disciples who followed him and assisted him in his ministry. On one occasion, John saw the Lord Jesus passing by and said to his disciples: "Look, the Lamb of God" (John 1:36). When the disciples heard this they left John to follow the Lord (John 1:37).

Later, in John 3, we read that some of John's disciples came to him with what they perceived to be a real problem:

They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan-the one you testified about--well, he is baptizing, and every-one is going to him.

These disciples were not sure how to handle the fact that people were leaving their little group to follow Jesus. They saw Jesus as a threat. Both Jesus and John were baptizing and preaching but people were flocking to Jesus. John's popularity was being overshadowed. John had no problem with this. "He must become greater; I must become less," John told his disciples (John 3:30). John's disciples, however, did not see things in this light. They were comfortable in their little group and resented anything that would threaten to break them apart.

Many years later in Ephesus, we meet another group of John's disciples. Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed (Acts 19:2). John's disciples replied: "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit" (Acts 19:2). These disciples were missing a very important Christian teaching. Their understanding of the Christian life was inadequate. Paul taught them about the ministry of the Holy Spirit and that day these twelve disciples were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and became His followers too.

What did it mean for the disciples of John to meet the Saviour? It meant that they had to be willing to leave their little group. John was a good and respected man of God. He was a good preacher of the Word. His disciple's understanding of the truth, however, was limited.

If John's disciples were to grow in their relationship with God, they would need to associate with the disciples of Christ. For some this meant leaving their group to join another. They came to realize that their spiritual walk was more important than their little group.

Maybe you have been part of a church for many years and have never grown in your personal relationship with God. Maybe you have not grown in your understanding of the teaching of the Word of God. When the disciples of John met the Saviour, they realized that they needed to join with those who were more closely following Him. There they could be encouraged and grow in the truth of the Word of God. Those who remained, many years later still had not grown in their understanding of the key truths of the faith.

When we meet the Saviour, we too will need to examine whether we are part of a fellowship that correctly preaches and teaches the Word of God. Our relationship with God and our growth in Him is of utmost importance. John's disciples were so hungry for Christ and the truth of His Word that they were willing even to leave their own fellowship to find a place where they could learn more and grow in their faith.

For Consideration:

- Is your church preaching the truth? Has it been an encouragement to you in your growth in Christ?
- How important is it to you that you grow in your relationship with God? What stands in the way of your spiritual growth today?

- What would you be willing to do today to grow in your relationship with God and your understanding of the truth of His Word?

For Prayer:

- If your church has been an encouragement to your spiritual growth, take a moment to thank the Lord for its members and leaders.
- If you are not part of a church that has been helping you to grow spiritually, ask the Lord to bring people into your life that will encourage you and teach you in the ways of Christ.

ANDREW AND PHILIP

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter). The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nazareth! Can anything good come from there? Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip.

One of John the Baptist's disciples was a man by the name of Andrew. When John introduced him to Jesus, Andrew left John to follow Christ (John 1:40). Andrew's brother was Simon Peter. Both were simple fishermen.

After leaving John the Baptist, Andrew spent time speaking with the Lord. If there were any doubts about Jesus when he first left his former teacher, there were none after having met and spoken with Jesus. Andrew believed with all his heart that Jesus was the Messiah that was to come.

What did it mean for Andrew to meet that Saviour? The Bible tells us that Andrew went to find his brother Simon Peter. He wanted to tell him what he had found. We read in John 1:41: "The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him: 'We have found the Messiah.'" Andrew had just made the greatest discovery of his life. He had found the Saviour of the world. What is the most natural thing in the world to do when you make an important discovery? Do you not want to share it with others? Andrew went to his own brother first. The hardest people to speak to about the Lord are often the members of our family. When Andrew met the Saviour, he felt compelled to go to his own family and share his discovery with them.

The next day Jesus met another man by the name of Philip (John 1:43). We know very little about Philip. When Philip met Jesus, his reaction was very similar to that of Andrew. He went and found a friend to tell about his meeting with Jesus. Philip found Nathanael and said to him:

We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. (John 1:45)

Both of these men responded in a similar way. They felt compelled to share their discovery with their friends and loved ones. When you meet the Saviour you too will have a desire to share your faith in him with others. Like a young person who meets the love of his or her life, you want to talk about the Lord to your friends and loved ones. It is

hard not to talk to others about your new-found relationship with the Lord. You invite them to come and meet your Saviour. You bubble over with excitement and enthusiasm for the one you love.

Andrew and Philip did what was only natural for them to do. They shared their discovery with their loved ones. When you meet the Saviour, you too will have a natural desire in your heart to share Him with others.

For Consideration:

- Do you know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour today? Do you have a desire to talk about Him with others?
- What do you suppose keeps us from sharing the wonderful news of our Saviour with others?
- Consider what we have examined in this meditation about Andrew and Philip. Was their relationship with Jesus merely an intellectual one? How do you account for the excitement they seem to have in their heart about Jesus? Do you have this excitement?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you a greater desire to share Him with others.
- Ask the Lord to give you a real excitement in your heart about the Lord Jesus and what He has done for you.

5

NATHANAEL

Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel. (John 1:45-49)

We saw in the last meditation that when Philip met the Lord, he went to Nathanael with the good news. Nathanael's initial response left much to be desired. He said: "can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46).

Nathanael had his opinions about Nazareth and the people who came from such a town. In his mind, there was nothing good about Nazareth or anyone who lived there. When Philip came to him and told him about Jesus of

Nazareth, Nathanael was very sceptical. Philip encouraged him, however, to come to see for himself.

As Nathanael went to meet Jesus, he had already judged Him. Maybe you are like Nathanael. You have heard about these people who follow Jesus. They are always going to church meetings. They are sometimes fanatical about their faith. They go around telling others about Jesus. They read their Bibles all the time. Like Nathanael, you are sceptical about associating with this kind of person.

In spite of his prejudices, Nathanael went with Philip to meet the Lord Jesus. When Jesus saw him coming He said to him: "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false" (John 1:47) It is unclear what Jesus was saying to Nathanael, but his words show us that He knew all about him.

Nathanael was taken back by such a direct approach. "How do you know me?" he asked Jesus in John 1:48. Jesus' response shattered Nathanael: "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you," Jesus told him.

Humanly speaking, it was impossible for Jesus to have known that Nathanael was under that fig tree. Here before Nathanael was a man who knew the deepest thoughts of his heart. We are not sure what Nathanael was doing under that fig tree, but Jesus knew. Nathanael's prejudices were shattered. He cried out: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel" (John 1:49). Those simple words from Jesus to Nathanael that day convinced him forever that Jesus was the Son of God and the divine King of Israel, the Messiah. Nathanael left Jesus a changed man. He came as an unbeliever. He left as a believer.

What did it mean for Nathanael to meet the Saviour? It meant a shattering of his prejudices and preconceived ideas. It meant joining up with the man of Nazareth (the town he hated). Nathanael had been wrong about Jesus. Meeting Jesus that day he had to admit his error. He embraced the man of Nazareth.

Maybe you are in the position of Nathanael. You have your own ideas about Jesus and what it means to follow Him. Could it be that those ideas are false? Nathanael's ideas were shattered when he accepted the invitation to come and meet Jesus for himself. May you have the courage of Nathanael to approach the "man of Nazareth" and meet him for yourself.

For Consideration:

- What impressions have Christians given you about what it means to follow Jesus?
- Have you ever been "turned off" by a believer in Jesus Christ? Explain.
- Are Christians always a true reflection of Christ and His character?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that while His followers have not always been good examples of His character, He remains faithful and good.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be a Christian that reflects well His character to others.

- Ask the Lord to strip away any prejudices or pre-conceived notions you have. Ask Him to reveal Himself clearly and personally to you.

6

THE MONEY CHANGERS

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle, he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" (John 2:13-16)

For the Jew, the Passover was a very important festival. It commemorated the day when the angel of the death "passed over" the land of Egypt. On that day, the angel killed the first-born child in every home. Only the homes that had the blood of a lamb painted on the door posts were saved from this terrible judgment of God. The Passover was a day when Jews came to Jerusalem from faraway places. There in Jerusalem they would offer sacrifices of thanksgiving to their God.

The long journey was hard on the animals. Many chose to leave their animals at home and buy what they needed for

their sacrifices when they arrived in Jerusalem. They came with currency from many different countries. This currency needed to be exchanged into local currency to purchase their animals for sacrifice.

It was here that the money changers came into the picture. They offered a valuable service to Jews coming with foreign money. The problem was that the money changers often took advantage of their brothers and sisters. The exchange of money became big business. The animal sellers got into the act as well. The temple area was filled with merchants, sheep and cattle.

Jesus arrived at the temple that day and looked over the scene before Him. This was the temple of the Lord God. The occasion was a solemn celebration in honour of the God who had delivered His people from Egypt. The more Jesus looked at the scene, the angrier He became. He saw a marketplace not a temple. He saw people whose intent was to make money at the expense of their brothers and sisters. He saw the cheating and the fraud. Passover had lost its meaning. It had turned into a day for making money. All this was being done in the name of His heavenly Father.

Nowhere else in the gospels do we see Jesus respond with such anger. That day, Jesus made a whip from cords He found in the temple. With His whip in hand, Jesus drove the money changers and the animals out of the temple shouting: "Get out of here! How dare you turn My Father's house into a market!" (John 2:16).

What did it mean for the money changers to meet the Saviour? When they met the Saviour, they came face to face with one who exposed their hypocrisy and evil ways. They fell under His judgment. They were a religious people

offering a service to their brothers, but Jesus saw beyond their outward actions to the inward attitude of their heart.

I dare say there are church goers today in the same situation as these money changers. Maybe they are elders or deacons in their local church. Maybe they sing in the choir. Maybe they teach Sunday school or work with the youth. They serve the Lord but are not right with Him. In all of Scripture never was the Lord as angry as when he met those who claimed to serve God but in reality, lived for themselves.

The encounter of Jesus with the money changers was not a pleasant one. Jesus was not fooled by their religious exterior. There is nothing we can hide from the Lord Jesus. For the money changers, meeting Jesus meant coming under His judgment. It meant exposing their hidden intentions and motives. Meeting the Lord Jesus is not something to take lightly. When we come to Him we must be ready for Him to expose whatever brings dishonour to His Father. Will you come to Him under these conditions?

For Consideration:

- Did the money changers and sellers of animals perform a necessary service for Jews coming from a great distance? Why was Jesus angry with them?
- Is it possible for us to serve in a church and not be in a right relationship with God? What does it mean to be in a good relationship with God?
- What can we really hide from the Lord?

- Take a moment to examine your relationship with the Lord today? Does it consist merely of external rituals or does it come sincerely from the heart?
- What is hypocrisy? Why does hypocrisy displease God?
- Are you ready personally for the Lord to expose anything in you that brings dishonour to His name?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to examine your inner motives in serving Him. Ask Him to expose anything that does not bring honour to His name.
- Thank the Lord that while He is a God who is angered by hypocrisy and sin, He is still a God of compassion and grace toward those who come to Him in sincerity.

7

NICODEMUS

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.” In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” (John 3:1-3)

In John 3 we meet a man by the name of Nicodemus. He was a Pharisee. As a Pharisee, he was a religious person. He carefully observed the Law of Moses. Few people in Israel lived up to the high standards of the Pharisees.

We learn something else about Nicodemus. In John 3:2 he says to Jesus:

“Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

What he had seen Jesus do proved to Nicodemus that Jesus exercised His ministry in the power of God and under His authority. Nicodemus believed that Jesus was from God.

There is one more thing we need to say about Nicodemus. Notice that he came to Jesus at night. The Pharisees did not like Jesus because He exposed their hypocrisy. Nicodemus however, despite what his fellow Pharisees said, came to Jesus to learn more. He appeared to be a man who was searching for a deeper understanding of the truth Jesus taught.

What more could we ask for in a man of God? Here was a man who lived a good life. He was a careful observer of the Law of God. He believed Jesus was from God. This was clear from the works he had seen Jesus do. Finally, he was willing to listen to Jesus and had a hunger for the truth He taught.

When Nicodemus approached Jesus in John 3, however, the first thing Jesus said to him was this: "I tell you the truth; no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3).

Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was telling him. Jesus was telling him however that all his good works and careful observation of the Law of God was not enough to get him to heaven? He did well to believe that Jesus was from God but even that would not get him into heaven. Unless he was born again Nicodemus would never see the kingdom of heaven.

Nicodemus had never heard this teaching before. He asked Jesus what He meant. Jesus told him that no one could enter heaven unless they experienced a spiritual

birth. We come into this physical world by means of a physical birth. Jesus was teaching Nicodemus that he would have to experience a spiritual birth to enter heaven.

For spiritual birth to take place the Spirit of God must come to live in our lives. This is only possible through the forgiveness of sins. The Lord Jesus forgives our sin by paying our debt on the cross. This opens the doors for His Spirit to come to live in our lives. When God's Spirit comes, He gives us a whole new life. Those who know the presence of the Spirit of God are changed. The apostle Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Nicodemus knew nothing about this spiritual birth or the life of God's Spirit in him.

What did it mean for Nicodemus to meet that Saviour? It meant coming to grips with the fact that, if he was going to get to heaven, it would not be on the basis of his good life and beliefs. If he was going to see the kingdom of God, he needed to be born spiritually into the family of God.

Have you experienced this new birth? This is an important question. "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3.3). Be careful how you answer this question. Those who have been born again are new people. This is not something they can do for themselves. You did not have anything to do with your physical birth nor can you be born again spiritually by your own efforts. It is a work of God as He comes to dwell in our lives.

Nicodemus was a good man but he would not see the kingdom of God. God reserves his kingdom for His children only. No one else will enter His kingdom. You do not become a child of God by your physical birth. You do not become a child of God by trying to make yourself acceptable in His sight. You become a child of God through a miraculous and gracious work of God who reaches down to us and plants His life in us.

What did it mean for Nicodemus to meet the Saviour? It meant coming face to face with the fact that salvation had nothing to do with his own efforts and beliefs. It meant facing the reality that unless a miracle of God took place in him, he would never see the kingdom of God. It meant facing the reality that salvation was not about what he did for God but about what God did for him.

For Consideration:

- Why is it so difficult for us to accept the fact that salvation is not about what we do for God but about what He does in us?
- What views are there in our day about how we can get to heaven? What does Jesus tell Nicodemus here is the only way to get to heaven?
- What does it mean to be born again? Can you be a good living person, believe in Jesus and still not be born again?
- How can a person know if they are born again? What evidence should there be in our lives?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you today in what or in whom you are trusting for your salvation.
- Put aside all confidence in your good works and beliefs and call out to the Lord God to save you.
- Ask the Lord Jesus to forgive and cleanse you from your sin and place His Spirit in you. Ask Him to make you his child.
- If you know Him today, take a moment to thank the Lord for the evidence of His life in you.

8

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." (John 4:4-10)

In John 4, Jesus met a woman at a well in Samaria. The Samaritans were enemies of the Jews. So great was the hatred between these two nations that the Jews refused to pass through their territory.

Jesus chose to pass through Samaria on His way to Galilee. Being weary, he rested by a well. The disciples went

into the village to buy food. As Jesus rested, a woman came to the well to draw water. We discover four things about her in this passage.

First, this woman was a Samaritan. The average Jew would have walked away when he saw a Samaritan approach. Jesus stayed by the well.

Second, she was a woman. Note the reaction of the disciples when they return from the village:

Just then the disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking to her. (John 4:27)

The average Jew would not have been alone with a woman in this situation. The disciples are surprised to see Jesus sitting by the well speaking with her.

Third, we understand in John 4.18, that this woman had five husbands and the man she was living with was not her husband. Despite her lifestyle, Jesus still took time to speak to her.

We learn finally that the Samaritan woman was somewhat argumentative. When she discovered that Jesus was a prophet, she tried to engage him in a religious debate. She brought up an issue that had long time been debated between the Jew and the Samaritan concerning the proper place to worship. Jesus is not distracted by her argumentative spirit.

We do not know why the Samaritan woman had so many husbands. Was it because they all died? The chances of

all five dying are very slim. Did they divorce her? Was it because of her loose living or her argumentative spirit that they left her? The Bible does not give us the answers to these questions. We see before us, however, a woman with problems. Did Jesus felt compelled to come to Samaria to bring comfort to her troubled soul?

Here was a woman the average Jew would have avoided at all costs. Her life left much to be desired. What did it mean for the Samaritan woman to meet the Saviour? It meant that she found acceptance. She had been cast aside by many people. She had gone through five husbands. The Jews rejected her. In this man Jesus, however, she was accepted.

This woman was so touched by this encounter with Jesus that she ran into town to speak to her friends. "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did," she said. "Could this be the Christ?" People from all over the town came to meet Jesus that day. Many believed and accepted Him because of what the woman had told them.

The Samaritan woman at the well was in many ways an outcast. She had problems with men and problems with the Jews. She was not proud of her life. She was surprised that Jesus would even speak to her. Maybe you can identify with this woman. You may not be proud of your past either. You may have been let down and rejected by many people. This woman found acceptance in Jesus. Jesus looked beyond her sins and her situation and invited her to drink of the living water that would satisfy the deep longing of her soul. She found in Him everything her heart had been longing for. Jesus will do the same for you today.

For Consideration:

- What do we know about the Samaritan woman Jesus met that day? Are there people comparable to this in your society?
- Do we have to be good to be accepted by the Lord?
- Have you found acceptance in the Lord Jesus? Have you accepted those around you who are “unlovely” and “unacceptable”?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He reaches out and accepts us just as we are.
- Ask the Lord to open your heart more to those around you who are outcasts in our society.
- Ask the Lord to help you to show love and compassion to people like this woman in your society.

9

THE NOBLEMAN

Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine, and there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe." The royal official said, "Sir come down before my child dies," Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. (John 4: 46-51)

After His time in Samaria, Jesus went on to Galilee. In Cana of Galilee, He met a nobleman. This nobleman had heard about the miracles of Jesus. He had a son who was on his deathbed. When he heard that Jesus was in Galilee, the nobleman asked Jesus to come to his place and heal his son.

Maybe in his mind's eye he had an image of Jesus standing by his son's bed. Perhaps Jesus would offer a great prayer and touch his son. His son would rise out of his bed to the amazement of all the onlookers. What a joyous celebration would follow. Maybe the nobleman would have called together all his friends and relatives to celebrate the occasion. Maybe he would have hosted a great feast in honour of Jesus who had healed his son. What a happy occasion this would be. There would be laughter, merriment and joy.

While the Bible does not describe for us the nobleman's idea of what would happen that day, it is clear from the context that he expected a great sign or wonder. Jesus' response to him in John 4:48 is a clear indication of this fact:

“Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “you will never believe.”

In response to the nobleman's request Jesus simply said: “You may go. Your son will live” (John 4:50). Jesus did not go with the nobleman. He simply told him to go home. His son would live. There was no thunderbolt from heaven. There was no laying on of hands. There was no prayer offered up for his son. Jesus did not even go to see his son. All the nobleman had was the word of Jesus, “You may go. Your son will live” (John 4:50). He could have returned home a discouraged man.

The Bible tells us that the nobleman however “took Jesus at His word and departed” (John 4:50). As he returned, he was met by one of his servants with the news that his son had been healed. When he inquired about the time of his son's healing, the nobleman discovered that it was at the

precise moment that Jesus told him to go home. The word of the Lord was sufficient to bring healing.

What did it mean for the nobleman to meet the Saviour? It meant that he had to take Him at his word. Jesus gave him His word and that was enough.

Some people are waiting for a big sign or miracle before they believe. There will be no thunderbolt from heaven. There will be no sign. God has spoken and this is enough. Will we take Him at His word like the nobleman and be healed or will you wait for a sign that may never come and perish?

For Consideration:

- Have you ever missed out on what the Lord Jesus was doing because it was not what you expected?
- Why do you suppose we need signs and wonders to prove that what Jesus says is true?
- Consider that the world as we know it was brought into existence by the word of the Lord. Is His word enough for you to believe today?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you failed to take Him at His word. Thank Him that His word is true.
- Ask the Lord to help you to trust His word. Ask Him to give you grace to be more willing to step out in His promises.

10

THE MAN AT THE POOL

Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lay--the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was the Sabbath. (John 5:2-9)

In Jerusalem one day, Jesus passed by the pool of Bethesda. This pool was a gathering place for the infirmed, the crippled, and the paralyzed. They believed that, at a certain time, an angel would come down and stir up the waters. The first person into the pool would be healed.

Jesus met a man at the pool that day. He had been an invalid for 38 years. When the angel stirred up the waters, this man was not able to get into the pool. Someone else always got there before him. He needed someone to help him. There was nobody there for him. Maybe he had no family. Perhaps his family had abandoned him. His friends were not there for him either. He was a lonely man in need of help.

The pool of Bethesda was his only hope. He waited at the pool hoping that somehow he would be healed. When he met Jesus that day, there was no exchanging of names. They engaged in a simple conversation. Jesus asked him if he wanted to get well. The man responded: "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred." (John 5:7). Was there in this statement a gentle pleading for help? Would this stranger be kind enough to pick him up and carry him to the pool?

Jesus had compassion on the invalid that day. He told him to take up his bed and walk. Immediately, the man felt his strength renewed. He stood up, picked up his mat and walked. In his astonishment and joy, he failed to see that Jesus had left him. He had not even asked Him His name.

When the Jews asked him who it was that had healed him in John 5:12, the invalid had to admit that he did not know His name. Only when Jesus appeared again to him in the temple, did the man recognize Him.

That invalid had to admit before the people of his day that he did not know the man who had healed him. How humbling that would have been. For thirty-eight years he lay on a mat not able to walk. A stranger gave him the gift of wholeness. He did not even ask the stranger His name.

Do you know the One who gave you life? You owe your life and breath to this Creator God. Everything you have or ever will have is a gift from His hands. Your health, your job, your family, your home are all blessings from Him. Do you know him?

What a tragedy it would be to go through life never personally knowing this God. Are you like the man at the pool? You have received life from a stranger. That stranger came and died that you might be forgiven of your sins. Do you know this Stranger? Have you ever committed yourself to finding Him? It is not too late. Will you make it your priority to know him?

For Consideration:

- Have you ever felt like this invalid at the pool of Bethesda, hurting and alone? Explain.
- Why do you suppose Jesus singled out this one man among all those who were at the pool that day?
- What has the Lord God done for you?
- How well do you know the Lord Jesus today? How important is it for us to know Him today?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to reach out to those who are hurting and suffering like this invalid at the pool.
- Thank the Lord for what He has done for you and for the good things He has given you.
- Ask the Lord to help you to get to know Him more. Thank Him that He wants us to know Him more.

11

THE BOY WHO FED FIVE THOUSAND

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

Jesus' fame had spread throughout the land. People were coming from all over to hear Him preach. Many came with the sick and infirmed to have Jesus heal them. On this occasion, a crowd of five thousand people gathered around Jesus.

Jesus knew the crowd was weary. They may have been with Him for some time. They needed to eat to renew their

strength. Jesus asked Philip: "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"

The disciples were not rich men. They had left everything to follow Jesus. They did not have the money necessary to buy food for such a crowd. Philip replied, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite." (John 6:7). In his mind it was impossible to feed such a crowd on the money they had available to them.

Maybe Andrew heard what Jesus had said to Philip. He began to inquire among the crowd to see if anyone had brought food. If those who brought food could share it, maybe there would be enough to go around. Andrew's search revealed only a little boy with five loaves and two small fish. He reported this to Jesus.

Jesus asked the people to be seated. Taking the little boy's lunch, He gave thanks and broke it. He then called His disciples to distribute the pieces He had broken. They served the bread and the fish to the crowd. Each time someone reached into the basket their hand came up full. Five thousand people were fed that day. Twelve baskets remained when everyone had finished eating. The people were astonished at this great miracle of God. This miracle took place thanks to a little boy's lunch.

What did it mean for this little boy to meet the Saviour? It meant that he had to learn that Jesus was interested in his loaves and fishes. It meant learning that when he offered whatever he had the Lord was able and willing to do great things with it. Of all the people that Jesus could have used that day, he chose a little boy. We do not even know the name of this youngster. We have no record of ever meeting him again. The little he had he surrendered to the Lord

and the Lord was pleased to bless. Five thousand people were fed thanks to his little lunch.

You may not feel like you have much to offer the Lord. You may feel insignificant. Jesus is interested in you just the same. He can take the most insignificant people and do significant things through them. There were five thousand people in the crowd that day. Jesus put His finger on one little boy. Maybe He is pointing His finger at you today as well. Maybe He is calling you to surrender what you have to Him. Will you listen to His voice? Like the little boy, will you surrender to Him the little you have? He will do great things with what you give to Him.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever felt unworthy or inadequate? What does this passage teach us about the kind of people the Lord can use?
- What holds you back from offering what you have to the Lord and his service?
- Why do you suppose we feel that the Lord needs important and educated people for His kingdom? What is God really looking for in a person He wants to use?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that while we are unworthy and inadequate He is willing and able to use us just as we are.

- Take a moment now to offer yourself afresh to the Lord God. Ask Him to show you how He can use what you surrender to Him.

12

THE CROWD AND THE BREAD OF LIFE

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:26-29)

After feeding the five thousand, Jesus crossed the lake of Capernaum. The next day, the crowd, realizing that Jesus was no longer among them, went to find Him. They found Him on the other side of the lake.

Seeing the crowd, Jesus knew their heart. He said to them:

"I tell you the truth; you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill."(John 6:26)

Jesus knew why the crowd had come searching for Him. They came for what they could get out of Him. The day before, Jesus had fed them bread and fish. As long as Jesus had food to offer they would follow Him.

Knowing their heart, Jesus told the crowd not to work for the food that perished. Instead they were to seek the food that lasted for eternity. This food was to believe in Him. Physical food would give them physical life and strength. Believing in Him as the one sent from God would, however, give them spiritual life and strength.

The crowd responded by asking Jesus to prove that He really was the One whom God had sent. They reminded Jesus that God proved Himself to the people in Moses' day by sending them bread from heaven. Maybe the people were hungry. Were they suggesting to Jesus that he repeat yesterday's miracle and give them all something to eat? The idea they were trying to communicate to Him was that if He did give them something to eat, it would show them that He really was the Son of God? "Give us some food and we will believe you" was in essence what they were saying to Jesus.

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty," Jesus told them in John 6:35. The Bread of heaven was right in front of them but they did not believe. He had already proved Himself to them by feeding the five thousand just a day before. Why would they believe if He did another miracle? This statement caused quite a stir among the

disciples. When Jesus refused to show them a sign, many left Him never to return.

Here was a group of people who were willing to follow Jesus as long as He filled their bellies. They were only interested in a Jesus who gave them food and healed their sick. They followed Him for what they could get out of him.

What did it mean for the crowd to meet the Saviour? It meant that they were confronted with who Jesus really was. They were challenged to believe in Him for who He was, not for what they could get out of Him for themselves.

Why do you come to Jesus today? He is the Son of God. He is the Lord of lords. He is the King of kings. He is a holy and perfect Saviour. Those who understand who he is fall down at His feet in worship and praise for who He is. Standing before the people that day was the very Son of God. The only concern of the crowd was to know what they were going to get from Him. If He didn't give them what they wanted, they were going to leave Him. He had no value to them apart from what He gave to them. They walked away from the Son of God because He did not give them bread. They saw Him as a servant whose only purpose was to meet their every need. What an insult this was to the Lord Jesus.

Jesus let the crowd go. He did nothing to keep them. He did not want followers whose only desire was a selfish one. This type of friend is not a friend at all.

This passage calls us to examine our reasons for coming to Jesus. People follow Jesus for all kinds of reasons. The crowd that day followed Him only to be healed and fed. When Jesus refused to give them what they wanted they walked away. They were not committed to Him. Why do

you come to Jesus today? Do you come because He is the Lord God or do you too come to be fed?

For Consideration:

- Why did the crowd follow after Jesus? What reasons do people have in our day for following Jesus?
- What did Jesus mean when He said that He was the "Bread of Life?"
- Who is Jesus to you personally?
- Why did Jesus let this crowd go?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord Jesus for who He is and what He has done.
- Ask the Lord to help you to appreciate more fully who He is and what he had done for your salvation.
- Ask the Lord to remove all selfish motives from your heart and teach you to love Him for who He is.
- Ask the Lord to renew in His church a deep sense of awe over Jesus as the very Son of God.

13

THE ADULTEROUS WOMAN

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what to you say?" They were using the question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." (John 8:3-7)

People had gathered around Jesus at the temple court to hear Him teach. Jesus' teaching was interrupted however when the teachers of the law and the Pharisees burst into the temple area. They had a woman with them. Those who had been intently listening to Jesus turned to see what was happening. The group made its way to where Jesus was teaching. They set the woman in front of the crowd. Every eye likely turned to her. One man in the group said:

“Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what to you say?” (John 8:4)

Perhaps there was a gasp of horror as the crowd looked at the woman. The attitude in the court may have changed. A spirit of judgment possibly rose into the air. Did the people prepare themselves to pick up the nearest stone to throw at her? Adultery could not be tolerated.

As for the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, they were smiling to themselves. They had been looking for such an opportunity. They hated Jesus and wanted to cast doubt on His ministry. They knew Jesus was considered by the crowd to be a friend of sinners. Would he go against the Law of Moses to protect the life of this woman? If He did, they would expose Him as a false teacher.

Jesus refused to answer. He knew what these men were doing. They wanted to trap Him. The Pharisees and teachers of the law continued to question Jesus demanding an answer. The crowd listened, waiting for His response. Finally Jesus straightened up and said:

“If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” (John 8:7)

The woman braced herself to be dragged out of the temple court to be stoned. Nobody approached her. The crowd looked between her and Jesus. They looked at one another. One man left. Another followed. One by one they left until Jesus remained alone with the woman. “Has no one condemned you,” asked Jesus. “No one, sir” she replied. “Then neither do I condemn you,” said Jesus, “go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:11).

Jesus was the only person in the courtyard that day without sin. He alone could have cast the first stone. He refused to do so, choosing mercy over judgment.

What did it mean for the adulterous woman to meet the Saviour? It meant that she was given a new chance to live. The crowd would have stoned her. In their eyes she did not deserve to live. Jesus was willing to forgive. He accepted her when everyone else rejected her.

There is no sin too big for Jesus to forgive. Others may hold this sin against you, but in Jesus there is forgiveness. It does not matter what you have done in the past. Jesus will accept you when everyone else has turned their backs on you. You do not have to be good to come to Jesus. You can come just as you are.

Without Jesus this woman would have lost her life. The greatest thing the Jewish leaders could have done for her was to bring her to Jesus. He was her only hope. Jesus is willing to forgive the sins everyone else seems to remember. In Him you will find great mercy and compassion.

The adulterous woman must have left the presence of Jesus a changed woman. How could she ever return to her sin again? She owed Jesus her life. She was forgiven. Let Jesus do the same for you today.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever found yourself in the place of the religious leaders of Jesus' day? What is the

difference between how we see sinners and how God sees them?

- Are there sins you find difficult to forgive? Is the Lord willing to forgive those sins?
- What is the connection here between forgiveness and turning away from the sin for which we have been forgiven? What requirement does Jesus place on this woman He forgave?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is willing to forgive you for your sins.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to show mercy and compassion on those who have sinned against you.
- Take a moment to commit yourself to the Lord Jesus. Ask Him to forgive you for your sins. Receive that forgiveness and walk away from those sins today.

THE MAN BORN BLIND

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." (John 9:1-3)

In their journeys, Jesus and his disciples met a man born blind. As they passed by, the disciples asked Jesus a question. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2) Jesus told them that this man's blindness was not the result of sin in his life or the lives of his parents.

While this was the very first encounter of Jesus with this man, Jesus knew all about him. He knew that he was not blind as a result of some private sin. He knew that this was not an act of judgment on the part of God. "This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life," Jesus told His disciples (John 9:3).

God had a purpose in the blindness of this man. When he was born, his parents did not understand why God had given them a blind child. They may have even been angry or disappointed with God. Maybe they felt like the disciples, that they were being punished for some secret sin.

Here was a man God wanted to heal. By his healing, many would see the power and compassion of God at work. The blind man, unknown to himself, awaited the Lord's timing. That day came. Jesus stood before him. The Lord made some mud and placed the mixture on the man's eyes. Jesus then told him to go to the pool of Siloam to wash.

With the mud in his eyes, the blind man made his way to the pool of Siloam. He washed in the pool as Jesus commanded and was healed. People were amazed at the work of God in His life. The Pharisees asked him who had healed him. He told them it was Jesus.

The Pharisees asked him what he thought about Jesus. In John 9:17 he told them that he believed Jesus to be a great prophet. While this was an admirable statement, it shows us that this man's spiritual eyes had not been opened to the true identity of Jesus who had healed him. Jesus was far more than a prophet.

The Pharisees told the man that because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, He could not possibly be a great prophet. He had to be a sinner. The man replied, "Whether He is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know, I was blind but now I see" (John 9:25).

As the conversation between the man and the Pharisees continued, he told them that he believed Jesus had to be from God. "We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does His will. Nobody has

ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing," he told the Pharisees (John 9:31-33). With that statement, the Pharisees became angry. Because he saw Jesus as a man of God, the Pharisees cast him out of the temple. Being excommunicated was a terrible shame for a Jew. He was publicly humiliated.

Jesus came to see the man when He heard he had been cast out of the temple. "Do you believe in the son of Man," Jesus asked him (John 9:35). "Who is He, sir?" the man asked (John 9:36). "You have now seen Him; in fact, He is the one speaking with you," Jesus responded (John 9:37). When he heard this, the scales fell from his spiritual eyes. "Lord, I believe," he said as he fell down and worshipped Him (John 9:38). That day the man was completely healed (physically and spiritually). God's purpose had been finally worked out in his life.

What did it mean for the man born blind to meet the Saviour? It meant that he received new sight both physically and spiritually. He saw things now in a completely new light. He had been healed physically but more importantly, he was spiritually healed. He saw Jesus as he had never seen Him before. He was more than a prophet. He was more than a worshipper of God. He was more than a good man sent from God. He was God and God had reached out and touched him.

What a day that was. To no longer be blind was great; to have seen the Son of God was far greater. Maybe you too are like this blind man. All your life you have been blinded to the things of God. Maybe today the Lord Jesus wants to reach out His hands through this book to touch your spiritual eyes. Let Him touch you. You will never be the same again.

For Consideration:

- What is the difference between physical healing and spiritual healing? Can we be physically healed and not know the Lord who healed us?
- Who is Jesus to you today? Do you know Him as a good teacher, a worshiper of God or as God?
- Which healing is more important, physical or spiritual? Explain
- Have your eyes been opened to the Lord Jesus and who He is?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to open your eyes to who He is.
- If He has already revealed Himself to you ask Him to teach you more.
- Take a moment to pray that the Lord would heal the spiritual blindness in your society. Ask Him to reveal Himself to those around you.

15

THE PHARISEES AND THE DEATH OF LAZARUS

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." (John 11:43-48)

Have you ever met someone whose mind was made up? You can reason all you want with these people but you will never change their minds. While evidence proves them wrong, they prefer to go to the grave wrong rather than admit their mistake. These people usually become bitter

and unreasonable. Some of the Pharisees could be put into this category.

In John 11 Jesus received word that Lazarus, His friend from Bethany was very sick. He was asked to come quickly to the side of this dear friend and heal him. Jesus decided, however to remain where He was ministering for two more days.

Those two days were crucial for Lazarus. Without Jesus intervention, he died. After Lazarus died, Jesus told His disciples that it was time to go to Bethany. By the time they arrived, Lazarus had been in the tomb four days.

Jesus met Lazarus' sister Martha at the tomb. While she was very glad to see Him, she made it quite clear to Him that had He come earlier, Lazarus would not have died (John 11:21). She believed that Jesus could have healed her brother.

After a brief conversation with Jesus, Martha went home to get her sister Mary. She told Mary that Jesus had arrived and was looking for her. Mary rushed to the tomb to see Him. Many Jews followed her.

After a moment of shared grief, Jesus called for the stone that covered the tomb to be rolled away. Martha objected at first but when Jesus told her she would see the glory of God, she stood back and watched. The stone removed, Jesus called out, "Lazarus, come out." I imagine that all eyes were glued to the opening. Suddenly a figure appeared wrapped in grave clothes. Jesus sent someone to unwrap the strips of cloth. As the graves clothes came off it was clear that this was Lazarus. He was very much alive.

This was the greatest miracle the people had ever seen. They stood in amazement, not knowing what to say. Many people were convinced that day that Jesus was the Son of God.

Among the crowd gathered at the tomb were some Pharisees. They too had seen this great miracle of Jesus. They went back to their fellow Pharisees and told them what had happened. Notice the response of their brothers to this great miracle of Jesus in John 11:47-48:

“What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”

Jesus had just performed a great miracle. A man had been raised from the dead. Jesus had just demonstrated that He held the power of life in His hands. The response of the Pharisees was to do all they could to keep any more people from believing in Him.

The Pharisees remained untouched by the miracle of Jesus. Their minds had been made up. They wanted nothing to do with Him. Solid evidence of the deity of Christ had been presented to them but they would have nothing to do with it. Jesus showed them the facts. They clung to their traditions.

What did it mean for the Pharisees to meet the Saviour? It meant re-examining their traditions and beliefs. It meant questioning everything they had been taught. Would they be willing to admit they were wrong about Jesus when faced with the facts? Many did not have the courage to do so. They preferred to die in error rather than admit they

were wrong. They chose their traditions and false beliefs over Christ.

I pray that you will consider long and hard the evidence before you in this book. Will you accept the evidence and claim Him as your Lord and Saviour?

For Consideration:

- Have you ever met people who just won't admit they were wrong?
- Is your heart soft enough to be open to the facts presented to you about Jesus?
- Are you willing to face the truth about Jesus?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to open your heart to the evidence around you.
- Thank the Lord that He is God and that He comes to offer us salvation.
- Do you know people who are hardened to the message of Jesus and His salvation? Ask Him to open the hearts of these people to see Him for who He really is.

16

MARY AND JUDAS

Six days before the Passover Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. (John 12:1-4)

In the last chapter we examined the story of the resurrection Lazarus. Sometime later Jesus arrived at Bethany where Lazarus lived. Lazarus' family decided to offer a special meal in Jesus' honour. Maybe this was a means of thanking Jesus for what He had done for their dear brother.

What a special meal it must have been. Lazarus owed Jesus his life. They wanted this evening to be very special. They knew Jesus was no ordinary person. He was the Son of God. A meal in His honour could not be treated lightly. Martha, in particular, kept very busy serving the special guests. Jesus' disciples were also present.

During the course of the evening, Mary came into the room with a bottle of perfume. This was no ordinary perfume. It was a perfume made from an imported herb called nard. The bottle Mary held in her hands was very expensive and represented a year's salary for the average worker. She opened the bottle in Jesus' presence and, to the amazement of her guests, poured its contents on His feet and wiped them dry with her hair. The whole house was filled with the beautiful fragrance.

Judas Iscariot did not appreciate what Mary had done. "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor?" he asked (John 12:5). The Bible tells us that Judas was not concerned about the poor. As the treasurer, he had been stealing money and saw here an occasion to enrich himself.

Jesus did not condemn Mary's action. In fact He defended her before Judas. This perfume was an expression of Mary's love. She did not hesitate to pour out a year's salary on His feet. In her mind there was nothing too expensive for her Lord.

When Mary met the Saviour that day her love for Him compelled her to offer the greatest gift she could afford. She poured the priceless perfume over His feet as an expression of her devotion.

What is Jesus worth to you? What sort of price tag can we put on the person of Christ? We all will admit that Jesus is worth far more than we could ever estimate. Who among us, however, will take the step Mary took that day? Who among us will lay down our most valuable possessions at His feet?

Judas, on the other hand, for 20 pieces of silver, was willing to sell Jesus to the Jews. What did it mean for Mary to meet the Saviour? It meant being willing to sacrifice her most precious possession. Jesus did not refuse her gift. He accepted it and the attitude in which it came.

Often we come to the Saviour for what we can get from Him. Mary, on the other hand, came to offer her gifts to Him. We may not have great wealth or possessions, but we all have something we can offer the Lord Jesus today. He calls us to offer up our plans and agendas in life. He calls us to give of our time and energy. Will you come like Mary offering all that you have?

Mary understood that following the Lord Jesus would cost her something. She was willing to pay the price. All too many people do not want to pay the price to following Jesus. Are you willing to pay the cost? It may mean leaving family, friends and earthly possessions. It may cost you your time and energy. Will you come to Him like Mary, laying these things down at His feet as a sweet smelling perfume?

For Consideration:

- What was the difference between Mary's response to Jesus and that of Judas? With whom do you more clearly identify?
- If you are a believer in Jesus Christ today, what has your belief in Him cost you?
- What are you willing to sacrifice for the Lord Jesus today? How much is He worth to you personally?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you a fresh sense of His beauty and worthiness.
- Ask the Lord to make you willing to sacrifice whatever He asks you to sacrifice for His glory today.
- Thank the Lord for the fact that He is completely worthy of our greatest sacrifice.
- Ask the Lord to show you if there is anything you need to lay at His feet today.

SIMON PETER

As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it, saying, "I am not." One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow. (John 18:25-27)

Jesus had been arrested. His disciples fled and left Him alone to face the Jewish authorities. There was no doubt about what the Jews intended to do with Jesus. Their intention was to crucify Him.

Two of Jesus' disciples followed at a distance. Simon Peter was one of them and he was anxious to see what would happen to His Lord. Standing outside the courtyard, a girl approached him and asked, "You are not one of his disciples are you?" Peter replied, "I am not." (John 18:17). He entered the courtyard and stood by a fire warming himself, awaiting the results of the trial. "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" said another person (John 18:25). For the second time Peter denied any association with Jesus. As

time went on, another person looked over to Peter and said, "Didn't I see you with Him in the olive grove?" (John 18:26) The man speaking was a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off. Peter denied knowing Jesus a third time.

Luke tells us that when Peter denied Jesus for the third time, Jesus turned and looked at him (Luke 22:61). That look broke Peter's spirit. He left the courtyard and wept bitterly (Luke 22:62).

Prior to these events Peter told Jesus that he would willingly lay down his life for Him (see John 13:37). He was not so sure of himself now. He was not the man he had so boldly claimed to be.

What did it mean for Peter to meet the Saviour that day? It meant that he had to come to grips with his own weakness. As he saw the eyes of the Lord penetrate him, he knew he was guilty. He had, at one point, given up all to follow the Lord. Now he was afraid to be identified with Him.

Maybe as you read this you can identify with what Peter was going through. Maybe at one point in your life you made a commitment to the Lord Jesus. Today however, you find yourself in Peter's position. You are ashamed of your Lord. You do not want others to know that you are His follower.

Peter left the courtyard a broken man. He saw his failure when he saw Jesus that day. His weakness and bold claims were exposed for what they really were. Those who meet the Saviour often become painfully aware of their shortcomings. Standing before His holiness and purity they see their shame and sinfulness. What is most encouraging however about this story is that Jesus restored

Peter. Peter got back on his feet, received the forgiveness of God and went on to become one of the most important leaders in the church. Jesus can do the same for you.

For Consideration:

- How sure are you of your relationship with the Lord? Is it possible for you to fall just like Peter?
- Have you ever fallen into sin like Peter? How difficult was it to get back up again? What encouragement do you find in this chapter?
- How do you keep from falling like Peter?
- What sins do you need to deal with today to be restored into a better relationship with the Lord Jesus?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be strong in Him.
- Ask the Lord to reveal any pride or false sense of security that may be in you today.
- If you have fallen, ask the Lord to give you grace to get back on your feet like Peter.
- Thank the Lord for His wonderful forgiveness and grace.

18

PILATE

When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour, "Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews. But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. (John 19:13-16)

After condemning Jesus in a religious court, the Jews brought Him to Pilate for his judgment. They wanted Jesus killed and needed Pilate's approval.

It was in the early morning that they brought Jesus to Pilate. Pilate asked the Jews, "What charges are you bringing against this man?" (John 18:29) The Jews replied, "If He were not a criminal... we would not have handed him over to you." (John 18:30) Their accusations were vague. Pilate was not convinced that Jesus was guilty of any wrong. He told them to take Him away and judge Him

according to their own law (John 18:30). The Jews could punish Jesus but according to Roman law they were not allowed to crucify Him.

The Jews were not happy with Pilate's response. Luke 23:1-2 tells us that they then began to bring political accusations against Jesus. They accused Him of "subverting the nation," and opposing the payment of taxes. They even told Pilate that Jesus claimed to be king.

Religious accusations did not bother Pilate but he could not ignore these political accusations. He brought Jesus into the palace for questioning.

"Are you the King of the Jews," Pilate asked Jesus (John 18:33). Jesus responded by telling him that while He was king, His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). By this Pilate understood once again that the disagreement between Jesus and the Jews was religious in nature. Jesus was not a political threat. Having been reassured in his heart, Pilate pronounces his judgment. "I find no basis for a charge against Him," he said in John 18:38.

In his desire to please the Jews, however, Pilate decided to release a prisoner. He brought before them a man by the name of Barabbas. According to Luke 23:19 this man was guilty of sedition and murder. The King James translation of the Bible tells us in John 18:40 that Barabbas was a robber. With Barabbas on one side and Jesus on the other, Pilate told the Jews that he would release one of these men. There is no doubt in the mind of Pilate as to which one of them was guilty. Barabbas was a political rebel. To the astonishment of Pilate, however, the Jews called for the release of Barabbas. They ask Him to crucify Jesus.

Pilate asked the Jews, "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in Him no grounds for the death penalty." (Luke 23:22) Pilate did not understand why the Jews felt so strongly opposed to Jesus. He decided to continue his attempt to release Jesus. He told the crowd that he would have Him punished and then released (Luke 23:22).

According to Matthew 27:19 Pilate knew the reason the Jews wanted to kill Jesus was out of envy. During the trial of Jesus, Pilate's wife told him about a dream she had about Jesus. She begged Pilate to have nothing to do with "that innocent man." (Matthew 27:19).

To please the Jews Pilate had Jesus delivered over to his soldiers. The soldiers dressed Jesus in kingly robes. They placed a crown of thorns on his head and mocked him. They spat on Him and beat Him. When the soldiers had finished with Jesus, Pilate had Him brought again before the people. What a sorry sight He was. Blood streamed down His head. Open cuts could be seen on his back. He was wet with the spit of Roman soldiers. Surely Pilate thought, this would satisfy the Jews.

The response of the people was beyond imagination. They cried out, with one accord: "Crucify! Crucify!" It is hard to imagine such hatred. They had no compassion. Pilate did not understand their response. Once again he said: "I find no basis for a charge against Him."

The Jews told Pilate that Jesus claimed to be God and according to their law He had to die. When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus again into the palace for further questioning. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus (John 19:8). What was going through his mind when he asked this question? The result of this conversation with Jesus

was that yet again Pilate sought to release Jesus but the Jews kept crying out against Him (John 19:12).

Seeing Pilate's hesitation to crucify Jesus, the people began to accuse him of being the enemy of Caesar. Pilate knew that if that news were to travel, he risked his job and even his life. In a last feeble effort to release Jesus, Pilate said to the people, "shall I crucify your king?" The chief priests responded, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). Pilate knew the hypocrisy of this statement. The Jews hated Rome. He could do nothing to ease the mounting rebellion on his hands. He handed Jesus over to the Jews to be crucified.

Pilate had a sign made up to put over the cross where Jesus was crucified. It said, "Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews." (John 19:19) The Jewish leaders asked Pilate to change this sign. They wanted it to read "He claimed to be king of the Jews." (John 19:21) Pilate would have nothing to do with changing the sign. "What I have written, I have written," he told them (John 19:21). We are left wondering what Pilate really believed about Jesus. He certainly knew He was innocent.

What did it mean for Pilate to meet the Saviour? It meant that he came into confrontation with the people of his day. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, yet he handed Him over to be crucified. Why did he hand Jesus over? Was it not because of the people around him? Was it not because he valued his job, his reputation and his life? He knew the truth about the innocence of Christ but did not have the courage to stand for Him in his final hour.

What will we do with Jesus today? Will we be like Pilate and wash our hands of Him because we do not have the courage to stand up for the truth? Pilate went to his grave

knowing that he had killed an innocent man. Will we go to our grave knowing that we have turned our backs on Him? Knowing the truth is not enough. We also need to respond to the truth. How will we respond to Jesus today? Will we risk our lives our jobs our reputations for Him? Or will we like Pilate turn our backs on Him and go with the crowd?

For Consideration:

- What do you think Pilate believed in his heart about Jesus?
- Why do you think Pilate ultimately handed Jesus over to the Jews?
- What do you think his response toward Jesus should have been?
- What has been your response to Jesus?
- What are you willing to risk for the sake of Jesus today?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to demonstrate what you believe about Jesus in your life. Ask Him for courage to stand firm for what you believe.
- Thank the Lord that while Pilate handed Him over to be crucified, the Lord God used what He did to accomplish our salvation.
- Ask the Lord to give you courage and strength to be faithful to Him no matter the cost.

CONCLUSION

Why did the apostle John write the Gospel of John? John 20:30-31 gives us the answer:

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

If there was one thing that John wanted to accomplish by writing his gospel it was that his readers be convinced that Jesus was the Son of God and enter into the life He came to offer. I have written this series of brief reflections on the Gospel of John for the same reason. It is my desire that each reader examines his or her response to the person of the Lord Jesus introduced to us by John in his gospel.

In this study we have been introduced to men, women and children who met Jesus when He walked on this earth. There are several important lessons that these various encounters teach us.

First, coming to Jesus will cost something. The disciples dropped their nets and left their families. John's disciples left their master. A little boy gave Jesus all his lunch. Mary poured out her most expensive perfume on His feet. When we come to Him we too must be willing to lay everything down.

Second, coming to Jesus will mean confronting what we currently believe. Nathanael had his ideas about the people of Nazareth. Those ideas had to be changed. The Pharisees had their opinions about Jesus but because they refused to accept what Jesus said, they never did come to know Him and the truth of His word. If you come to Jesus you must come with a willingness to trust Him and what He says.

Third, coming to Jesus will mean being confronted with our sin. When the money changers met the Lord Jesus He took out a whip and drove them out of the temple. When the crowd of John 6 came to Jesus demanding to be fed, He exposed their selfishness. Simon Peter was confronted with his shortcomings when Jesus looked up at him after he denied him three times. When Nicodemus came to Jesus, as a religious man, he was told that he was not ready to enter the kingdom of heaven. For some this message about sin was too much to bear. They refused to listen. Those who were unwilling to accept the reality of their sin walked away unchanged.

Fourth, those who came to Jesus recognizing their sin discovered His willingness to forgive. The Samaritan woman and the woman caught in adultery understood this wonderful acceptance and forgiveness of Jesus as did Simon Peter. They came with a full understanding of their sin and unworthiness but walked away changed people, knowing the complete forgiveness of the Lord Jesus.

Fifth, those who were forgiven experienced new life and purpose. Andrew and Philip are clear examples of individuals who were radically changed by meeting the Lord Jesus. The Samaritan woman too was changed by her encounter with Jesus. Their thinking was radically changed. They were new people because they met the Lord Jesus and received the forgiveness and new life He came to offer.

Finally, coming to Jesus demands a decision. Pilate knew the truth about Jesus but did not have the strength to choose Jesus over the crowd. The Pharisees saw evidence of the truth of Jesus' claims but refused to open their eyes to it. Nathanael, on the other hand, came to Jesus with a negative attitude but was willing to accept the truth he saw in Him. He went away a new man. Those who meet the Saviour have a decision to make. Will they accept Him and His claims or will they walk away unchanged.

In this book we have met individuals who walked away from Jesus unchanged. We have also met men, women and children whose lives were radically transformed by their encounter with Him. The question ultimately is what will be your response to meeting Him in the pages of this book? May God give you eyes to see Jesus for who He is, and a heart to believe His claims. May your encounter with the Saviour be a life-changing encounter.

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