

THE GOSPEL
according to
John

part 1

STUDY GUIDE

“

What would it take to convince you of the existence of God? How would your friends, family and work colleagues respond to that question? Would it take some spectacular vision or miracle – or perhaps it is needing the answer to a big ‘why?’. Throughout history we can broadly categorise the ‘proofs’ requested of God as ‘signs’ (if I can see God) and ‘wisdom’ (if I can understand God). John’s Gospel has been given to us to convince us Jesus is the Messiah – the one God has sent into the world to change and restore it, and in these first few verses John describes Jesus as the ‘Word’ – the answer and reason – and the ‘Light’ – the sign and visible evidence – of God. This is the one John is describing as coming to the Earth in Jesus Christ – through whom all things have been made, in whom all things hold together, for whom all things exist.

”

The Limitless Flow of Grace

- John 1:14-18

The Baptism of the Son and the Spirit

- John 1:19-34

Christ, The Lamb of God

- John 1:35-42

Come and See

- John 1:43-51

Miraculous Wine

- John 2:1-12

The Mystery and the Majesty

- John 3:1-15

Love the Light

- John 3:16-21

From Baptism to Eternity

- John 3:22-36

Water for the Thirsty

- John 4:1-30

Food for the Hungry

- John 4:27-42

The Limitless Flow of Grace

- John 1:14-18

Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

- What 'proof' do your friends / family ask or expect before accepting God?
- How do these fit into the 'sign' and 'wisdom' proofs that we have seen here?

John 1:14a – The Word Became Flesh

- How often do you consider the incarnation of Christ? How does this act of God show His overwhelming love for us?
- What cost are you willing to bear to show love to someone else? What humility might this require of you?

John 1:14b – He Dwelt Among Us

- How does the glory seen by Moses compare with the way we see glory in Christ?
- How can we be tempted to seek one sign of God's glory over the other?

John 1:16-17 – Law or Grace?

- How can the offer of grace be such a challenge? Why do we struggle to accept the free gift?
- How is the Christian message of grace different to how the world expects to be 'right with God'?

Sermon Overview (The Limitless Flow of Grace)

Consider God's perspective on this. You have eternally existed in glory and love – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You create the universe that your glory and love might be shared over and over. Your creation is dazzling full of great wonder and beauty, of angels, galaxies, mountains, oceans, sea creatures, animals of all shapes and sizes – but you give extra value and worth to men and women, whom you make to be just like you. You are thrilled with what you've created – but have to endure the heartache of seeing your children reject you, deny you, despise you – the agony of seeing a malicious lie spread throughout the world that you are not good, not loving, not glorious. What would you do?

The Word Became Flesh (verse 14a)

The One through whom all things have been, in whom all things hold together, for whom all things exist - became flesh, became human. This is the most incredible condescension of all time - nothing compares to this, no other act of humility comes even close. There are no illustrations that can easily be used to capture the magnitude of Christ's condescension without trivialising and therefore minimising the incarnation. He took upon Himself a body that is weak like ours, that hurts like ours, that smells like ours – a body which could die like ours. He took on human emotion like we have – which can experience betrayal – rejection, failure, temptation to sin!

That's what God chose to do. When you are feeling angry towards God it's worth bearing this verse in mind, it's worth remembering He made a decision to save this world by entering into it and wading through the foulest sewage to rescue us.

He Dwelt Among Us (verse 14b)

We have already seen from verse 1 how John deliberately draws our attention back to the Old Testament scriptures, mirroring Genesis 1 – now he does this again here, but the link is more subtle, however those early Greek speaking Christians who were amongst the first to receive this letter would have immediately noticed another parallel here – it is the word 'dwelt'. The literal rendering would say this: 'he tabernacled (he pitched his tent) among us'.

Read Exodus 40:34-35

The glory of God was so overwhelming that Moses was unable to dwell within it. This same glory entered into a baby, born in a stable, laid in a manger. This baby grew through adolescence into adulthood. The glory Moses encountered was unapproachable - stand back or you will die. This glory 'veiled in flesh' touched lepers, ate fish on the beach with his friends, played and talked with children. Prostitutes and tax collectors would bound up to him and encounter respect, love and mercy, would be changed by his touch. This is how God chose to change the world!

It was a glory 'veiled in flesh' and as such so many missed it – because he looked so ordinary, unimpressive, his appearance was like that of any other middle eastern man! This humility of Christ which is a source of incredible comfort to Christians – the One who sympathises - is a major obstacle to those who aren't. Where an Old Testament scene of glory might be what is requested - it's a glory that comes in tremendous humility.

Law or Grace? (verses 16-17)

You might ask this question – what does God want from me? Moses - who got to see something of the full-blown earth shaking, thunderous glory of God - was given 'law'. The 10 commandments - the description of a 'perfect life', the life none of us has even come close to. You might say: 'I want to see the glory Moses got close to seeing' - do you want the law of Moses too?

What have I got to do if I'm going to be 'good with God' if I'm going to have this 'relationship you keep banging on about' – the answer is found in verse 16 – receive 'grace upon grace' what's that? Gift upon gift – charity upon charity – kindness upon kindness! What does God demand from you? Only that you would let Him shower you in His love – only that you would receive His gift, only that you would allow Jesus perfect life to be attributed to you. All you need is nothing, but most people don't have it – 'I don't need God, I don't need Christ, I'm doing just fine, my life will count on my own merits'. The Christian's cry is this 'nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling' – Jesus has come to make God known, how He chose to accomplish this should blow our minds.

The Baptism of the Son and the Spirit

- John 1:19-34

Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

John 1:19-23 – *Who are you?*

- What qualities does society look to in order to determine identity and success?
- How do our friends/family measure greatness? How do we measure greatness?
- How can we be tempted to qualify/disqualify ourselves or others from being used by God based on our actions?

John 1:24-28 – *He whose sandal I am not worthy to untie!*

- What can stop us from turning focus, from ourselves, back on to Jesus?
- How can our actions glorify God, and how can we point people towards Him?

John 1:29-30 - *Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*

- How do you talk about the things that excite you?
- What is the difference between knowing about Jesus, and knowing Jesus personally?
- What qualities are you trying to 'cover' yourself with? How do we attempt to earn our own righteousness?

John 1:31-34 - *I saw the Spirit descend from heaven...*

- In what ways does Jesus' baptism differ from ours?
- How does Jesus' baptism reveal Jesus' mission, and testify of Him?

Sermon Overview (The Baptism of the Son and the Spirit)

The Gospel is written by John the Beloved, a disciple who spent years with Jesus – one of His closest friends. This makes the account of Jesus life that we read more personal, and an account we can more easily believe. This is someone who spent time with Jesus, who knew Him, learnt from Him. When we read this Gospel, we are reading the words of a close friend.

Who is John the Baptist?

Up to this point in this Gospel, John has been describing Jesus: the word become flesh, the light of the world, at the right hand of the Father. In this passage, the focus shifts slightly onto another character – John The Baptist (JTB). This is a different John to the author of the Gospel. John - the author of the Gospel – starts to talk about JTB at the climax of his description of Jesus. This suggests that John considers JTB to be important to the account of Jesus life.

JTB is mentioned in all the Gospels. Mark's Gospel starts with JTB - described as being clothed with camel hair, eating locusts and honey. Luke's Gospel fills in JTB's story – even before his birth being described as "*great before the Lord*" |(Luke 1:15). JTB lives

out in the desert, dressed in hair, eating bugs and honey – what makes him great is not his appearance. JTB would not be considered great in the eyes of society – so what makes him *great before the Lord*?

The Pharisees had this same question. *What do you say about yourself?* (verse 22). What gives you the authority to baptise, to gather people, calling them to repentance – what makes you so great that you can do this? JTB's answer changed the focus. It is not about JTB, but one greater who is coming. JTB could have claimed importance from his family line (Luke 1:5-6) – this is the authority Jews could relate to. However, JTB knows it is not about this. It's not about him, his family line or who he is – but it is God who saves. It is all about Him.

Who is John the Baptist preparing for?

The next day, Jesus approached JTB (verse 29). This is written, suggesting that the Pharisees are still there. JTB has taught that one is coming that is greater – and the next day He approaches him. JTB's response is: 'this is the one I have been telling you about. The thing I am passionate about - and now you get to see it too.'

- *Behold...* JTB's response is a reminder that Jesus is not just to be read about. Jesus isn't just someone we can know about, but is someone we can know personally. He is to be seen, and experienced personally. We don't need to rely on other people's experience and understanding, but we can see Him for ourselves.
- *...the Lamb of God...* JTB's audience would know this reference to the Old Testament, particularly the Passover (Exodus 12). JTB is stating Jesus is the fulfilment of the sacrificial lamb. Just as the Blood of the Passover Lamb covered the Israelites, we are covered by the new Sacrificial Lamb, who saves us by and through His Grace – with whose Blood we are covered. He's not just a teacher, or good man – but He is a Sacrifice from God.
- *...who takes away the sin of the world...* Unlike what is expected, this promise is not restricted to just the Jews, the people of God or those who follow His rules. JTB describes Jesus as taking away the sin of THE WORLD. Anyone - from any tribe or nation, who believes and is covered by the blood of the new Sacrificial Lamb - has their sin removed. This is not about following the law. It's not about a bloodline. It is about being covered by the Blood of the Lamb.

Christ, The Lamb of God

- John 1:35-42

Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage from Sunday. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

John 1:35-37 – Behold the Lamb of God!

- What do you understand by 'Lamb of God'? How can we make this term relatable to our friends and family?
- How can we be tempted to give up, after our first attempts at sharing good news fails?

John 1:38-39 – What are you seeking?

- If you had the opportunity like the disciples to ask Jesus a question, what would you ask?
- How accurately does our prayer life reflect our desire to know Jesus more?

John 1:40-42 – We have found the Messiah!

- When have you seen God move in 'ordinary moments'? How can we risk missing these moments to transform lives?
- How can we be encouraged to share the good news we have heard? Who are our 'Simons' that we need to invite?

Sermon Overview (Christ, The Lamb of God)

John has written this Gospel, and has given Jesus a far bigger introduction than the readers would have expected. Far from describing the man from Nazareth – a man many of the readers would have known – John takes them back to before the beginning of creation, and increases this vision of Jesus beyond what they had seen. Then we meet John the Baptist (JTB), and hear him describe Jesus as the Lamb of God. JTB drew a crowd, with many baptised by him – but he would point them away from himself, and towards the Messiah who would come – Jesus.

Behold the Lamb of God!

This is the second time in this Gospel we hear JTB describe Jesus as the Lamb of God. JTB spoke about who Jesus is, and this led to some of his disciples following Jesus instead. There is no indication that this following happened after the first time JTB meets Jesus, but now. In church, we may be accustomed to this phrase and description, but it is not a phrase that is really understood in today's culture. For the Jews hearing JTB's exclamation, this would mean far more. They would know the stories of the Passover lamb, and the sacrifice provided to replace Isaac; they would understand the daily sacrifices in the temple, and the commands given for the sacrifice – the scape goat – who could take away the sins of the Jewish nation; they would know the words of Isaiah who spoke of a saviour who would come like a lamb led to the slaughter.

After all JTB had said of the one to come – here we see the title of the ‘Lamb of God’ again. As we have previously seen, this would ring familiar to many in the Jewish community, but also totally alien in how JTB appears to be using it. What kind of lamb would God provide? How can this Lamb be like any of these lambs in Jewish traditions? Yet there was something in this they latched their faith and hope to and followed. They knew it meant rescue, redemption, atonement, forgiveness - even if they didn’t yet see how.

We have Found the Messiah.

For Andrew, it wasn’t enough just for him to get to know Jesus. Andrew’s instinct with excitement is to bring his brother to be near too. Andrew was the first of all the disciples to speak about the Messiah to those he knew. When Andrew told Simon he had found the Messiah, what did Andrew mean, and what would Simon understand? Andrew would have heard from JTB about the coming Messiah. They would have heard in the synagogues of the chosen and anointed one. Israel hoped for a warrior king, a wise king, a fair king – and this is the one who has been expected – who would rescue Israel, sort out God’s people, and rule on David’s throne again.

Considering how many followers of Jesus of Jesus there are in the world today, this moment can seem so ordinary. However, this moment changed everything. Had JTB not pointed to Jesus; had Andrew not followed; had Andrew not gone to his brother Simon – what would their lives have been like? Considering all they saw – without this moment, they would not have witnessed any of it. This is the story of every Christian – a moment that starts in very ordinary circumstances: in a community centre, over a curry, at a kid’s party; that becomes a moment that changes their life forever.

Come and See!

The most crucial turning point, the most important invitation, was from Jesus: “Come and See”. Those words not only altered the plot of this story, allowing them to follow him, but it changed their lives with what they discovered when they carried on. As they continued their walk with Jesus, they could learn far more about this man – the perfect, blameless sacrifice sent by God. Three years later, they would see even clearer how this man, Jesus, would be the Lamb of God – who would suffer and die for the sins of the world before he is glorified.

Talk of sin, judgement and sacrifice may be daunting, but we cannot shy away from these subjects as Christians – because we believe there is good news. Jesus, the innocent Lamb of God, took the punishment you and I don’t deserve so that you could receive the mercy you don’t deserve.

Come and See

- John 1:43-51

Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage from Sunday. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

John 1:43-44 – He Found Philip

- What encouragement can we take from the truth that we are *'found and called'* by Jesus?
- Did you feel *'lost'*, before God found you? How can we misunderstand the desires of *'the lost'*?

John 1:45-46 – We Have Found Him

- Philip eagerly went straight to Nathanael – who do you go to, eager to share the good news?
- How can we be tempted to put-off sharing the gospel, fearing we only have partial or inaccurate knowledge?
- What pre-conceived opinions about Christianity and the Church prevent friends/family from investigating more?

John 1:47-51 – I Saw You

- What do your friends/family expect from Church? How can we invite them to *'come and see'* authentic Christianity?
- Have you experienced a similar, personal and intimate, interaction with Jesus? How did it affect you?

Sermon Overview (Come and See)

Jesus is now gathering His disciples - those he would spend majority of next three years with - teaching and training them within the context of friendship. Jesus continues to call people to follow Him – by the Holy Spirit applying His Words to our hearts as they are read and heard in moments like these. To be a Christian is to follow Jesus. The Church exists to call this world to *'come and see'* the One who calls all people to *'come and follow'*.

Philip - the Eager, if Errant, Evangelist (verses 43-45)

We don't really get a lot of information about Philip – or his first encounter with Jesus. We know he is from Bethsaida, the same village as Andrew and Peter. Other than that, the only information we have about Philip is that he has been found by Jesus, and called by Jesus – but this is a significant and poignant fact about him. This is a fact about each and every follower of Jesus, that sets us apart. We have been found and called by Jesus. Whether we spent years feeling lost and out-of-place, or we were content with our lives and unaware of any danger; Jesus found us where we were and called us to follow Him.

When Philip had been found by Jesus, he found Nathanael. There is repetition of the word 'found' in this passage, that reflects the pattern of Christianity – this is how the gospel has spread throughout the world. Those whom Jesus finds, find others, that they may be found also - it is the most logical chain reaction.

Philip starts really well – building up this introduction of Jesus. The one that Moses and the prophets spoke of – the Messiah – is here. This is what the faithful Jews, in this moment in history, are all longing to see. Philip then goes on, continuing the introduction with what would be a huge anti-climax for Nathanael: *'Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph'*. While this was Jesus' popular title, it was not accurate. The more accurate title: *Jesus of Bethlehem, son of God / David'*, would have had far more impact. Philip just shared what he knew. That is all God expects - and our imperfections do not stop God saving souls.

Nathanael – the Informed Sceptic (verse 46)

Nathanael knew what to expect – and Nazareth certainly wasn't somewhere the Messiah would come from. His preconceived notion of the Messiah did not correlate with this introduction from Philip. Like many today, who have preconceived views of Christianity and the Church – Nathanael did not believe there was anything in it. Philip's response is just: *'come and see'*. Philip doesn't have all the answers but he is convinced all Nathanael needs to do is 'see Jesus' in order to believe.

Like Lucy, in 'The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe' - having seen Narnia, believed the rest of her siblings should see it too - if you and I have come to know Jesus, there's hope for everyone. Your friend may think all you are seeing is the hard, wooden back of a wardrobe, but at any moment they too might enter the new world of 'heaven' - as we find Nathanael does. We know what we have seen to be true; to have been found by Jesus. It can be discouraging and you can at times be made to feel like you are delusional and deceived. Praise God for His Holy Spirit - our seal and guarantee (*See Ephesians 1:13-14*).

Jesus – the Answer God Gives (verses 47-51)

Nathanael is clearly intrigued enough by his friends testimony to make a journey to see Jesus. At ChristCentral, we often meet people who are visiting for similar reasons – and most invitations to church are typically accepted with the caveat: *'...but I'm not religious – you won't convert me'*. Fortunately, Christianity is not about making more people religious. No-one who comes to see Jesus leaves thinking they need to be 'religious'. Instead, life-changing power is received.

Jesus knew the sceptic heart of Nathanael. He spoke to him words like arrows that hit the target of his scepticism. So much so that Nathanael instantly felt the need to ask: *"How do you know me?"*. Jesus then goes even further: *'...when you were under the fig tree, I saw you'*. We don't know anything about the fig tree, but clearly Jesus knew – and Nathanael knew. Jesus' words land in Nathanael's heart like 10 tonne weight. God sees you - He notices you. This revelation leads Nathanael to see Jesus, not as *'Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph'*, but as *'the Son of God, the King of Israel'*. When such a revelation comes sceptics of God become Sons of God.

Miraculous Wine

- John 2:1-12

Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage from Sunday. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

John 2:1-12 – *The First of His Signs*

- As the first sign, what does this miracle say about Jesus / God? How does this challenge the popular idea of Him?

John 2:1-3 – *They Have No Wine*

- When can we feel like we have come up short? How have we responded to these situations?
- How can we be tempted to bring God the solution, rather than the problem?

John 2:4-5 – *Do Whatever He Tells You*

- How can we hear Jesus' instructions for our lives? How can we know what He is telling us to do?
- What prevents us from following Jesus' instructions?

John 2:6-12 – *Fill The Jars*

- How do we respond when Jesus' answer doesn't appear to respond to our immediate need?
- How can we get distracted by immediate issues? How can we re-focus on the big picture God to which has called us?

Sermon Overview (Miraculous Wine)

Following the repeated invite so far in John's Gospel, this encounter is another opportunity to 'come and see' what Jesus is like. Jesus ministry is starting, and we get to understand more about Him and His character through this moment.

What does this sign say? (verse 11)

John states that this is the first of Jesus' signs – and so it is important to see what this sign says. His first sign isn't healing the sick, nor feeding the starving – instead His first sign is to ensure this wedding is a party people will enjoy. This is a challenge to many people's view of Christianity. This is the first sign that John records, and the first impression we have of Jesus – and so of the Father as Jesus shows us what the Father is like. Jesus has come to show us that God knows how to thrill us – far beyond the fleeting thrills this world has to offer. We want to enjoy God, and glorify Him in all things.

Where do You Turn When the Wine Runs Out? (verse 3)

This is part of a wedding that would have gone on for days. The family would have put everything in to this wedding, and there would be huge honour and shame at stake with this. The wine is such a key part of this feast, and to run out puts the feast - and the reputation of the groom's family - at risk. With any life experience, comes the

experience of coming up short, feelings of inadequacy and helplessness. Yet the Bible calls us to *'rejoice in the LORD always'* (**Philippians 4:4**) – the people of God are called to live happily in God, always. God wants us to be happy, and know fullness of joy.

Mary's response to this problem is key for us. She simply tells Jesus what has happened. It is unlikely she expected a miracle – as this is Jesus' first sign, we can conclude He had not created food out of nothing as He grew up. However, she does appear to have learnt to turn to Jesus when things are tough. As a mother, she would have seen Jesus keep a calm head in a crisis – growing up to be a man who is wise, and would take responsibility. While it doesn't appear she expected a miracle, Mary knew she could turn to Jesus.

Will You Listen Well and Do Whatever He Tells You? (verse 4 - 5)

As Jesus responds to Mary, His response: *'Woman'* – (perhaps better translated 'dear woman') is strong, and indicative of the weight of what Jesus is communicating – Jesus is not just Mary's son, but the Son of God, on a mission. What He goes on to say is of great magnitude and importance, far beyond being Mary's son.

As Jesus continues, *'my hour has not yet come'* speaks of something else – and something we hear again from Jesus (**see John 13:1 & 17:1**). There is a greater task before Jesus. He is not there to solve the problem of a lack of wine, but His hour and His purpose was The Cross. We can easily veer away from this in our prayers, wanting God to fix our immediate issues – rather than focussing on the bigger need that Jesus completed on the Cross.

Mary isn't fazed by Jesus response. She didn't ask for clarity, for an explanation or for confirmation. Instead she turns to the servants and says *'Do whatever he tells you'*. This is the key for breakthrough – to do whatever Jesus tells us to do.

Why Did Jesus Choose Washing Pots? (verses 6-10)

So having established for us His primary mission, Jesus nevertheless deals with the presenting issue starkly better than the previous. Jesus used the jars for purification in this miracle – not out of need (Jesus could, and did create from nothing), and certainly not because the jars would be typically used in this way. This is a sign of who Jesus was, and what He was there to do. The pots cleanse on the outside - but like the wine, Jesus miracle is starkly better.

We get joy deep within as the Spirit of God cleanses our souls with the blood of Christ. The wine is a sign that points to Calvary - and helps us to understand 'the hour' and our need of it. This miracle - both explicitly (my hour) and implicitly (water into wine) - directs our attention once more to the Cross, where Jesus bled and died for us.

The Mystery and the Majesty

- John 3:1-15

Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage from Sunday. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

John 3:1-2 – He Came to Jesus

- What belief / way of life do our friends / family hold on to? How does it affect their behaviour?
- What caused you to start considering the claims of Christianity?

John 3:3-8 – You Must Be Born Again

- How is Jesus' claim *'no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again'* such a radical and offensive claim?
- How can we be tempted to rely on the rules and rituals, rather than seeking the work of God in our lives?
- How have you experienced the work of the Spirit in your life? How has the Spirit transformed your life?

John 3:9-15 – How Can This Be?

- What separates Christianity - and the claims of Jesus - from other teachings and ways of life?
- What hope does the Gospel bring when we feel like we have failed and fallen far from God?

Sermon Overview (The Mystery and the Majesty)

We are very early in the ministry of Jesus still. John has written about the events of Jesus' ministry: His encounter with John the Baptist, calling His first disciples, His first miracle turning water to wine. Just before this encounter with Nicodemus, we have heard how Jesus cleared the temple during Passover, incensed by their behaviour - turning the place of worship into a place of commerce and corruption.

The Unsettled Seeker

It is still during the Passover festival, in Jerusalem. For Nicodemus, this would be a busy time. As a Pharisee – and member of the ruling council - there would have been many Passover rituals and celebrations that he would have been involved with. Yet - rather than heading home for the night, resting with friends and family - we read that he has gone to find Jesus. Whether it was the only time Nicodemus could find, or the time he felt he could hide and not be noticed – Nicodemus came to Jesus in the night. This opportunity to meet Jesus was not something Nicodemus could let go by.

Nicodemus has spent years growing up in the Jewish faith. He has studied the scriptures, knew the rituals, and lived obediently as a Pharisee – yet he has seen signs and heard of the miracles that Jesus has been performing, and this has prompted him

to approach. Seeing the signs leads him to question his way of life – a successful way of life – wondering whether there is more to life than his religious observance.

The Impossible Task.

Nicodemus came with no question, but Jesus knew what he was searching for. The Pharisees were waiting for the ushering in of the Kingdom of God – waiting for the Messiah. Jesus' response challenges the Pharisees – they will not see the Kingdom they are waiting for, unless they are born again.

To be born of water and the Spirit references back to *Ezekiel 36:25-27* – something an important Pharisee such as Nicodemus would know. So much of the Bible is a story of how man has fallen short of what God requires. The Pharisees have missed this point and are fastidious in their religious observance – seeking to live the perfect life and get others to follow their rules. The passage from Ezekiel highlights our impurities and the hope that comes from God alone – that He will cleanse us.

There is a mystery to being born again. We cannot manufacture or earn any right-standing with God. It is impossible without a work of God. Without the Spirit, we cannot be born again. The whole process of being born again is out of our hands, and in the hands of God alone. When our work - our attempts at evangelism, our struggles against sin, our ritual discipline – fails to produce results, we need to seek the Holy Spirit to transform our lives, and the lives of those around us.

The Perfect Provision

Nicodemus, and the Pharisees, cannot understand Jesus' mission. For years, the Pharisees have set out rules and rituals to draw close to God – and what Jesus is saying does not fit with what they have been doing.

First Jesus reveals who he is to Nicodemus. This had started with a declaration "*Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God*" (verse 2) – but Jesus calls himself 'the Son of Man'. More than a teacher, Jesus is the One who has come from Heaven - who would be lifted up so that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life.

Jesus talks of being lifted up, just as Moses lift up the snake (*Numbers 21:4-9*). The Israelites had sinned and turned from God – so God sent venomous snakes into the camp. When the Israelites realised their sin, they turned back to Moses and to God. God's instruction called them to look at the lifted snake – a foreshadow of the lifted Christ.

No matter how we have sinned - how we have turned from God – the Gospel calls us to look to Jesus on the Cross for our salvation. We are freed from any religious expectation or need to work or earn our hope.

Love the Light

- John 3:16-21

Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage from Sunday. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

John 3:16 – For God So Loved the World

- How can we see this desire *'to be loved'* in the lives of those around us, and our own lives?
- What does *'to be loved'* mean to you? How can this affect your understanding of God's love for the world?
- Consider **1 John 4:7-18** and **1 Corinthians 13** – how should our view of love be redefined by God?

John 3:17-18 – Whoever Believes in Him is Not Condemned

- How can we risk limiting the gospel and who it has power to reach and save?
- How can we risk limiting the gospel in its ability to over-come our faults and failures?

John 3:19-21 – Light has Come Into the World

- How can we try to hide from the light? What challenges do we face that stop us standing in the light?
- How do our attempts to hide our faults in the darkness affect how the Church / Christianity is portrayed?
- How do we benefit from having friends that we can be honest with, and will hold us accountable?

Sermon Overview (Love the Light)

This is a continuation of Jesus encounter with Nicodemus – having just discussed the concept of being born again. Now we read what is arguably the most popular and quoted Bible verse. Many people know John 3:16, and John Piper considers it *'...the greatest summary of the gospel'*. What is it about this passage that speaks to so many? Why is this verse so popular?

For God So Loved...

This passage speaks to many, and speaks of a hope that we long for. All people have this need, this desire, to be loved – and we seek ways to fill this need. We try to fill our need to be loved with acceptance from those around us. Our desire to be loved can lead us to make ourselves needed by those around us. Wanting people to like us, we hide away our faults and put our best foot forward – so that people would love us. We work hard at being someone worthy of being loved.

Our experiences affect how we respond to the notion of love. Perhaps you have never been told you are loved. Maybe you have been 'loved' on the condition you do things for that person. Maybe the thought of being loved is too terrifying – having that

intimacy, and the expectation you put on yourself. Maybe love is something you are terrified of losing, because your identity in that love is so entwined you don't know who you would be without it. The word love evokes so much in us – and our experience of what love is, and what love has done to us affects how we view the love of God.

We risk defining God, and His love based on our experiences – but God is love (**1 John 4:16b**), and we need to define love based on who God is. He gets to tell us what love is like. If we want to know what real love is like, we need to look to God (*consider 1 John 4:7-18 and 1 Corinthians 13*).

... the World

Jesus is still talking to Nicodemus, an important Pharisee. The Pharisees are expecting God to send His Messiah, to restore Israel and bring power to those who have obediently followed His commands. Nicodemus is expecting the restoration of God's people – but Jesus expands the vision. This is not just for the Jews, but for the World – for every background, class, culture, race. Jesus is fulfilling something bigger than Nicodemus could fathom or understand.

This love does not come because the people looked impressive enough. This isn't because the people of God had earned it. Instead, God sent His Son because He loved. God initiates His plan of salvation – and the demonstration of God's love for us is shown in that Jesus was sent for us. It does not matter what we have done – as God's love came that whoever believes in Him. Our faith doesn't come from what we have done (or the things we have not done). Our faith is only in Jesus Christ, and in that we have hope that we will not perish – but instead have eternal life.

Light has Come

When people see the truth in the gospel, there are two common responses. The first response is to see the light and love the darkness. Afraid to bring anything in to the light that will show our weakness and frailty, we hide in the darkness – only showing God what we think He wants to see. Believing that this love is conditional, we don't want to risk our faults being seen. So, we hide away the bits that that we think will threaten the love of God.

Instead, Jesus calls us to stand in the light – bringing everything into the open. There is no condemnation in God, and Jesus encourages us to bring everything in to the open. If we live in the darkness, hiding away our faults, they take hold. Freedom comes when we stand in the light. Rather than stopping God from loving us, allowing Him to see everything, and allowing our friends to speak into those areas, gives freedom and ability for God to call us to be more like Jesus. Being open and honest, all of us in the light gives us opportunity to grow and live more as God has called us.

From Baptism to Eternity

- John 3:22-36

Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage from Sunday. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

John 3:22-25 – *because water was plentiful there*

- What is your understanding of baptism? What do your friends / family understand about baptism?
- How can we use moments like baptism to start discussions? What other opportunities can we utilise?

John 3:26-29 – *I am not the Christ*

- How can we see a desire for purpose and meaning in the lives of our friends and family?
- In what ways can we attempt to stand in God's place? Where are we tempted to take responsibility for things?

John 3:30-31 – *He must Increase, I must Decrease*

- How can we see Jesus' influence in our lives increase? What signs can we see that God is increasing in our lives?
- What practical ways can we remind ourselves of our identity, and the part we have to play?

John 3:32-36 – *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life*

- How can we be tempted to blur this line that John makes clear (v36)?
- What encouragement and assurance can we take from this verse?
- How does this reminder affect our evangelism, and passion to share God with those around us?

Sermon Overview (From Baptism to Eternity)

This happens just after Jesus encounter with Nicodemus. Jesus has just shared how – because of God's love – it is possible to have a brand new life. It is possible to swap our negative attributes – our condemnation, depression, anxiety – for light and life. This is a free gift from God that washes us clean. After Jesus shared this information, He goes out and baptises people.

Baptism

John writes that Jesus is baptising at Aenon – because water was plentiful (**v23**). When Jesus baptised, there was a lot of water. Unlike infant baptisms, with 'sprinkling' of water, John describes a baptism that points to something else. In Romans, Paul describes baptism as a joining with Christ, in His death, burial, and resurrection (**Romans 6:3-5**). Going down into the water, staying in the water, and then resurrecting from the water – baptism represents us being joined with Jesus. The need to have plenty of water is important – to reflect the burial that it links to.

Baptism prompts discussion. JTB's disciples and a Jew were caught in a discussion about ceremonial washing because of what was happening (**v25**). Conversations arise when people see the church in action – and baptism is a very visible, and unusual, sign that can lead to great discussions. It is important we utilise these opportunities to draw attention towards God.

Identity

John records people were coming to be baptised – constantly. There was a desire to be cleansed – and, deep down, people are still searching for that peace. People search for meaning and purpose – but often in the wrong place. Putting all energy into work and success, raising a family, living a 'perfect' and religious life or even just getting the best / biggest / newest things. We all search for something to satisfy us.

JTB's disciples had sought identity in their popularity, and Jesus's popularity was starting to threaten this. Yet, when they spoke to JTB, we see his identity – and it is something we can learn from. Each of us spend much of our lives considering two questions – 'who am I?', and 'who is God?'. JTB answers these questions (**v 28**). JTB knows he is not the one responsible for the cleansing, for bringing peace and for the salvation of Israel. He also knows he has been sent ahead – as a messenger to point to the One who is responsible. It is important for us to learn our responsibility, and God's responsibility. Often we take responsibility for that which belongs to God - bouncing from guilt and shame, to pride and arrogance. We need someone to cleanse us, to save us – and that cannot come from within.

Transformation

As JTB knows his identity, he no longer needs to take centre stage (**v30**). His purpose on Earth was to prepare a way – to point to Jesus. For Christians, we don't need to fight our own cause – our part is to let Jesus take centre stage in our life. When we know our identity, and God's identity, our life transforms – in such a way that Jesus part in our life increases, and what we bring decreases. What Jesus brings – the fruit of the Spirit, destiny, purpose – all increase. What we bring – sin, shame, guilt – all decrease.

Eternity

There is a clear dividing line (**v36**). For those who believe, there is eternal life and forgiveness. For those who do not believe there is God's wrath. Jesus died on the cross to bridge the gap for those who believe, that we can receive eternal life – a free gift from God that washes us clean. Yet for those who do not believe, and reject Him, there is no life – only God's wrath.

Water for the Thirsty

- John 4:1-30

Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage from Sunday. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

John 4:1-9 – *How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me?*

- How can we see God at work in our circumstances – drawing us closer to Himself?
- What reasons do friends / family give that Christianity / Jesus is not for them?
- What 'social norms' can we be tempted to hide behind and prevent us talking about Jesus?

John 4:10-18 – *whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again*

- '*If you knew...*' – how can we be distracted by immediate needs, and miss God's work in front of us?
- What things can we be tempted to turn to in an attempt to satisfy our needs?
- How does knowing Jesus affect the way we pray?

John 4:19-26 – *an hour is coming when you will worship the Father*

- How do you respond when God highlights '*wounds*' in your life? How can we be tempted to hide our pain?
- What effect does 'Spirit' and 'Truth' have in your worship?

Sermon Overview (Water for the Thirsty)

The Gospel according to John records a number of encounters Jesus had with individuals. We have just read an encounter Jesus had with Nicodemus, and now we read an encounter with a Samaritan woman. Both encounters are affected the reputations they have built up over the years. Jesus interacts with these two individuals personally and there is great contrast with how Jesus deals with them – and yet some remarkable similarities with the core message.

He Left Judea, and Went Again to Galilee (verses 1-6)

Jesus is aware that his reputation is growing, and the Pharisees (who generally do not like Jesus) were hearing about his rising popularity. Something in this prompts Jesus to move on – this isn't the time for Jesus to face the Pharisees or to be arrested – and He travels to Galilee. Jesus had to go through Samaria. It is possible to travel by boat, otherwise it would generally be through Samaria – yet John feels it important to state Jesus '*had to go through Samaria*'. Something compelled Jesus to travel through Samaria – and it led to an important, sovereignly appointed moment. This encounter

A Woman of Samaria Came to Draw Water (verses 7-9)

A Samaritan woman has gone to draw water at the middle of the day. As a local woman, she would know this is the hottest time - when carrying the day's supply of

water would be hard work. She is travelling alone, and vulnerable. This is an unusual encounter, but one that allowed her to meet with Jesus. Jesus has zero regard for social conventions. He is not worried that she is a woman alone at the well – and shares an invite for friendship. His heart is pure, His motive is love.

Jesus is not stopped by the racial difference, nor by the social norms that govern a man's interaction with women. The Samaritan woman is convinced this encounter should not be happening – and society had many reasons they shouldn't be talking. However, Jesus has come for all people, irrespective of background, gender, upbringing or religion.

If You Knew (verses 10-15)

The Samaritan woman does not see anything extraordinary in Jesus – other than the fact that He is talking to her. Standing before God Himself – the Samaritan woman sees a man who looks ordinary. She exists within the realms of what is natural – He doesn't even have a bucket - and so she cannot accept that He could give her water. Jesus wants to satisfy her greatest need with the Living Water, but because she is focussed on her immediate, physical need, she misses the point.

Jesus' promise sounds incredible – a water that conquers death. People may not believe it to be true, but so many want it to be. The Gospel is a message that should prompt people to respond '*give me this water*'. The Samaritan doesn't see a bucket, doesn't know fully – but the offer Jesus has given is so desirable.

What You Have Said is True (verses 16-18)

Jesus doesn't just embrace her and tell her she is forgiven, loved and saved. Jesus turns the conversation and everything become awkward. Jesus doesn't offer an easily palatable gospel that avoids the major issues. Jesus wants to heal and restore – and while sin and brokenness is left in darkness it does not improve. Her attempts to hide her wounds (*'I don't have a husband'*) do not stop Jesus. While it may hurt – Jesus sees, He knows and He wants to bring healing.

An Hour is Coming When You Will Worship (verses 19-26)

The Samaritan woman attempts to divert Jesus – throwing the common Samaritan curve-ball – 'who is right – Samaritan or Jew?'. Jesus isn't caught off-guard. She attempted to avoid the personal pain and hurt, focussing on an ancestral difference and the worship of '*our fathers*'. Jesus returns the discussion back to her - where she will worship.

The Living Water that Jesus is offering – the Holy Spirit – satisfies the spiritual thirst – conquering death and promising eternal life. We can worship in truth (found in the Word of God), and in Spirit (empowered by God Himself).

Food for the Hungry

- John 4:27-42

Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage from Sunday. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

John 4:27 – *Yet no one said, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”.*

- Who can we be tempted to dismiss - who don't fit in to our social norms?
- How can we practice Jesus' new way of relating to others outside our social circles?

John 4:28-30 – *Could this be the Messiah?*

- What 'water jar' are you tempted to hold on to? How does this hinder your ability to meet God's purpose?
- How can our personal experiences of transformed lives help our witness of the Gospel to friends / family?

John 4:31-38 – *Look at the fields, because they are ready for harvest.*

- How can we get distracted by the material / physical needs in our lives or the lives of those around us?
- 'One sows and another reaps' – how can we all play our part in the harvest God has called us to?

John 4:39-42 – *Many Samaritans from that town believed in him.*

- What hurts have you used to disqualify yourself from God's purpose? How has God released you from this?
- How can your transformation provide an example for those around you? How is God choosing to use your witness?

Sermon Overview (Food for the Hungry)

As we continue in John's Gospel, we return to the encounter between the Samaritan woman and Jesus. We have already read about the thirst that this woman has that nothing has been able to satisfy – but Jesus has promised living waters that can satisfy. Through this encounter, Jesus confirms to the woman that He is the Messiah that they are waiting for.

They Were Amazed (verse 27)

The Disciples return from town to find their 'rabbi' alone talking with a Samaritan Woman – and they were aghast. Yet they don't challenge Jesus - they have too much respect for Him. With their limited understanding, there is a belief that Jesus is showing a new way to live – and His interaction with this Samaritan is a new way of relating – where ancient walls of prejudice and hostility are taken down by the grace of God. While society saw a Jew talking to a Samaritan – a breach of societal norm – Jesus saw a precious soul made in the image of God.

The Woman Left Her Water Jar (verses 28-30)

The Samaritan woman left her water jar. She has come to the well for water – and yet after her encounter with Jesus, the water jar is no longer important. Jesus has just affirmed to her that He is the Messiah, and she is exhilarated. She is eager and enthusiastic – not wanting anything to slow her down for running back to the town and telling everyone. This isn't a hesitant, reserved response – she leaves anything that may slow her down in order to share this great news.

She doesn't give an amazing sermon, nor answer all their theological questions. Instead she extends a simple invite. This woman who did everything she could to avoid the crowds, fearful because of the things she has done, encountered the One who knows everything, who accepts, loves and affirms her, and God's perfect love casts out fear. While she knows Jesus is the Messiah, and she invites others to discover for themselves - and they follow her. They have seen a transformed life in this woman – an incredible change – and they are drawn to God.

I Have Food to Eat That You Don't Know About (verses 31-38)

The Disciples are focussed on the material needs in front of them. They are so caught up with the physical needs, that they miss the spiritual nourishment of which Jesus is speaking. The food Jesus speaks of – to do the will of God – satisfies the spiritual need. While the Disciples focussed on the physical, they were mal-nourished from not eating the spiritual food. To do the will of God and finish His work - even His death on the cross - is the food which satisfies Jesus.

Unlike the harvest they are used to – where sowing would need months before there was opportunity to reap – the harvest can come quickly. What Jesus had sown mere hours before, was already producing a harvest – crowds coming up the mountain. While the physical harvest is temporary – as food passes, the harvest from work done for Christ – whether sowing or reaping – produces eternal fruit.

Many More Believed Because of What He Said (verses 39-42)

The Samaritan woman leads a vast crowd to Jesus – a crowd who had already believed he must be the Messiah on account of her witness alone. They were convinced Jesus was the Messiah before they even met Him. Jesus didn't need the Samaritan woman in order to reach the whole town, but He loves to work in partnership – often with the most unlikely (*See 1 Corinthians 1:27-31*). Her transformation, was convincing – and a whole town is transformed as a consequence.

Compare this with Nicodemus (*John 3:1-21*) – a Pharisee concerned for his good reputation, with great credentials and education. He didn't lead crowds to Jesus, and appeared (initially at least) too preoccupied with his good standing in society – unable to leave the weight of his good reputation (his 'water jar') at Jesus' feet.

*This Study Guide has been written and produced by ChristCentral Church
For more resources like this one, please visit: www.christcentral.church/resources*