

New Testament History, Literature, and Theology

**Session 18: John: Character Portrayals**

**—Nathaniel, Nicodemus, Samaritan Woman...**

By Dr. Ted Hildebrandt

**A. Review [00:00-1:45]**

**A: Combine A-B; 00:00-8:17; Nathaniel (Jn 1)**

Welcome back to another presentation on the book of John. We've been talking about the person of John and him as the beloved disciple, and him being very Jewish and Palestinian in orientation, and very detailed oriented in terms of times and places. He was very aware of the topography of Palestine. Then last class period we went over basically some major themes that we were talking about in John. The purpose of John is so that we might "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing in his life and his name," and so belief is a big thing. We worked with belief and then we also worked with some of the sign miracles that Jesus did to stimulate belief. One of the sign miracles was Jesus making water into wine. So we took the wedding feast in Cana and Jesus making water into wine in John 2. We talked about wine and what are the various approaches to handling that from a scriptural basis and also from a modern practical basis. Then after that we talked about Jesus as God and John being one of those things that, "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The *logos* [Word] was God. So we showed various ways through Scripture that Jesus Christ is God. It wasn't added later by the church but it was embedded in the early documents, the very earliest documents so the church, Jesus Christ was God. So concerning the Jehovah Witnesses, we talked some about that last time.

**B. Characters in John: Nathaniel (John 1) [1:45-8:17]**

Now what I'd like to do is we're talking about belief now and I would like to see how John records and he's very sensitive to people. Dr. Steve Hunt, now, at Gordon here, is writing a book and in the book on all the characters in John. John seems to be very

sensitive to picking up the fine points of these various characters. So I want to look at some of these characters and see how these characters move from where they were to a stance of belief.

The first individual that I would like to look at in terms of these character portrayals would be Nathaniel. They call him Nathaniel the skeptic, and so what happens is Philip, this is in John 1:45 and following. Now let me just read through the story here and you'll recognize this chapter 1 verse 45: "Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked. 'Come and see,' said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching...." So Nathaniel's initial reaction to Jesus was, he's from Nazareth. Nothing good can come from that town. When Jesus saw Nathaniel approaching, "he said of him, 'Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is nothing false.'" So Jesus picks up on Nathaniel and kind of breaks into his world and flatters him. He says something not flattering in a bad sense, but telling him, actually "here's a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false." Jesus didn't say that of many people. Jesus usually said, "Woe onto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." He usually pointed out flaws in people. "Peter you're going to deny me three times," but with Nathaniel he says, "Here is a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false." 'How do you know me,' Nathaniel asked. Jesus answered, 'I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.'"

Now we don't know what was going on under this fig tree, but apparently Nathaniel was under the fig tree and there was something he was thinking about or something was going on in his head, and basically Jesus goes right to it: "I saw you before Philip called you under the fig tree." Then all of a sudden here's Nathaniel the skeptic who kind of profiled Jesus, as being from Nazareth. What he does, he stereotypes Jesus. He's from Nazareth; I've met people from Nazareth they're all like this. He profiles Jesus, and now Jesus breaks into the world of the skeptic, and says, "'I saw you while you were under the fig tree, you are an Israelite in whom there's no guile. I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.' Then Nathaniel declared, 'Rabbi, you are

the son of God. You are the King of Israel.” Do you see the tremendous switch there? Jesus breaks into the skeptics’ world, and he basically tells him two things he can’t make sense out of. And he thinks, “Wow, you know me. It’s incredible you knew that.” Nathaniel then just totally does a flip from “nothing good can come out of Nazareth.” He flips, he declaring, “Rabbi, you are the son of God. You are the king of Israel.” And Jesus said, “You believe.” How does the issue of belief in John, “You believe because I told you, I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.” He then added, “I tell you the truth.” This may be a little hint as far as what was going on under the fig tree. “I tell you the truth that you will see heaven open and angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” Son of Man is, of course, Jesus, how he identifies himself. “I tell you the truth, you will see the heavens open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

Where have we seen these angels going up and down from heaven? Where have we seen that? Jesus is referring to something that we looked at last semester in the Old Testament. Does anybody remember what that was? Yeah, angels ascending and descending, that’s the Jacob’s ladder story. The story of Jacob’s ladder where Jacob at Bethel lays down his head on a rock and he has a dream with these angels ascending and descending, going up and down Jacob’s ladder. We said in the Old Testament it was a ziggurat stairway going up to the top with the house of God at the top, and the angels going up and down. So Jesus breaks into Nathaniel’s world, recognizes his character. Nathaniel’s a little bit stunned at that, and then Jesus puts his finger right on something Nathaniel was thinking. Nathaniel totally flips. When the skeptic finally gets convinced, the skeptic is a person who jumps in with both feet. “Rabbi, you are the son of God.” He jumps in both feet and so you see Jesus handling this skeptic. What are some of the benefits and what are some of the cures of skepticism? There are certain benefits to it. A lot of times skeptics keep things at an arms distance, and so they’re skeptical because they’re non-committal, they’re non-committal. They’re not engaged personally. They keep things safe. If you’re a skeptic, you don’t have to really give yourself to something because if your skeptical you can keep everything out there and you’re safe. So while a

skeptic's position, while it's always viewed as being cutting edge and skeptical, it's actually a very safe position because being a skeptic, you don't have any skin in the game so to speak. When you're a skeptic, everything is safe. You stand back as the great critic. You stand back, disengage and therefore you can criticize everybody else because you're not risking anything, you're not putting your neck out there at all. And so skeptics, but when a skeptic then flips, all of a sudden then from being disengaged, all a sudden now he's engaged and he realizes Jesus is the Christ, the son of God. He totally flips and so this is a neat story there with Nathaniel. This is how in chapter 1 of John Nathaniel comes to know Christ and this is how Jesus stimulates belief in him by telling him these things.

### **C. Nicodemus: the Religious Quester (John 3) [8:17-21:08]**

#### **B: Combine C; 8:17-21:08; Nicodemus (Jn 3)**

Now, here's another one, Nicodemus and he's probably much more famous. This is John chapter 3. I want to reflect back on a guy named Batson. There's a guy who does this, what's called the psychology of religion. It's a whole study a whole discipline, the psych of religion. This Batson guy's down, I believe, at Princeton and traditionally in the psych of religion you get what's called extrinsic religious people--you get intrinsic religious people. Extrinsic religious people are people who find meaning in their religion by external things. So this would be like they find meaning in terms of some groups of people will find meaning in icons and looking at icons externally. Some people would find externally in terms of Bible reading or prayer. External things that you do, going to church services, once, twice, three times, or four times a week. You do some external things and you find meaning for your religion in those external things. And so those would be called extrinsic religious people. They find meaning in things that are out there that they participate in. There are intrinsically motivated people. Intrinsic people would be people that find their religion in very personal private kind of thing inside them. So there's extrinsic and there's intrinsic, An intrinsic person in terms of their personal relationship with God and the meaning that comes in terms of their private religion. So extrinsic and intrinsic and that's traditionally how the psych of religions is broken down.

Batson came up with another category, what he called the quest oriented. Extrinsic, intrinsic and then Batson adds the quester. The quester is the one who's evolving. For this person the religion is a journey, not an extrinsic or intrinsic, but it's--a person's on a quest, the persons on a journey and he does this. What I would like to say is that I think Nicodemus is one of those people. He's a quester. He's one that asks questions, he's not sure, he's exploring; he is going after religion. He's seeking, hoping that he will find and he's those kinds of things.

So John 3:1: "And now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council." So, not only was he a Pharisee, but he was in the Jewish ruling class. This was a person of status, Jewish ruling council. "He came to Jesus at night." Now you've got to understand in John, when John uses light and darkness, John uses this imagery and he makes a big difference between light and darkness. So when Nicodemus comes at night, that's, you're setting a flavor there for John in particular. He says, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one can perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." Now that's pretty incredible. When you think about most of the Pharisees, what did many of the Pharisees say about Jesus? For many of the Pharisees, Jesus did miracles right in front of them. He cast out demons, and what was their conclusion? Their conclusion was, "He cast out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of demons." So, many of the Pharisees saw the miracles of Jesus in their face and even with the miracles in their face, they concluded he was of the devil. Not so with Nicodemus, Nicodemus sees what Jesus does, and he said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can perform the miraculous signs you were going if God were not with him."

In reply Jesus declared. In other words, Nicodemus is quite flattering to Jesus he's saying very positive things here, and no one can do these things except if God is with them. Jesus then is very abrupt back with Nicodemus, it's amazing. In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth. No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again, born from above." Where did that come from? Was Nicodemus asking questions about it, Nicodemus was just talking with Jesus and Jesus replies, "I tell you the truth no

one can see the kingdom except those born again.” Nicodemus then starts asking questions. This shows his quest kind of orientation. When he doesn’t understand something, he’s going to ask a question, “I don’t understand this. What did you mean? How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born.” Nicodemus is very literal. Jesus is saying you got to be born again. He says wait I’m an old man, am I going to crawl into my mother’s womb, that’s impossible. And so how are you going to do this? So Nicodemus doesn’t understand it and he responds to Jesus then by asking questions. Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water in the spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh. Spirit gives birth to the spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying you must be born again. The wind blows wherever it pleases. And you hear the sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone that is born of the spirit.” By the way there’s some plays here going on. The word *pneuma* in Greek, spirit and wind can be the same word. The word for spirit can also mean breath it can also mean wind. Very similar to the Hebrew word, actually *ruah* in the Old Testament has exactly, similar semantic fields, it can be spirit, it can be wind, or it can mean breath. And so Jesus words are playing with that.

And then he comes down, “‘so it is with everyone who is born of the spirit,’ ‘how can this be?’ Nicodemus asked.” And then Jesus comes straight at him, “‘You are Israel’s teacher?’ Said Jesus. ‘And you do not understand these things? I tell you truth, we speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe. How then will you then believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone up into heaven except the one who came from heaven, the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.’” So here again do you see what Jesus is doing? With Nathaniel, what did Jesus do? Jesus took Nathaniel back to Jacob’s ladder and angels ascending and descending and I’m not God, but I’m the Son of Man, and he took him back to the Jacob story in Genesis. Here, with Nicodemus, he takes him back to Numbers 21 where the serpent is lifted up on a pole. They looked at the serpent, the

serpents were biting and then the people were dying. They looked at the serpent and they lived. So Jesus is now using that passage. So, in both cases both with Nathaniel and with Nicodemus he takes them back to the Old Testament, to imagery and echo's that imagery up into their current situation. And so, "just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son [his unique son], that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him." So whoever believes in him shall not perish. "Whoever believes," this is one of the great passages of whosoever will, a person believing in Jesus Christ gets eternal life. It's through faith and believing in him a person is saved.

And whoever will, whoever does that, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he does not believe in the name of God's one and only son. And this is the verdict, light has come into the world, but men love darkness." Do you get the imagery here? Nicodemus comes at night, "light has come into the world, but men love darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come to the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed, but whoever lives by the truth comes into the light so that it may be seen plainly, that what he does, what he has done, has been done through God." See this kind of light and darkness thing, and Jesus said, the people coming at night, and I think there are implications here for Nicodemus.

Then what happens, it says, "but whoever lives by the truth comes to the light so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." Then the next verse what happens to Nicodemus' response, did Nicodemus believe in Jesus or did he not believe in Jesus? You get this great statement, "For God so loved the world, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life." That is the John 3:16 statement. Did Nicodemus believe then? Was he the "whosoever will" person? Chapter 3 verse 22, the verse just changes topic. After this Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside where he spent some time with them and baptized. Well what in the

world happened to Nicodemus? Did Nicodemus believe or not believe? In John 3, there was no record that Nicodemus believed. It just drops him. He's at the end, Jesus gives a message to Nicodemus about whosoever will. God didn't come into the world to condemn the world but so the world will be saved through him—light and darkness in Nicodemus. And then you expect from Nicodemus some sort of response like Nathaniel where you get a response. “You are the Son of God or something like that from Nathaniel makes a very strong statement. With Nicodemus there was no response. Jesus ends and then the paragraph division is there and Jesus is down Jordan River baptizing people, or his disciples are. So Nicodemus gets dropped. It's really interesting, here is this leader of the Jews, and for the quester, where is the response?

I think there is something going on between chapters 3 and chapter 4 and I'm going to try to relate those two textually. And we'll look how the text dances back and forth between chapter 3 and chapter 4. I think some of this plays into this. But, I wonder whether part of this is that Nicodemus is a quester. He is a quester. So Nicodemus doesn't make a decision on the spot. Different people, what I'm going to try to suggest with all of this is Jesus hits different people and approaches them in different ways to stimulate belief. With the quester you've got to give the person space. He's asking questions, he needs to process this, he's not going to jump in both feet. A skeptic, a skeptic, skeptic, skeptic, Jesus breaks into his world, then he totally jumps in. He's got both feet in or both feet are out. Not with the quester. Quester is the one who kind of plays with his food, and he asks questions and he analyzes and he thinks about it and he ponders it. He's not ready to make a decision on the spot kind of thing. And there is no decision made here and now. We know if you go over to chapter, I believe it is in chapter 19 verse 39. Who shows up after Jesus is dead? Who shows up to take care of his body? It is Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Apparently Nicodemus, who was on the major Jewish council member and I wonder too whether some of the things that we know about what went on in the Jewish Sanhedrin, the council that was condemning Jesus actually came through Nicodemus who was on that council. And so we may have here an inside story largely through Nicodemus, but Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, the rich man who gave his



tomb for Jesus to be buried in. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea show up at the end of the book of John in chapter 19 to bury Jesus. But what's interesting is, here there is no response in chapter 3. We have to wait till chapter 19 verse 39 to find out what happened with Nicodemus. So, different people, different responses, both cases Jesus takes them back to the Old Testament, whether it's Jacob's ladder for Nathaniel, or putting a serpent up on a pole looking and believing and being healed looking and living kind of thing back with Moses. And so Jesus, both times, takes them back.

#### **D. Samaritan Woman at the Well (John 4) [21:08-32:50]**

##### **C: D-E; 21:08-35:23; Woman at the well (Jn. 4)**

Well now what about--this third one: the woman of Samaria. She totally contrasts; first of all she's a woman of Samaria. So you've got Nicodemus, Nicodemus is of the high ruling class, he's a Pharisee and he's in the Jewish council. Here you've got a woman who's from Samaria, she's not just a regular run of the mill woman; she's a Samaritan woman. So she's the lowest of the low, we've said before that there is tension between the Jews and the Samaritans. She's an outsider, whereas Nicodemus is an insider. He's Jewish, he's very Jewish and the leader of the Jews. Here now you've got a total outsider with this woman of Samaria. It's interesting to watch how Jesus dances with her. With Nicodemus, Nicodemus comes in, Jesus sure great teacher of God and all these nice things. Jesus says, "You have got to be born again." Jesus is really abrupt with Nicodemus and right in his face. And then, "you do not understand all these things?" What's one of the problems Nicodemus has? He's a great teacher in Israel and he comes to Jesus and Jesus says you don't understand these things. So Nicodemus has got to say, "No, I don't understand." What's really hard for a leader to say is, "I don't know." So Jesus kind of pushes him to say it. Then Jesus says, "You know you're this big honcho, and you don't even know some of these basic things." I think what happens is you've got to be humble. So Nicodemus has got to get off his high horse and realize, "I don't know these things you're talking about." I know when I first started teaching I was really intimidated. I was terrified that a student would ask me a question that I wouldn't know

the answer to it. And now, as I've taught for years, now when students ask me questions, I usually make up answers on the spot. I'm quicker on my feet and understand things more so I can make things up. But notice, I said, "I make things up," and if I'm really honest with my students, and I try to be, a lot of times I say, the first thing out of my mouth is "I don't know the answer to that question," if they've asked a really good and hard question. I don't know, but then I'll tell them, I'll make something up because, I'm creative and think about things a lot so, but anyways saying, "I don't know" is really an important thing for a leader and for a teacher to be able to say and let it sit that way.

But now what about this woman of Samaria? Let me read through the story here. Now, "he had to go Samaria, so he came down to a town in Samaria called, Sychar. Now this is where Jacob's well is at, Jacob went into the land of Palestine and had a well there. Near the plot of ground, Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour." Remember how I told you that John pulls in these details. "It was about the sixth hour," so it's about noon now and so it's right there in the afternoon. They start their day by the way in the morning at 6 o'clock when the sun comes up. Their day starts when the sun rises. So it would be 6 o'clock to noon, sixth hour. When the Samaritan woman came to draw water Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" So, Jesus asks her not any philosophical questions or anything, he simply asks her for a drink of water. He's thirsty; he's tired; "can I have a drink of water?" His disciples had gone into town to buy food. So there are no disciples, the disciples had gone to town. Jesus is alone with the Samaritan woman.

The Samaritan woman said to him, now Jesus just asked the question, "Can I have a drink of water?" And the woman—now, in Nicodemus' case, Jesus is very abrupt with Nicodemus. Now here it's the woman who's abrupt with Jesus. So the Samaritan woman said to him, "'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (The Jews do not associate with the Samaritans)." Little note in the Bible, "(the Jews do not associate with the Samaritans)." "'So how can you ask me for a drink when you're a Jew and I'm unclean? I'm a Samaritan woman.'" So she is very abrupt right in

Jesus' face coming back on this, Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it was, who it is that asks for you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

Now this phrase "living water," if you are Jewish, and Jesus was speaking Aramaic obviously, it would be *mayim hayim*, and you all know that *hayim* the Jewish people when they want to do a toast, they say *L'hayim*. *L'hayim* means "to life." So, *mayim hayim* is living water. Jesus is talking about *mayim hayim* living water. Today when you say "living water," that means "running water." Now she's going to a well to get water, Jesus is saying, "I can give you living water." "'Sir,' the woman said, 'You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater.'--Now check this out, she's getting hints here. "Are you greater than our father Jacob? Who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons," Jacob's sons, who are the twelve tribes of Israel, "as also did his sons and his flocks and his herds." Jesus answered, "'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I will give, will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up into eternal life.'" Do you see how John keeps doing this eternal life theme? "The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water so I won't get thirsty and keep coming to draw water. I'm coming here to draw water.'" The woman says, "That's great. I don't want to be out here hauling water all the time. This guy can give me water; I'll never get thirsty again. This would be the best thing ever." This was Jesus' response, she's asking, so he's baited her. "'Give me some of this water so I won't have to come here again,' and then Jesus says, 'you want some of that water?'" Here's his next question, he told her, "Go call your husband and come back." Jesus is breaking into this woman's life now. He's got her hooked, she's interested in this water and Jesus said, "'Go call your husband.' 'I have no husband,' she replied. Jesus says, 'You are right when you say that you have no husband. The fact is you have had five husbands and the man that you have now hooked up with--I mean, the man you have now is not your husband. What you have said is quite true.' 'Sir,' the woman said, 'I can

see that you are a prophet.” How does this guy know I’ve had five husbands and the guy I’m living with now is not my husband? You must be a prophet.

“Our fathers,” and then she throws a theological question at him, again, to put him off, “Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.’ Then Jesus declared, ‘Believe me woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.’” Kind of a prophetic statement there. “You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know for salvation is from the Jews.” Jesus doesn’t back down on his Jewishness. “Yet, a time is coming,” and this is beautiful, “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable,” O, that’s the Westminster confession. “God is a spirit and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.’ The woman then says, ‘I know the Messiah called Christ, [*Messiah* is the Hebrew term, *Christ* is the Greek term] is coming and when he comes he will explain everything to us.” Now, I want you to think about Jesus. People, when Jesus asked, you know, “Who are you Jesus?” Jesus always kind of gives them this answer that’s not quite straight up and says, “Who do people say that I am? You know and he goes off like that. It’s very interesting how he responds to this woman. “I know that the Messiah called the Christ is coming, when he comes he will explain everything.’ And then Jesus declared, [and I want you to find, think about a clearer statement in all of Scripture.] Jesus says, “I who speak to you am he.” She says, “I know when the Messiah, the Christ, comes he’ll do these kind of things. “Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.” That is one of the clearest declarations that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ anywhere in Scripture as is a response to this Samaritan woman’s question. In other words, he doesn’t do it for Nicodemus who is a quester, and so Nicodemus is asking questions and kind of going off and pondering things. The Samaritan woman comes and she says, we know about the Christ and Jesus doesn’t get her to think and ponder. He just right away says, “I the one that’s talking to you, yes, yes that’s who I am. I am the Messiah; I’m the Christ,” a flat out statement. Remember

Caiaphas, “who are you?” And Jesus, beaten in silence won’t tell him exactly and then describes himself as the Son of Man coming from heaven. But here, to the Samaritan woman he says, “I am the Messiah, the Christ.” An incredible statement here.

The Samaritan woman then, what happens? The disciples come back and just then the disciples return and were surprised to find him talking with the woman. But no one asks what do you want, or why are you talking with her. Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come see a man who told me everything I ever did.” What a statement from this woman. The people in the town, small town everybody would have known her. This guy comes out, this guy has told me everything. Could this be the Christ? They came out to the town and they made their way toward him. Meanwhile, the Samaritans come back down in verse 39. “And many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.” This woman, it’s an amazing story. She becomes one of the first missionaries. She goes back and she is the sent one. She is an apostle to the Samaritans and she witnesses to the Samaritans. The disciples go into the town to buy food. They come back with the food; this woman goes into the town. She takes the gospel to the town and it says, “Many of the Samaritans from the town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony. ‘He told me everything I did.’ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them. And he stayed two days and because of his words, many more became believers.” Again, John’s emphasis is on believers and believing. And so here you have this Samaritan woman opening up the Samaritans. By the way, it’s very interesting when we get into the book of Acts. In the book of Acts the Samaritans show up as Christians in the book of Acts, largely possibly coming out of the situation here.

#### **E. Comparison of Nicodemus and the Samaritan Woman Narratives [32:50-35:23]**

So I want to do a little comparison between Nicodemus and this woman of Samaria. I think in chapter 3 and chapter 4 there are these inter-textual relationships going back and forth between them. And so you get for example, Nicodemus is a person of high status. The woman is a person of low status. Nicodemus is very polite to Jesus,

“O, you are a teacher of Israel” and goes off like this. Jesus is abrupt back and is very abrupt. He says, “hey, be born again.” Nicodemus says, “where in the world does that come from?” How do I do that? Jesus is abrupt back and aloof in some senses back. Jesus to the Samaritan woman, Jesus is very polite to the Samaritan woman, “can I have a drink of water?” But the woman is very abrupt. “How do you, yeah, you’re a Jew from down there, how do you ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?” So the woman is very abrupt going back. Nicodemus asked questions, questions and questions. He’s a quester and so he asks questions. Jesus, on the other hand, asked the woman questions. “Would you go get your husband?... O, you had five.” So Jesus asked the woman questions, whereas Nicodemus asked the questions.

In Nicodemus, the story ends with Nicodemus undecided and the story just ends abruptly. You don’t even hear a response from Nicodemus at the end. Jesus just gives this thing about, “For God so loved the world, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” Then the story ends. Nicodemus you don’t know what happened to him. You’ve got to wait till chapter 19 to find out with Nicodemus. He’s a quester. The woman, not only makes statements about Jesus, “you are the Christ,” Jesus says, “That’s who I am. I am the Christ and the Messiah.” The woman becomes a witness for Jesus. She goes into this town of Samaria and the town of Sychar there. She becomes a witness for Jesus. And so this is kind of interesting. Nicodemus, at the end of the book we find out he and Joseph of Arimathea take the body of Christ and he stands up for Jesus. But the Samaritans, in the book of Acts, largely respond possibly to the initial seeds being planted by this Samaritan woman that Jesus talked to. So I think there’s this interaction between chapter 3, the story of Nicodemus, and the story of the Samaritan woman. There’s this play going on between the two of those and kind of an inter-textual play.

## **F. Character Portrayals: The Adulterous Woman [35:23-41:34]**

### **D: Combine F; 35:23-41:34; Adulterous Woman (Jn 8)**

Now, I want to just hit some other characters rather quickly, and then I want to focus on Thomas in more of a complete way. The adulterous woman narrative or

pericope, and let me just kind of do this one out of my head to speed things up here. This is in chapter 7:53 to 8:11, so it's basically the early part of chapter 8. There's this pericope, this story, about the woman caught in adultery. You remember the Pharisees bring this woman who has been caught in adultery. They bring her up to Jesus and Moses, claiming in the law it said this woman's caught in adultery, she should be stoned. What do you say Jesus? They're trying to trap him because if Jesus says stone her and kill her; he's going against the Romans because the Romans did not allow for the killing of someone by the Jews themselves. They had to get it through the approval of the Romans so he would have been, if he says she should be stoned, then he's going against Rome. If he says she shouldn't be stoned, then he's going against Jewish tradition because they're citing Moses who said that she should be stoned. So either way they've got him.

Well what does Jesus do? "The one who is perfect, let him cast the first stone." Then Jesus writes something on the ground and everybody has imagined what Jesus wrote in the ground some suggest Jesus wrote the women that these guys had been shackled up with and all sorts of things that people say Jesus wrote on the ground. But, needless to say, Jesus said, "The one who is perfect, let him cast the first stone." Then that interesting text says, "They all go away, the older to the younger. They all go away, the older to the younger." What's the difference between an old man and the young man? The older man is aware of the complexities of life and wisdom and that kind of thing. The young men maybe pick up the stones and were ready to stone her, were really angry. So she's an adulterous she should die. And he's in heated passion and this heated passion goes to defend the truth. An older person realizes, "hey, there but for the grace of God go I." So the older people go away.

Finally, Jesus is just left with the woman alone. And when the woman looks up let me actually read this because I think this is kind of interesting, the interaction between Jesus and the woman. This is in chapter 8, and let me just go down here. He straightened up and said to them, "If any of you is without sin, let him throw the first stone." He stooped down and wrote on the ground. We don't know what that was. "At this those

who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until Jesus was only left with the woman, still standing there and Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one sir,' she said." And Jesus makes this comment and this is a comment that's really hard I think. "Neither do I condemn you." "Has no one condemned you?' 'No one sir,' she said. 'Neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared, 'Go now. Leave your life of sin.'" Some people have said that this passage basically is this adulterous woman pericope from chapter 7:53 to 8:11 and section, the beginning of chapter 8. If you look in your NIV Bible you'll notice lines going right across, crossing out this pericope. That it is not found in some of our best and earliest manuscripts. The fact of the matter is, the story is found over in Luke in some manuscripts. And in Luke, it was Luke 21 this same story. So this is kind of like a floating pericope or a floating story that seems to float over to Luke and then ends up here in John. So, most people acknowledge that this story is ultimately a legitimate story.

But think about it, you're a monk. Let's suppose you're a monk in the middle ages and you're copying the Bible. You're sworn to celibacy and poverty and so you're sworn to celibacy and all of a sudden you're writing about this adulterous woman. Jesus turns to the woman caught in adultery and says, "neither do I condemn you." You say wait a minute I'm sworn to celibacy and so all of a sudden it's how can Jesus tell this adulterous woman that he doesn't condemn her? I mean she's an adulterous woman. It seems to me I can see monks and other scribal people taking this story out. I cannot see scribes putting this story in; I can, however, see them taking it out. So what I'm suggesting is this story is legitimate. I think actually putting it in like the NIV does and putting the lines they are telling you it's not in our best manuscript, but putting it in because I think it's a legitimate story about Jesus. So, this is the story the adulterous woman, "neither do I condemn you" and it floated around. It's found in different manuscripts in different places, over in Luke 21 actually. So that's the story of the adulterous woman and that textual variant that they have there.

The blind man, its just a beautiful story. This guy he was born blind, Jesus takes mud pies, sticks them on his eyes and tells him to go down to the pool of Siloam, all the



way down from the temple mount down to the pool of Siloam. It was probably about half a mile downhill wandering through all the things, he's blind going with his cane down and getting and washing it off in the pool of Siloam and then coming back to Jesus the guy can see. Then rather than people being excited that this guy can see and there's great irony here. The man who can't see, see's now and Jesus comes and the blind man, ultimately is led to believe in Jesus. The blind man now can see, but the Pharisees who can see are blinded because of their own rejection of Jesus. So you get this play between the blind man seeing and the seeing people not seeing. Anyway, so chapter 9 of John the is the blind man, muddy blind man very interesting story.

### **G. Character Portrayals: Thomas [41:34-50:30]**

#### **E: Combine G-H; 41:34-57:46 Thomas in John**

But I want to focus next on Thomas, as the doubter. This will be our last character portrayal. It bothers me that Thomas is portrayed so negatively. Whenever I say the word Thomas, what's the next word that comes to your mind? Doubting Thomas. I want to look at some other passages where Thomas is referred to here because he comes up in two other passages before that last passage where he doubts. I want to look at him and I want to say that he's gotten a bad wrap it seems to me. So, I want to look at, first of all, John 14 and I want to read then Thomas's reaction to Jesus. This is chapter 14 and I'll start with verse one there. It says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," this is Jesus speaking, "Trust in God, trust also in me. In my father's house are many rooms," in old King James is a little better there. It says, "In my father's house are many mansions." So people think well "in my father's house there are many mansions that's good, we get a mansion in heaven." Right, but actually this is actually more accurate translation "For in my father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." This is a beautiful statement, Jesus coming back and that we may be where he is. "You know the way to the place where I am going."

Now what's the problem? Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going. So how can we know the way?" Thomas is inquisitive. When he doesn't understand something Jesus said, "you all know the way." Thomas says, "wait a minute, Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus then answers Thomas, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." That is one of the most incredible statements in Scripture isn't it? "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Thomas says, "We don't know the way." How did this statement come about, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me." That statement, that incredible statement of Jesus was a response to Thomas's question. So Thomas is inquisitive and Jesus responds, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." So that great statement, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," comes as a response to Thomas's question. So I want to say, "Thank you Thomas for asking that question." John chapter 14 verse 6, one of the greatest statements in all the scriptures. "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

Now let's go back up a little bit. Let's go back into John 11. This is the Lazarus story. Lazarus dies and you remember Mary and Martha and his sisters. They are all upset that Jesus comes in late and all this kind of thing. So the disciples, one of the things we didn't talk about in John 11 is the disciples are scared to go up with Jesus to Bethany. Lazarus is sick and is dying; he's going to die in Bethany. Now where is Bethany? Jerusalem is located here; Bethany is located on the backside of the Mount of Olives. So basically what happens is you come up from Jericho up through the desert and you climb up on the Mount of Olives and that's where Bethany is. Once you go over the ridge and it's only, we're talking couple hundred yards, three four hundred yards. You go over the ridge and then you come right down and there's Jerusalem. When you're up on the Mount of Olives, you're up about 2700 feet. Jerusalem down here is about three or four hundred feet lower. So basically you come down there to the Kidron Valley and then up into the temple mount. So, one of the best views of the temple mount in

Jerusalem is from the Mount of Olives because the Mount of Olives overlooks the temple mount.

So the disciples are scared to death to go to Bethany because Bethany is located within a stones throw to Jerusalem; we're talking half a mile or a mile from Jerusalem, and from the temple. The last time Jesus was in Jerusalem, they were just out to kill them. And so the disciples say, "Jesus, Lazarus, he's in Bethany, but Jesus, Jesus going up there the last time you were up there they tried to kill you. So let's not go up to Jerusalem too prematurely here." So the disciples are scared to go up with Jesus.

Now I want you to listen to Thomas. Does this sound like doubting Thomas? Now here's what Thomas's response is: "'But Rabbi,' they said, 'a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are wanting to go back there?' So he told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead and for your sake I am glad that I was not there so that you may believe.' [Again that emphasis on belief] 'I'm glad I was not there so that you may believe. But let us go to him.'" The disciples are scared. He almost got killed last time. "Then Thomas called Didymus ["twin"] said to the rest of the disciples, 'Let us go also, or let us also go that we may die with him'" (John 11:16). Doubting Thomas, this guy's got courage. He says, "Yeah, Jesus is going up there. He's our friend; he shouldn't go up there alone. We're going to go with him. If he's going to die up there, we're going to die with him. Let's go boys and let's go up with Jesus." This is Thomas the courageous. "We're going to go up and die with Jesus." They were afraid. Thomas gets over his fear with courage and says, "We're going to go die with him. If he goes, we go." That's Thomas.

So you see what I'm saying, Thomas is inquisitive. You know Jesus is "we don't know the way." "I am the way, the truth, and the life." "Jesus, you go up there and you're going to get killed Jesus; we don't want to go up there." Thomas says, "Hey, let's go boys; we're going to die with him. And that's our roll." And this is Thomas.

So what I want to suggest then is now, let's look at the passage in John chapter 20 verse 24. Thomas is the I'm from Missouri show me kind of person. But, he said to them, now this is Thomas. Thomas--Jesus appeared after the resurrection to the disciples.

Thomas wasn't there. He didn't see Jesus but he said to them, "Unless I see," this is John 20:24 and following. But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my fingers where the nails were and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." Again the notion of belief. Thomas says I can't believe the resurrection. I've got to put my finger in the nail prints of his hand. I got to put my hand into his side where the spear went in. A week later, then Jesus shows up, he holds out his hands to Thomas, and he says, "Put your finger here, see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe. Stop doubting and believe." Again, it is belief, belief, belief. How does Thomas believe? Jesus says, "Here, Thomas, put your fingers in. You are a show me kind of person, well that's good. I'm Jesus; I'm going to show you. Here are my hands. The marks are still on my hands."

Does that mean that Jesus' hands had the mark of the crucifixion? This is his resurrected body. Is Jesus going to have the marks of crucifixion on his body for eternity? Apparently so, this is his resurrected body. "Thomas, put your fingers here, put your hand into my side. Stop doubting and believe." So there's this tension between doubt and belief. Jesus rebukes him at that point. Remember how we had Thomas the courageous, and the inquisitive? What's Thomas's response to put your fingers in my hands? Thomas said to him, "My Lord, and my God." What a response! Thomas sees Jesus, Jesus sparks him to believe by offering himself to Thomas and Thomas concludes, "My Lord and my God." What much better statement do you have in all of Scripture for the deity in Christ and who he is: "My Lord and my God."

## **H. Personal Reflections on Thomas [50:30-57:46]**

I think I gained understanding of this passage with Thomas because about five years ago now my father died of cancer. He had pancreatic cancer and the cancer just basically ate him out in his gut. He wanted to die at home, so he didn't want to go into the hospital. He didn't want to be put in an old folks home he was about 74, 75 at the time. I was on sabbatical, so I got to go home to be with him for the last 11 days of his life. The doctors told him he was going to die and I'll never forget, he was waiting for Jesus to

come all his life. He would go to the window almost every day. I can remember my father just all the time, Jesus is coming back today. Jesus might come back today and he'd look with hope for the coming return of Christ. I'd remember as he was going down with cancer his comment to me was, he said, finally, "I guess Jesus is not coming back for me, but I guess I'm going to be with Jesus." So he flipped that hope. That was a big turning point for him and as the cancer got worse, and it did get worse, and it really really got ugly. The people from hospice came and gave us morphine. And people at hospice said--I don't know how to tell you how much respect I have for those people, they were wonderful, absolutely wonderful. He was in a tremendous amount of pain so we had to give him morphine and it was bad, really bad. He would not trust anyone in our family to give him morphine except me. It was like, "Dad, I'm a doctor, but I ain't that kind of doctor." But it was just "No, no, Ted's going to give me the morphine." He knew it was pretty serious stuff. So I was the one who was the designated morphine giver even though I didn't know what I was doing and that became apparent on one night that I'll never forget.

After my father passed, and it was a really bad eleven days, and at certain points the pain was incredible. For about eight months after that, I could not get the death of my father out of my head. It's different when a person dies and they go to the morgue and everything is done and is done for you and things like that, not with this. It was hands on twenty-four/seven, my sister and my mother and I took care of him twenty-four/ seven around the clock the last days. It was bad. As I left there after he was buried, every night for about eight months I'd wake up in the middle of the night I'd wake up dreaming about my father's death, the pain and the things like that. I just, I couldn't get it out of my head. All I could see was his death, all I could see was him dying and it happened over and over and over again every night for about eight months.

I think that gave me some understanding of Thomas. I wonder if Thomas saw the one whom he loved dying of crucifixion, an extremely cruel death, nailed to a cross, asphyxiated as he's gasping for air. And Thomas saw him die and he can't get it out of his head and so it's like the disciples tell him, "Thomas, Thomas he's raised from the

dead.” And Thomas is saying, “Don’t mess with me. Don’t mess with me. I saw him die. I saw him die. Don’t, don’t start this ‘he raised from the dead stuff.’ Jesus is dead. I saw him die.” He can’t get passed the death of Christ because he saw it and it was so deeply implanted in him. I remember after eight months, it was in the month of August. All of a sudden one day, now you’re going to say this sounds really stupid from someone who has taught the Bible all of their life. You say every Sunday, “I believe in God the Father Almighty maker of heaven and earth Jesus Christ his only son our Lord ..., I believe in the resurrection.” All of a sudden one day in the middle of August I woke up and all of a sudden it hit me: there is a resurrection. There is a resurrection. Yes, my father’s death was really, really, really ugly, but there is a resurrection. *Anastasis*, Jesus overcame death by dying. Jesus conquered death by dying himself and rising from the dead, giving us hope. Death is not the victor. Death is the loser. Death is the biggest loser. Death loses. Jesus conquered death. There is a resurrection. How all of a sudden I realized for much of my life, to be honest with you, I don’t know if I really believed in the resurrection. Here when faced with the death of my father I couldn’t move to the resurrection and then all of a sudden, the resurrection dawned on me. And it was like the first time I ever believed there was a resurrection. All of a sudden, the death was gone and the hope of the resurrection was one of the greatest things in my life.

I wonder if Thomas was so focused on the death of Christ that he couldn’t make it to the resurrection. Jesus shows up, “Put your fingers here Thomas,” and Thomas then declares, “My Lord and my God.” So I just want to say be careful throwing stones at people like Thomas because there’s a lot of this when we see people we love die. It changes your whole way of thinking about things. Jesus has conquered death through the resurrection. Jesus raised from the dead and that gives us hope. Thomas said, “My Lord and my God,” and Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed. Because you have seen me, you have believed.” Notice what causes Thomas to believe. Belief is John’s big theme because Thomas saw, he believed. Then Jesus said this, “Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” And you know something, that’s us. That’s us. “Blessed are those

who have not seen, and believed,” and Jesus gives a blessing our way. We’ve not seen, but we believe and we hope. There is a resurrection, *Anastasis*, resurrection, *Anastasis*. Stand up, he stood up the resurrection and we’re celebrating tomorrow, Easter and what great hope for humankind. Death is not the victor, there is a resurrection. Jesus has declared, his disciples saw it. Five hundred people one time saw it. The message of Scripture declares it. We stand in his resurrection with the hope of the resurrection. And we then who have not seen him there is a blessing directed at us from Christ.

Thanks for listening and we’ve got one more, few minutes more on John and then we’re done.

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