

John 3:22-36 and 4:1-4

It had been a most unforgettable evening,
even though the lesson hadn't turned
out the way Nicodemus expected.

As a matter of fact, this "**teacher come from
God**" hadn't been what he had expected
either.

Yes, he had come for a theological
discussion, but he had found the very
Fountainhead of knowledge.

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Well the lesson was over, and in a very
short time, Jesus would be leaving the
city of God.

Certainly He would be back, but not as often
as you might expect.

For the most part, His time would be spent
in the cities and villages of Galilee
and Judea.

So as it turned out, Nicodemus had been very
wise in seizing the moment while it
lasted.

Yes, he had made time for Jesus, and the
rewards had been indescribable.

So what about our schedule?

Do we make time to sit at Jesus' feet?

And for that matter, what about Jesus'
schedule?

He has one, you know, and there's a lot to
be done in a very short time.

As He once told His disciples **"The harvest
truly is plenteous, but the labourers
are few."**

Yes, like Nicodemus, we must seize the moment, for --- **"the night cometh, when no man can work."**

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Well, Jesus was on His way.

Leaving the barren fields of Jerusalem behind, He passed on to the harvest.

John 3:22 **"After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized."**

In Jerusalem, Jesus hadn't committed Himself to His followers, for their commitment had only been superficial.

However, here, the people of Judea were quite different, and so was Jesus.

Just as soon as they accepted His teachings, He saw to it that they were baptized.

Obviously, He had found a people who were both honest and sincere.

And Jesus wasn't the only one that had made this discovery.

No doubt being led by the Holy Spirit, John had begun his ministry right here.

Matt. 3:1 **"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea."**

And as a matter of fact, John was back in Judea, when Jesus arrived on the scene.

So at least for a short time, Jesus and John were carrying on parallel campaigns.

And since baptism was such an important part of both their ministries, I think we should take a look at this ordinance.

The first thing that becomes obvious is the fact that this wasn't *Christian* baptism.

No, John's baptism and Christian baptism are completely different.

Christian baptism always comes *after* salvation, and although it has no saving merits of its own, it is a picture of our burial and resurrection with Christ.

On the other hand, John's baptism, and at that particular time, Jesus' baptism, was what you might call *Jewish* baptism. It was an ordinance involving repentance, and it was meant to prepare Israel for their Messiah.

Matt. 3:5-6, **"Then went out to him (that is John) Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, 6: And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins."**

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So now that we have identified these two baptisms, let's get back to John 3:22-24 **"After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized.**

23: And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.

24: For John was not yet cast into prison."

Yes, both Jesus and John were baptizing at the same time and in about the same place.

Was that a problem?

Well, some people thought it was, not the least of which were John's disciples.

And as we look in on them, it immediately becomes obvious that they had been having a bad day.

Yes, they had gotten into an argument with the Jews.

Actually V 25 only says "--- **there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying,**" but I wouldn't be surprised if it had escalated into a full-scale argument.

And somewhere along the line, John's disciples heard the news.

Yes, Jesus was baptizing in Judea.

I don't really know who told them, but I wouldn't be surprised if it was the Jews.

After all, the religious leaders had never accepted John's baptism, and they

wouldn't have missed an opportunity to rub it in.

Oh, haven't you heard? Jesus is baptizing right in this area, and He's getting a bigger crowd than you are.

Now wouldn't that make you mad?

V 26 **"And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him."**

Did you notice the bias here?

They called their leader Rabbi, while Jesus didn't seem to have a name.

No, they simply referred to Jesus as --- **"he that was with thee beyond Jordan."**

And as far as they were concerned, Jesus was with John, not John with Jesus.

Yes, they had completely forgotten the fact that John was no more than Jesus' herald.

And although I'm sure Jesus appreciated him, John wasn't even His prime witness.

In fact, in John 5:36, Jesus said "--- **I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me."**

However, John's disciples were quite angry with Jesus.

After you gave him that wonderful introduction, He's trying to take over!

And not only had John introduced Him to Israel, but he had baptized Him, which, in their eyes, would make Him one of John's disciples.

Of course, their evaluation was completely
ridiculous.

If they had only taken time to recall John's
words, they would have realized that
Jesus was **"the Son of God"** and **"the
Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin
of the world."**

Isn't it amazing how anger can twist up your
thinking?

Obviously, the time had come to straighten
them out.

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However, we mustn't be too hard on John's
disciples.

First of all, they had had a really bad day,
and usually that's when we make our
biggest mistakes.

And as we have already mentioned, Jesus'
baptism had been a little confusing.

So why did He do it?

Why did Jesus allow Himself to be baptized
by their leader?

Apart from the obvious confusion, John's
baptism involved repentance, and Jesus
had nothing to repent of.

Yes, Matthew tells us that the people were
**"baptized of him in Jordan, confessing
their sins."**

So why would the sinless Son of God have
anything to do with that kind of a
baptism?

Certainly John thought it was inappropriate.

In Matthew 3:14 **"--- John forbad him,
saying, I have need to be baptized of
thee, and comest thou to me?"**

But Jesus doesn't make mistakes, and He
wasn't making one now.

Granted, anything that involved a confession of sins wouldn't be appropriate for the Son of God, and basically that was John's point.

However, it would be appropriate for a *Jew*, and that was Jesus' point.

Listen to His explanation --- **"Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness."**

Yes, Jesus was following the principle set down in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 ---

"Abstain from all appearance of evil."

You see, Jesus was a Jew, and under John's ministry, there could only be two kinds of Jews.

Both of them are described in Luke 7:29-30

"And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John."

**30: But the Pharisees and lawyers
rejected the counsel of God against
themselves, being not baptized of him."**

Certainly, as the sinless Son of God, Jesus
could not confess His sins.

But as a Jew, He had the option of taking
His place with those that **"justified
God, being baptized with the baptism of
John"** or aligning Himself with those
that **"rejected the counsel of God
against themselves, being not baptized
of him."**

So nationally speaking, there was no middle
ground.

As He told John, **"it becometh us to fulfill
all righteousness."**

And I don't think it was any coincidence,
that at that particular moment, God
spoke from heaven saying, **"This is my**

**beloved Son, in whom I am well
pleased."**

And don't worry about those angry disciples.

John will straighten them out.

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However, John had his work cut out for him.

His disciples had begun their day by

fighting with the Jews, and now they
were accusing Jesus of using their
leader's personal trademark.

Yes, something had to be done!

So in V 27-30 John lays it on the line "---

**A man can receive nothing, except it be
given him from heaven.**

**28: Ye yourselves bear me witness, that
I said, I am not the Christ, but that I
am sent before him.**

**29: He that hath the bride is the
bridegroom: but the friend of the**

bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.

30: He must increase, but I must decrease."

Yes, my disciples, "my joy therefore is fulfilled."

Everything is going according to plan. Maybe not according to your plans, but it is going according to God's plan.

*You see, "**He must increase, but I must decrease.**" It's my purpose, not my fear.*

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And shouldn't it be our highest purpose also?

Certainly it was Paul's.

In Galatians 2:20, he said **"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me:"**

Yes, John had it right, and before the day was out, he would make sure that his disciples had it right also.

V 31-32 **"He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. 32: And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony."**

Wasn't that about the same information that Jesus shared with Nicodemus?

Let's take a moment to check it out.

In V 31, John carefully points out the difference between Jesus and the average man. --- **"He that cometh from**

above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all."

And that's the very point that Jesus made in V 13 --- **"And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."**

Yes, even Nicodemus, with all his religious training, was not qualified to critique Jesus' statements.

And even John, who had gotten his instructions from heaven, was nothing more than an earthbound man.

As he told his disciples, **"he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth"**.

On the other hand, Jesus is God

He **"came down from heaven"** and He **"is above all."**

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And notice the parallel reasoning in V 11 and V 32.

In V 11, Jesus draws attention to His own divine authority and Nicodemus's unwillingness to accept it --- **"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness."**

In V 32 John tells His disciples much the same thing --- **"And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony."**

So both Nicodemus and John's disciples needed to get their thinking straight lest they end up on the wrong side of God's *great divide*.

Yes, it's a serious business, and in V 18,
Jesus warns Nicodemus that --- **"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."**

And again in V 33, John tells his disciples,
"He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true."

It's an earthly decision that affects our
eternal destiny.

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And then John continues in V 34, **"For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him."**

Yes, Jesus is Immanuel. He is God with us.

If we reject Him, we automatically reject
God.

And because He is Deity "-- **God giveth not
the Spirit by measure unto him.**"

Certainly God gave the Spirit to His
prophets during those times of
inspiration, but only then.

However, this was never the case with Jesus.
He wasn't an earth-bound man, temporarily
receiving God's inspiration.

No, when you talked to Jesus, you were
talking to God.

And when He talked to you, you were
listening to God, --- **"For he whom God
hath sent speaketh the words of God:
for God giveth not the Spirit by
measure unto him."**

And here's another reason why we should pay
attention to Jesus --- V 35 tells us

that, **"The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand."**

Yes, **"all things."**

All the works of creation are put under His feet.

All the affairs of redemption are put into His hands.

Angels are His servants.

Devils are His captives.

And He has power over all mankind.

As Psalm 2:7-8 tells us, **"--- Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.**

8: Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."

And not only does He have power over mankind, He will be their final judge.

Jesus made that point very clear in John
5:22 **"For the Father judgeth no man,
but hath committed all judgment unto
the Son:"**

And then, in Ephesians 1:22, we are told
that God has "-- **put all things under
his feet, and gave him to be the head
over all things to the church,
23: Which is his body, the fullness of
him that filleth all in all."**

Also when Jesus commanded us to go "--- **into
all the world, and preach the gospel to
every creature,"** He assured us that
**"All power is given unto me in heaven
and in earth."**

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*Yes, my disciples, Jesus is our leader, not
our competition, for **"The Father loveth***

the Son, and hath given all things into his hand."

So get used to it.

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And then, in V 36, John re-echoes Jesus' words to Nicodemus in V 18.

Remember what Jesus said? --- **"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."**

That was also something that John's disciples needed to know.

So in V 36 he told them --- **"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."**

Yes, John shared much of the same
information with his disciples as Jesus
had.

You would almost think that he had been
listening in on that very private
interview with Nicodemus.

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And did you notice that he also used the
present tense when speaking of
everlasting life?

In V 16 Jesus said --- **"whosoever believeth
in him should not perish, but have
everlasting life."**

And in V 36 John said --- **"He that believeth
on the Son hath everlasting life: and
he that believeth not the Son shall not
see life; but the wrath of God abideth
on him."**

Yes, everlasting life is a present possession, or it's no possession at all.

On the other hand, eternal judgment is reserved for the future, --- **"he that believeth not the Son shall not see life."**

And while we're thinking about God's judgment, let me ask you a question. Is it our sins that send us to hell, or is it something else?

Well, there's no doubt about it, our sins do bring down the judgment of God upon us. But, in spite of that sobering fact, we can't help but notice that there are just as many sinners in heaven as there are in hell.

That's right. In both cases, it's 100%.

Yes, **"all have sinned, and come short of the
glory of God."**

So what makes the difference?

Actually, the question should be *Who makes
the difference?*

And the answer is: Jesus Christ.

As John told his disciples in V 36, -- **"He
that believeth on the Son hath
everlasting life: and he that believeth
not the Son shall not see life; but the
wrath of God abideth on him."**

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Well, it had been an awkward situation, but
now at least John had his disciples on
the same page.

At the right moment, he would fade into the
background, and he would cease to be
their leader.

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However, as we begin Chapter Four, we will find that it wasn't the right moment just yet, and although Jesus was fully aware of the problem, He was going to handle it quite differently.

John 4:1-2 **"When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, 2: (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples)"** -- and I'll stop right there.

Yes, rumours were flying.

What could have been, and should have been, a united effort and a smooth transition, had been turned into a competition.

And this wouldn't be the last time that malicious gossip would hinder the work of God.

So, in spite of the fact that they were
working in harmony, their efforts had
been misunderstood.

So what would Jesus do?

Would He call John over and quietly say, ---
*Look, John, you've done a good job so
far, and I appreciate it, but it's time
for you to move on.*

*As you can plainly see, I'm getting a good
response here, and your continued
presence has become an embarrassment.*

Did He say that?

No, He certainly didn't.

However, He didn't ignore the problem
either.

And here's the big surprise!

V 3 says --- **"He left Judea, and departed
again into Galilee."**

Can you believe it?

Is it possible that the Messiah, and the Creator of all things, stepped aside? And just like those circumstances that had surrounded Jesus' baptism, there was no middle ground here either.

Only this time, there was no middle ground geographically.

No, He couldn't walk a few miles down the road and start all over again.

Because He was the Messiah, His mission-field was Israel, and that meant only Judea and Galilee.

Now Judea, where He was presently located, was in the southern end of Israel, while Galilee was at the extreme north.

On the other hand, Samaria was just next door, but they weren't Jewish.

So literally speaking, there was no middle ground.

No, He couldn't just step aside.

If He wanted to defuse this nasty situation,
He had to leave a thriving work in
Judea, and trek all the way to the
other end of the country.

And that's exactly what He did.

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However, as V 4 points out, He "--- **must
needs go through Samaria.**"

Yes, Samaria was right in the middle,
between His two mission fields.

Of course, He could have crossed the Jordan
and traveled up the other side, but
that would have made His journey a lot
longer.

And even though most Jews would have done
just that, Jesus took the short cut.

Or, to be perfectly correct, He didn't take
the detour.

However, even though Samaria was the shortest way, for the average Jew, it wasn't the pleasantest way --- **"for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans."**

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Let's take a moment to look into Jewish history.

Many years ago, when Israel was taken into captivity, the king of Assyria left a few of the poorer Jews in the land to keep it from growing up wild.

And not only that, but he settled other conquered peoples there also.

It was a good way of keep things under control.

Not surprisingly, these nations intermarried with the original inhabitants, giving

rise to a nation of half-breed Jews called Samaritans.

Eventually the Jews returned, but they were forced to coexist with this new, and as far as they were concerned, inferior people.

Not surprisingly, they didn't get along.

And since the Samaritans were partly Jewish, they worshipped the God of Israel, but in their own way.

In fact, they worshipped Him in Mount Gerizim, while the Jews worshipped God in Jerusalem.

So that was the prevailing situation when Jesus " -- **left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee.**"

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You will notice that V 4 tells us that Jesus
"must needs go through Samaria," not to
Samaria.

No, Samaria wasn't His mission field; it was
simply on the way.

He had been sent to "**the lost sheep of the
house of Israel.**"

So, as far as the disciples were concerned,
they were simply passing through.

"Let's get some food and keep moving."

However, there was another reason for being
there.

You see, Jesus never makes detours, or takes
shortcuts.

He was in Samaria because God wanted Him in
Samaria.

He was there because He had an appointment
to keep.

And, as we will find out next week, it would
be a very *unusual* appointment.