

“Two Testimonies”

John 3:22 – 4:42

Cheri Bean

This week, we learned about two very unique individuals and their testimony about Jesus Christ, the Messiah. How interesting that God would work through a wild-looking evangelist who dressed in the latest camel-hair fashion, ate strange food, and preached an unusual message. Jesus referred to this man as not only the greatest of the prophets but also the “greatest of any person born of women” (Matthew 11:11).

And who would believe that God would use the testimony of a person who was disenfranchised by her own townspeople? She was discriminated against, hated and certainly treated with gender bias. Her decisions and actions were questionable. She had been married five times and then shared a bed with a man who would not put a ring on her finger. Who would believe that God would use her, a Samaritan woman, to be a missionary to the very townspeople who despised her?

Today we will move through the Judean countryside to find John the Baptist. We will pause to appreciate his character and his devotion to Christ. We will follow Jesus as He leaves Jerusalem and also goes to the Judean countryside where He gains more followers than John the Baptizer.

After preaching to the local community, Jesus decided to return to Jerusalem via Samaria where he encountered and changed the lives of a Samaritan woman and her townspeople forever. We will see that Jesus opened the eyes of His disciples to the souls of those who were ready to be harvested. (John 4:35-37)

And so, we begin in John 3:22. Jesus was traveling through the Judean countryside with His disciples. The text tells us “...He spent time with them and baptized.” Although, John 4:2 tells us, “Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were.” Jesus was surely giving His team hands-on training by getting their feet wet, so to speak, for their new job.

Christian baptism didn’t start until after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. As we heard so eloquently from Maggie in lesson 1, the baptisms that were taking place were baptisms unto repentance to prepare the peoples’ hearts for the Messiah.

After experiencing the dramatic events in Jerusalem—the cleansing of the temple, His confrontation with the religious leaders, and going public with His ministry—I am sure that Jesus was ready to spend time with His disciples away from the hustle and bustle of Jerusalem.

What an awesome experience the disciples must have had as they received instruction at the feet of the Son of God. Jesus poured His life into His men as He discipled them. He invested in their lives. Jesus knew that one day, He would pass the ministry to them and He wanted to ensure that they knew the truth of the Father.

We see in John 3:22-24, that the wilderness of Judea was clearly the Baptizer's territory as he was baptizing near Salim near the northern border of Judea. When "Team Jesus" traveled to this area, Jesus' ministry overlapped John's ministry.

John the Baptizer's wilderness disciples had been engaged in the ministry of baptism, which originated from the Old Testament and the ceremonial washing of Gentile converts. The Pharisees had raised ritual purification to a high art form; and so, it followed that John's baptisms could be considered as unorthodox.

A dispute arose between John's disciples and a Jew over purification rites in verses 25 and 26. This confrontation called attention to a problem. From John's followers' perspective, the multitudes that once flocked to the Baptizer were now going to Jesus. While the specifics of the conversation are not known, we do know that John's disciples left this dispute upset.

In verse 26, they complained to the Baptizer and said, "Look—the one you testified about (Jesus) is baptizing people, and everyone is going to Him!" They were upset that Jesus had a growing ministry and that their ministry was shrinking. People were flocking to Him. John the Baptizer's followers were probably feeling threatened by this and asked themselves, "What about us?"

John's response demonstrated why Jesus considered him the greatest man since Adam. Not only did John avoid following his ego, he corrected his disciples by clarifying three points.

The first point is found in verse 27 which says, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven." John acknowledged that what they were observing was the provision of God. This was all according to God's plan. The Baptizer

informed his disciples that they were not thinking about this in the right way. This was not a competition. God was ordering and directing all things to their appointed end.

The Baptizer shared his second point in verse 28. He stated, “I am not the Messiah, but I am sent ahead of Him.” John must have felt incredulous that his disciples failed to understand that his very purpose for being had always been to introduce Jesus as the Christ and to prepare the way for Him.

John the Baptist makes his third point using an analogy of a wedding. Starting in verse 29, he referred to himself as the “friend of the bridegroom.” According to Dr. Charles Swindoll, “In ancient Near East culture the “friend of the bridegroom” held considerably more responsibility than the “best man” today.” In addition to helping the bridegroom prepare his home for the day when the bride would come to stay, he helped direct the wedding feast at the end of the betrothal period. His most significant duty was to guard the bridal chamber during the feast, especially after the bride had slipped into the room unnoticed by the guests. No one except for the groom was allowed to go near the bridal chamber. When the “friend of the groom” heard the groom’s voice, he stood aside. His joy was complete when the groom arrived.

I love verse 30 which brings us to John the Baptizer’s third point, “He must increase but I must decrease.” John understood that Jesus had to be center stage and he, John the Baptizer, had to fade into the background.

John was okay with that, and honestly, this should be the motto of every born-again believer. **I must decrease and He must increase** in my life, in my heart, my business, and in my relationship with my spouse. I want to see Jesus increase and me decrease in every part of my life.

There’s a problem in making that our motto though. The problem is there’s this little thing called the pride of life. I say little, facetiously. In fact, it is one of the three categories of sin that impacts us all. It keeps us from disappearing in the background because we see the world through a lens of a “Me First Mentality. It’s all about me and I want to be noticed.”

The Apostle John talked about this in his first letter. In 1 John 2:16, we learn: “For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world.”

The final six verses of chapter 3 were not spoken by John the Baptizer. He finished his statements in verse 30. Now in verses 31-36, we have the commentary written by John the Apostle, the author of this gospel account. In these closing verses of chapter 3, he makes three statements:

- 1) "The one who comes from above is above all" (verse 31). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, does not have His origin on earth. While He is completely human in every respect, He is not merely human. He has no beginning because He is of heaven. John is emphasizing the deity of Jesus Christ.
- 2) "He (Jesus) bears witness to what He has seen and heard..." (verse 32). Those who accept His testimony, according to John the Apostle, have certified that God is truthful. For He whom God has sent utters the words of God for He gives the Spirit without limit" (verses 33-34). John is making a fairly simple statement here in these three verses that whoever believes the testimony of God declares that God is true. The converse of that is also the case. Whoever rejects God's Word is calling God a liar. (1 John 5:10-11)

Statement number 3 is contained in verses 35 and 36 and gives a warning to all:

- 3) "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God remains on him."

John the Baptizer was a preacher who lost his congregation; and yet, his joy was complete. Why? He conveyed the message that men are lost without Christ, but they have everlasting life through faith in Christ. What a testimony this man had. He knew that we find the greatest joy in glorifying God and doing His will. Is it any wonder Jesus considered him great?

When our kids were little, we had a living room that we kept clean and orderly in case we had visitors. One day, I was cleaning there and happened upon a hole in the wall and I noticed that there were streaks of popcorn ceiling missing.

We had four very active children who liked to play ball in the house without permission. When Steve and I had the lineup of interrogation to find out who had left their mark upon the living room, one child ran upstairs and hid. He knew his secret had been discovered and his first response was to hide.

Now he is not the only one to respond that way. You will recall that hiding is what Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden and hiding is what the woman we meet in John Chapter 4 seemed to be doing.

In chapter 4, Jesus and His disciples are traveling from Judea to Galilee which was problematic. Samaria was located between Judea and Galilee and Jews hated Samaritans. Samaritans were not just unwelcome neighbors to the Jews, they were despised and there was a deep-rooted animosity between them. The Jews of Jesus' day avoided Samaria by traveling around it, but Jesus walked straight through it on His way home and made sure to stop for lunch.

Verse 4 tells us that Jesus HAD to go through Samaria. This seems like a strange way to put it. It makes it sound that Jesus had no other choice. Technically, He didn't have to go through Samaria. He could have gone around it as most Jews did.

When Jesus and His disciples arrived, the disciples went into town to get some food and Jesus was left alone. He took a seat at a place called Jacob's well, which we learned about last year. And by the way, that well is still being used today. It has been providing people with water for over 4,000 years.

It was at this well that a woman came upon the scene with a jar for water. It was noon – a time when most people would not go to the well, which would be in the heat of the day; nor was it the best time to carry a one-bath jar holding 5 gallons of water, which weighed approximately 40 pounds.

The woman was caught off guard to see a Jewish man and to hear him speak to her. Jesus engaged the woman in conversation. I took note of a repeated cycle in the course of the exchange. Six times He appealed to the woman and six times she attempted to deflect the discussion, but Jesus knew how to reach her. Here is a summary of their conversation:

1. Jesus appealed to her kindness when He asked her for a drink of water. The woman responded defensively, which sounded to me as if she was saying, "Are you crazy? You are a Jewish man, talking to me - a Samaritan woman?"
2. Jesus appealed to her curiosity when He spoke of living water. The woman responded sarcastically when she noted He had nothing with which to draw water. She even had the audacity to ask if He was greater than Jacob.

3. Jesus appealed to her spiritual need for water that would satisfy her thirst forever. The woman focused only on her physical need of drawing water every day.
4. Jesus appealed to her personal interest when He questioned the woman about her husband, and the woman responded with a half-truth that she had no husband when, in fact, she was living with a man.
5. Jesus appealed to her conscience about her immoral living arrangements including the fact that she had been married five times, and the woman raised a controversial, and disconnected issue about where they should worship.
6. In John 4:24, Jesus appealed to her will as He explained that the Father was seeking worshipers who worshiped in Spirit and in truth. The woman tried to delay any decision on her part when she spoke of the Messiah who would come one day.

I just want to pause at this point of the conversation. Don't miss the irony of this next statement: In verse 25, she said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us." What she is saying to Jesus is that when Jesus comes, He will make everything clear. I don't know for sure, but I am fairly certain that Jesus couldn't help but give a slight smile when He said to her, "I, the one speaking to you – I am He."

At this point, I am compelled to share a personal story. When I read those words many years ago, I was a busy mom of four, an educator who was enrolled in classes that would help me "rise" to the next level on the ladder of success, and one who was trying to complete an intense Bible study regimen. You see, I knew I needed time alone with my God and I chose to "squeeze" the Lord of Heaven into my busy schedule. I remember that it was 1:30 in the morning when I was struggling to complete my Bible study, and the Lord changed my life when I read, "Jesus declared, 'I, the one speaking to you' – the one for which you have little time – 'I am He.'"

I literally broke down and wept when I read this beautiful passage and how my Savior compassionately reached out to this broken Samaritan woman and announced Himself full on as the Messiah. I am sure that you have some milestone Jesus moments in your life that have meant so much to you. This is one of mine. I am thankful that I was "assigned this passage." It touches my soul every time I revisit it. Yes, that morning, Jesus touched my soul with those words, and led me to a deeper relationship with Him.

Jesus did not leave the Samaritan woman's story here. She had made a number of false assumptions about Him. Here are some lies that she was believing:

Lie number 1: Jesus wants nothing to do with me. She believed that as a Jewish man, He didn't even want to talk to her. Sometimes, we get to the point where even though we believe in Jesus, we're not sure that He wants anything to do with us.

Lie number 2: Jesus is more interested in religion than me. Did you notice what she did in the conversation? She tried to distract Jesus by drawing Him into an argument about religion. She tried to avoid engagement by talking about theology or its interpretation. Some of us still do that today.

Lie number 3: He's making me an offer that is too good to be true. Jesus offered the woman living water that would forever quench her deepest thirst. Not only was this statement difficult for her to wrap her head around, I am sure it would be hard for her to trust another man who seemed to be promising something more than he could deliver.

When Jesus revealed to her that He was the Messiah, the most incredible thing happened. She believed Him and it changed everything. The woman who had been hiding from her shame and guilt, ran back to town and in verse 29, she told everyone in her village, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" Once she had a sip of the living water, she couldn't help but tell others. She went from believing lies to discovering Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus HAD to go through Samaria. I believe He had this divine appointment with a Samaritan woman. This day in her life, was circled in God's calendar. This is the only time in His entire life when Jesus so voluntarily, so candidly, so clearly told someone that He was the Messiah, the Son of God, and it was to a Samaritan woman with a damaged reputation. When she was especially thirsty, Jesus introduced Himself as the living water – this drink that would forever satisfy her soul and she believed Him.

At the end of the story, Jesus' disciples returned and urged Him to eat (verse 31). Jesus responded, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (verse 34). That's who Jesus is, His meat and His drink – His zeal, His passion – was to do everything that the Father sent Him to do. That included ministering to the people of Samaria and offering them the living water that wells up to eternal life.

There are many lessons in these passages. I would like to review four of them with you before we close.

First of all, I would like to emphasize the statement in John 3:31 that “all authority in Heaven and earth has been given over to the Son.” This is a timely reminder for us to trust God, no matter the distractions. It is so easy for Christians to look at the violence and evil that is happening all over the world, and be distracted from God’s grace and love. I don’t know about you, but when I hear political campaign rhetoric, it makes me a little crazy. When things in our lives are not going well physically, emotionally, relationally, or financially, we can easily be distracted or even doubt that God is in charge. I assure you; God’s plan is still in place! He is still in charge!

Secondly, the woman at the well taught me that I must not underestimate our God. She had made a number of false assumptions about Jesus. Each of those “lies” separated her from the life that God wanted for her.

We must remember what God does best: takes the common and makes it spectacular. He takes a rejected and broken woman and makes her a missionary of the biggest news in history.

When we least expect Jesus in our lives, He shows up. Sometimes, when we are actively trying to avoid anything that would remind us that our lives are not as they should be, we find Jesus waiting in the very place we have run to hide.

We must remain open and expectant of His direction for us each day. The woman at the well opened her heart to Jesus. What He did was huge, but she accepted His love and also a brand-new direction for her life. Let us be used of God as she was.

Third, I focused on the testimony of both John the Baptizer and the Samaritan woman. Both followed their calling to testify that Jesus was the Son of God. Sometimes Christians excuse themselves from witnessing to others by saying that their family or friends aren’t ready to believe. Jesus, however, makes it clear in John 4:35 that there is a continual harvest just waiting to be reaped. If we look around, we will find people who are ready to hear God’s Word. It is always time to share the Gospel and God’s love with whoever will listen.

For some of us, it has been a long, hot, dry summer and it may be time for us to refresh ourselves in Jesus’ love by taking another drink from the fountain of water that springs up into everlasting life.

Someone might object: “I drank of what Jesus offers, and I feel thirsty and empty again.” The answer is simple: drink again! It isn’t a one-time sip of Jesus that satisfies forever, but continual connection with Him. I thank God for People of the Word and the relationship it encourages me to have with my Lord and Savior. After having that refreshing drink, the Holy Spirit will guide us again to share the good news of Jesus Christ. The harvest is ready. We are to go out and gather it!

Finally, I want to share a story of an influential 20th century theologian to illustrate my last point which is about John the Baptizer. The theologian’s name was George Eldon Ladd and he was a professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary where he taught for 30 years. I mention him because of his foundational work in expanding upon the “inaugurated eschatology” concept, which is the belief that we are now living in the end times.

While Ladd was probably a devout Christian, there is one aspect of Ladd’s life and legacy that serves as a cautionary tale. It involves something very destructive - pride.

Ladd desperately wanted to achieve academic respectability. From the moment he joined Fuller Seminary, he had dreams of producing a great literary work that would be influential in the scholarly world. His dreams came true when his book Jesus and the Kingdom was published in 1964.

As the story goes, there was a liberal professor at the University of Chicago who wrote a scathing review of Ladd’s book in which he said Ladd displayed shoddy scholarship. Ladd was devastated and saw himself as an academic failure.

Ten years later according to a student at Fuller Seminary, Ladd published a book that was a major success entitled New Testament Theology. Ladd as an old man ran through the hallways at Fuller waving his \$9,000 royalty check, shouting “I did it! I did it!”

I couldn’t help contrasting the vision of Ladd running the hallways of Fuller waving a check and shouting with the vision of John the Baptizer’s joyful and humble proclamation about Jesus - “He must increase. I must decrease.” I pray that each of us will strive to emulate John the Baptizer’s example of humility and purposeful devotion to Jesus Christ.

The testimonies of John the Baptizer and the Samaritan woman certainly should lead us to think of our own limited time on earth. I will close with two questions for you. Will your **legacy** be, “Although I was imperfect, God allowed me the honor of being a missionary for Him?” And will your **testimony** be: “He told me everything I ever did and he loved me anyway?”