

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Trustworthy

Jesus, the Evangelist

(John 2:12-4:30)

Study #3

Introduction: The training we need...

Over the course of years, I've benefitted from all sorts of training.

I went to Dallas Seminary for training to serve as a pastor. I was trained in gardening by good friends in the church and in car repair by my father-in-law. I still get lots of training in "how-to" stuff - exercise, home fix-ups - online.

You have probably benefitted from all sorts of training in all sorts of like skills.

This morning, we receive training in powerful and loving evangelism from Jesus, the Master Evangelist.

Preview...

Our look into Scripture today will be something of a wild ride, because we're going to cover a lot of ground. Here is where we're going.

¹ FYI - The Bible usually says that people go "**up**" to Jerusalem, even when they are traveling south, due to the elevation gain involved in going to Jerusalem.

² According to Jewish custom at this time, all males Jews living within fifteen miles of Jerusalem were required to go to Jerusalem for Passover. And, of course,

We'll first look at two mighty works of power that validate Jesus' authority. Then, having established His authority, we'll listen as Jesus brings His Good News to two people in two compelling one-on-one conversations.

To set the stage for the first work of power, we watch Jesus leave the village of Cana, where He turned water into wine at the wedding.

[12] After this He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother, and His brothers and His disciples; and they stayed there a few days.

Then, since it was the season of Passover, ***[13]...Jesus went up to Jerusalem.***¹

The springtime Passover festival celebrated the Jews' deliverance from Egypt at the Exodus. Passover consisted of a week-long series of festivities, culminating in the Passover meal.²

Sadly, by Jesus' day, the Passover festival had turned into a sham. He walked into the section of the temple reserved for worship by God-fearing Gentiles (the action that follows took place in what was called "The Court of the Gentiles") and found an unholy mess.³

Two Events Confirm Jesus' Authority (2:13-22; 4:46-54)

Cleansing the Temple (2:13-22)

What Jesus found and what He did at the temple (vv. 14-17)

[14] And within the temple grounds He found those who were selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables.

others went, too. During Passover season, the city was jam packed with pilgrims who had traveled there, some from very great distances.

³ In earlier times, the buying, selling, and exchange of currency took place across the Kidron Valley on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. By Jesus' day, though, the merchandising had moved to the temple precincts.

People needed to buy animals for sacrifice; hence the animals. And people had to pay for the animals with “temple currency;” hence the money-changers who charged exorbitant exchange rates.

These practices made actual worship virtually impossible. So, Jesus did something about it.⁴

[15] And He made a whip of cords, and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. [16] and to those who were selling the doves He said, “Take these things away from here; stop making My Father’s house a place of business.”

What Jesus said to the offended Jews at the temple (vv. 21)

The Jewish leaders challenged Him and asked, ***[18]...“What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?”***

Jesus promised that there would soon be a “***sign***” that would validate His authority. ***[19] Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”***⁵

His resurrection after His “***temple***” (His body) was destroyed would prove His authority.⁶

And, just as with the miracle of the water-into-wine “***sign***,” so here, the noteworthy result is faith. This time, the growth in His disciples’ faith in Jesus’ words and in the Scripture.

[22] So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken.

That was one act of power. We jump over a couple of chapters to see another. In this scene, Jesus was back in the village of Cana. A desperate father approached Him looking for another miracle.

Healing the Son of a Nobleman (4:46-54)

This man - “***a royal official***”⁷ - lived in the nearby city of Capernaum. He wanted Jesus to heal his very sick son.

Knowing through the Cana grapevine what Jesus had done at the wedding, ***[47]...he went to Him and began asking Him to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death.***

Understandably, this father figured that if Jesus was going to perform a miraculous healing, He would have to be present. But no.

[50] Jesus said to Him, “Go; your son is alive.”

I’m impressed that at the word of Jesus, this father turned around, walked out of Cana to go back to Capernaum. He took Jesus at His word. He believed what Jesus said to him.

[51] And as he was now going down, his slaves met him, saying that his son was alive. [52] So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. Then they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” [53] So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said to him, “Your son is alive”; and he himself believed, and his entire household.

For the second time in John’s Gospel, Jesus has performed a “***sign***” - a “***sign***” being a miracle that points past the miracle to who He is. He is the Christ, the Son of God. (See John 20:30-31)

⁴ This is the first of Jesus’ two temple cleansings. He performed the same Messianic act during His life’s last week, again at Passover (Matthew 21:12-17)

⁵ See Mark 14:58 where Jesus’ words were twisted and misapplied at His trial. His accusers used these words against Him and were part of the reason He was unjustly convicted by the Sanhedrin. Ironically, the Herodian temple was finally completed in 64 A.D. - six years before its complete destruction by the Romans in AD 70.

⁶ Jesus was clearly speaking about the temple of His body (Greek: *naos*; refers to the actual dwelling place of God) and not the physical structure of the Herodian temple. (Greek: *hieron*; refers to a physical building)

⁷ This means that he worked for Herod.

Again, the comment John makes at the end here. It's about faith. Faith was birthed in the hearts of people in the home where the "**sign**" occurred. Jesus has proved, again, to be completely trustworthy.

So, we've seen Jesus perform two works of faith-prompting power.⁸ "Sandwiched" between those two works are two of the most powerful conversations of Jesus we have.

Neither Matthew, Mark, nor Luke include either of these chats. John includes them because they fit his purpose for writing, namely, *that all who read will believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing, will have life in His Name.* (John 20:31)

John tells us, first, about Jesus' visit with a man named Nicodemus.

Two Conversations Confirm Jesus Love for People (3:1-21; 4:7-30)

Differences in the Two Conversations

Differences in settings (John 3:1-2a; 4:7)

Nicodemus

[1] Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. [2a] This man came to Jesus at night...

Nicodemus initiated this visit, chose that the visit should be at night, and was the first to speak.⁹

One chapter and (probably) months later, John tells us of another meeting Jesus had, this one was with a woman. The two meetings are a study in contrast.

⁸ One (the temple cleansing) pointed to Jesus' final "**sign**" - His resurrection - while the other (the healing of the nobleman's son) was a "**sign**."

⁹ Among the possibilities for the rationale behind a night visit: (1) Fear that others might have judged him for meeting with Jesus; (2) Being embarrassed to be seen with Jesus; (3) Night was the best time to get Jesus alone, away from the crowds.

The Samaritan woman

[7] A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink."

- We know Nicodemus by name. We don't know the woman's name.
- Jesus met with the man at night; He met the woman at noon (**[4:6] about the sixth hour / noon.**)
- Nicodemus spoke first to Jesus; Jesus opened the conversation with the woman.
- We assume that Jesus met with Nicodemus on Jewish soil; He met with this woman in the region of Samaria.
- Nicodemus sought out Jesus; Jesus sought out this woman (**[4:4] He had to pass through Samaria.**)

So, there were great differences in the settings for these two talks. Even more different were the two people.

Differences in the persons involved (John 3:1, 10; 4:6, 9)

Nicodemus

Again, ***[1] Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.***

To learn that Nicodemus was a Pharisee is to learn a lot.

Jesus didn't get a lot of love from the Pharisees. And, for His part, Jesus had lots of very hard things to say to them.¹⁰

When Jesus lived, the Pharisees were the most orthodox Jewish party. They were popular and well-respected by the Jewish people.

¹⁰ The sect of the Pharisees arose a couple of hundred years before Jesus was born, during the period of the Maccabees. They were the most religiously orthodox and the most popular group of religious leaders in Jesus' day.

Their self-appointed mission was to call Israel to obey the Mosaic Law. If you met a Pharisee, you would have seen him as a very “together” guy.

Sadly, though, the Pharisees cared more about the letter than the spirit of the Law, were more concerned for what people thought about them than they were about what God thought, and were more interested in outward obedience than internal transformation.

And it may be that Nicodemus was the exception to Pharisaic rule.

Maybe he had watched and applauded when Jesus cleansed the temple of the buyers and the sellers. Maybe he had heard some of Jesus’ teaching and found it compelling. Maybe.

At any rate, this Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and “**a ruler of the Jews**” at that. As the conversation with Jesus unfolds, we’ll hear Jesus refer to Nicodemus as “**the teacher of Israel.**” (3:10)

Nicodemus was a highly respected, morally upright ruler of the Jews. And then there was the Samaritan woman.

The Samaritan woman

Jesus was sitting by Jacob’s well around noon just outside the Samaritan city of Sychar. He was alone, having sent His disciples into town to buy supplies.

John tells us that He was tired from the journey and was resting (John 4:6) when a woman approached the well. Jesus spoke to her.

There are several “*unusuals*” in this meeting between Jesus and the woman. For one thing, it was unusual that Jesus spoke to her.

In that culture a lone man would never speak to a solitary woman to whom he wasn’t related. It wasn’t considered proper. Jesus spoke to her, anyway.¹¹

More than simply being a woman, she was a Samaritan woman. John makes sure we know that **[9]...Jews do not associate with Samaritans.**

Her Samaritanism, in the eyes of most Jews, was a mark against her. It marked her as neither Jew nor Gentile. She was unclean, rejected.

And another unusual was that she was at the well collecting water at noon. Why noon?

Normally, village women would draw water from the city well early in the morning to avoid the midday heat.

This woman braved the heat rather than face the scorn of the other women.

We will learn that this woman had a hard past and a hard present. None of the other women wanted to have anything to do with her, nor she with them. She went to the well at noon to avoid them.¹²

Jesus could have conformed to social convention and not spoken to the woman. He could have found a bucket and drawn His own water. He could have waited for the disciples to get back with supplies for a drink.

He could have stuck with propriety but cast propriety to the wind...because eternity was at stake. He asked her for a drink of water.

We’ll leave her story there and now look at the different approaches Jesus took in talking with these two.

Back to Nicodemus, where we listen to his opening words.

¹¹ Edersheim quotes the rabbis of Jesus’ day: “*A man shall not be alone with a woman in an inn, not even with his sister or his daughter, on account of what men*

may think. A man shall not talk with a woman in the street, not even with his own wife, and especially not with another woman, on account of what men may say.”

¹² This is the conclusion of most scholars who study this passage.

Differences in Jesus' approach (John 3:2-12; 4:7, 10-24)

Nicodemus

NICODEMUS BEGAN WITH A COMPLIMENT

[2]...“Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

These are positive, affirming words.¹³ Nicodemus acknowledged the signs that Jesus was doing.¹⁴

After Nicodemus spoke, Jesus spoke. But He didn't respond in kind. He didn't say, *“Thanks, Nicodemus. And I hear wonderful things about the role you play on the Sanhedrin.”*

Jesus instantly went deep and spoke about spiritual matters, eternal things, to this theologian.

JESUS SPOKE IN THEOLOGICAL TERMS

[3] Jesus responded and said to him, “Truly, truly,¹⁵ I say to you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

Nicodemus would have heard **“born again”** and would have immediately thought of what the Jews said Gentiles needed. A do-over. A fresh start. Go back to square one. *“Become a Jew and live right!”*

What would have floored Nicodemus was that Jesus was speaking to him about the need to be **“born again.”**

Nicodemus would have been stunned and confused (and maybe insulted) that Jesus was saying that he, a respected member of the Sanhedrin, had to be born again - that national origin, race, morality, or social status were all irrelevant to entering the kingdom of God.

His question about re-entering his mother's womb was preposterous, of course. It was just to say, *“I don't get it.”*¹⁶

Jesus patiently - as with a child - tried to get through, again.

JESUS BROUGHT NICODEMUS TO DESPERATION

[5] Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.”

The way I take this comment is that Jesus was talking about the two births anyone can experience.

- First, there is the **physical** birth that takes place when a baby enters the world.
- Then, there is a **spiritual** birth that allows entrance into God's kingdom.

But those words were a diagnosis without a prescription. Being **“born again”** isn't something the person being born again is in charge of.

The baby can't **“born”** itself and neither could Nicodemus **“born again”** himself.¹⁷

¹³ In fact, Nicodemus affirms what Jesus will soon say - [16] **“For God so loved the world that He sent His only Son...”**

¹⁴ Nicodemus acknowledged the signs that Jesus was doing. At least he didn't attribute Jesus' miracles to Satan, the way some Pharisees did.

¹⁵ **“Truly, truly...”** is a formula that we will see repeatedly in John's Gospel, and three times in this one passage. It carries the sense, *“Sit up and take notice!”*

¹⁶ Nicodemus' question about re-entering his mother's womb a second time causes me to think that **“born again”** is a preferable way to understand Jesus' term than **“born from above.”** This is certainly what Nicodemus thought Jesus was saying.

¹⁷ We may say, *“The baby comes out when he / she is ready,”* but we do not mean that the baby decides to come out. Outside forces are at work to bring about a birth.

So, this **“ruler of the Jews”** faced a barrier that life status couldn’t climb. And he faced a problem - the need to be born again! - that he couldn’t fix.

Jesus brought Nicodemus to a point of desperation. And He did it by speaking to Nicodemus in a way that he probably hadn’t been spoken to in a long time.

JESUS SPOKE BLUNTLY TO NICODEMUS.

- Jesus pointed out that Nicodemus was unable to understand what He was saying because what He was saying was **“spiritual”** and Nicodemus was **“of the flesh.”** (v. 6)
- He said, **[7] Do not be amazed that I said to you, “You must be born again.”** - implying that Nicodemus should have gotten this.
- Jesus chided Nicodemus for his lack of understanding since he was **“the teacher of Israel.”** (v. 10)
- He told Nicodemus that all that He’s said to this point - about being **“born again”** and about how the Spirit of God moves are just pedestrian, terrestrial, earthly things - **“and you still don’t get it!”** (vv. 11-12)¹⁸

So, an older gentleman approached with a compliment. Jesus responded with eternal truth, which the elderly Nicodemus didn’t get - and Jesus chided him for being the slow student in the class.

Now we switch back and listen to how Jesus engaged with the Samaritan woman and brought the message He most wanted her to hear.

The Samaritan woman

JESUS MADE A CONNECTION (v. 7)

[7] A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give Me a drink.”

Jesus was making a human connection with this woman by making a request.

As we’ve already seen, she was shocked that He would speak to her at all, with her being a Samaritan woman.

And He didn’t back off. He doubled down and kept on the theme of water...with a twist to intrigue her, to draw her in.

JESUS PROMISED HER “LIVING WATER”

[10] Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.”

Jesus claimed that He could give her a drink. But He didn’t offer to draw it from the well, or to sell it to her. The water He had was hers for the asking, hers for the taking.

Her only concerns about this water were practical. **“Mister, you don’t even have a bucket.”** (v. 11)

But the promise of **“living”** water (a term that can refer to fresh, flowing water) has piqued her curiosity.

She asked Him, **[12] “You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well and drank of it himself, and his sons and his cattle.”**

Jesus took that question and ran with it.

[13] “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; [14] but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Jesus was saying that the teaching about the second birth is so elementary to the spiritual life, so foundational, that it can be referred to as an “earthly thing.”

¹⁹ Jesus was not saying that the person who tastes of His water shall never be thirsty again, and that one drink will satisfy forever. It’s better than that. His point

was that the person who drinks of His living water has an eternally renewable resource to meet that ever present thirst for God in the human heart.

Jesus worked off of the assumption that this woman was thirsty. (He assumes that everybody is thirsty for what only God can provide...)

So, just as she's getting eager for Jesus' water, He changed the subject from water to something else altogether.

JESUS REVEALED HIMSELF AS THE ONE WHO KNOWS

[16] He said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."

The dialogue is interesting here. She says she has no husband, which was true, but...there was a story. And Jesus told her story to her.

[4:17]... "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband;' [18] **for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this which you have said is true."**

Notice what is going on here.

Jesus is in a conversation with a woman about *"living water,"* water that only He could give her. To speak of *"living water"* was Jesus' way of talking about the life He gives: eternal life. And whether someone has eternal life is always and only about Jesus.

And here Jesus revealed Himself to this woman as The One who knows about her what no stranger could have known about her.²⁰

He draws attention to her broken, sinful, painful past to assure her that He knows. Everything.

Now Jesus has her undivided attention.

JESUS SPOKE MESSIANICALLY

[19] The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. [20] "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and yet you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one must worship."

²⁰ Like many others, I have thought that Jesus was calling attention to her past to drive her to see her guilt and sin before He shared the good news with her. I now

It is commonly understood that by what the Samaritan woman said here, she was simply deflecting attention away from her sinful past, which Jesus just revealed.

Maybe...

I am more drawn to believe that since she is learning that this Man is clearly more than the weary traveler she took Him to be, she felt safe and free to express her genuine confusions about worship, about Samaritanism vs Judaism.

She was no longer thinking about saving trips to the well, or Jesus' not having a bucket. She's thinking exactly along the lines that Jesus had been directing the conversation to go. She went where He had hoped she would go.

So, he didn't keep the focus on her life, and He didn't double down on her past. He engaged with her worship wonderings.

He clarified that very soon, place wouldn't matter. Worship wouldn't be about where a temple is or isn't. No special city.

[23] "But a time is coming, and even now has arrived, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. [24] God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

THE WOMAN LEARNS THAT JESUS IS THE MESSIAH

Jesus has introduced a radically different way for this woman to think about God.

He has revealed God as a seeking God. Despite the Samaritan woman's hardships, failures, and sins, God is seeking her.

She may have been running away from Him all her life. God was still pursuing her.

believe that the primary point of telling her story to her was to let her know who He was: the Messiah.

The words of this wonderful Counselor are having their effect.

He got personal. He shot straight with her about God's ways. She has turned receptive. She's thirsty for more than H₂O.

[25] The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us."

She makes a declarative statement about the Messiah. But it's more than that.

She expressed a longing for what only Messiah could bring. Clarity. Understanding. Resolution of life's messes. Her messes.

And she has just had a conversation with this Jew unlike any she's ever had with a man.

She didn't dare say it out loud. Her statement just hints at the possibility. *"The Messiah is going to be like... It's not possible that... You're not... Are You...?"* -

And with that, Jesus gossiped her. ***[26] "I who speak to you am He."***

She has all the information about God and Jesus she needs to see Him as trustworthy, the One who will give her ***"living water,"*** the Messiah...

...and she ran back to her village proclaiming to everyone she met that she had just met the Man who knew everything.

Now, let's wrap up our time by seeing how Jesus wrapped up His conversation with Nicodemus.

The "Fits-All" Believe-in-Jesus Gospel (John 3:14-16; 4:25-26)

Nicodemus

Moses' bronze serpent and Jesus' cross (vv. 14-15)

Jesus had left Nicodemus in a desperate heap. He must be ***"born again."*** He needs spiritual life - but he can't provide that for himself.

So, Jesus referred to a story from the Bible that Nicodemus, the Pharisee, the theologian, would have known well.

[14] And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, [15] so that everyone who believes will have eternal life in Him.

Here is the story... (You can find it in Numbers 21.)

After a great military victory against the Canaanites, God's people began to speak ***"against God and Moses,"*** which they actually did a lot when they got tired or hungry or thirsty.

God punished them by sending poisonous snakes into their camp. People were dying right and left from the snakebites.

Then, the Lord prescribed a healing path for those who had been bitten.

He told Moses, ***[Numbers 21:8] "Make a fiery serpent (of bronze) and put it on a flag pole.; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, and looks at it, will live."***

When they heard God's plan, some of the Jews took God seriously, and looked at the serpent. And all who did that, lived.

Now, back to John 3. Jesus says that He will be lifted up just like that bronze serpent, was and that **[15]...“everyone who believes will have** - not just ‘life’ like those did who were snakebit - **eternal life in Him.”**²¹

Then, Jesus spoke further of His mission by tying it to the giving love of God, the Father.²²

The love of God (v. 16)

[16] For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.

I have come to love the clarity and simplicity of Jesus’ words here as time has passed.

In fact, I use it regularly when I’m sharing the good news of Jesus with someone.

I hand my friend a Bible and tell them that I have memorized John 3:16. I ask them to check me on my memory work and then go on to quote the verse.

I say: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him...and goes to church and tries hard to be good and is super generous will not perish, but have eternal life.”*

My friend will typically point out that my memory work needs work, that I added stuff. So, I ask him, so what does the verse say is necessary for someone to have eternal life?

He will look at the verse again and will tell me, *“Believe in Jesus.”*

Got it.

The Apostle John, who wrote an explicitly evangelistic Gospel (see John 20:30-31) included Jesus’ words here about how to have eternal life and the sum total of what is required is, *“Believe in Jesus for eternal life.”*

This is the answer to theologian Nicodemus’ question about being born again. He can’t re-born himself. But he can be persuaded that Jesus is trustworthy to do what He claims to be able to do - save the one who believes in Him.

So, just like the Jews who only needed to look at the bronze serpent lived, when Nicodemus or anybody else believes in Jesus for eternal life, God gives them eternal life.

When someone believes in Jesus, they are justified before God, reconciled with God, will face no condemnation, and are adopted into God’s family as God’s children.

²¹ In what ways is the lifting up of Jesus (on the cross) analogous to the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness? (1). The bronze serpent and the cross both represent God’s judgment on sin. (2). The healing / saving power of God were available only on the basis of faith - not works.

²² Bible scholar John Niemela points out that Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus divides into three sections, highlighting the part that each member of the Trinity plays in final salvation: (1). Born again of the Spirit (3:3-8); (2) The mediation of the Son (3:9-15) (3) The saving plan of the Father (3:16-18)