

Grace Is for All People Who Believe



SABBATH—JANUARY 17

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: John 2:23–4:42.

MEMORY VERSE: “For God so loved the world that he [God] gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him [God’s Son] shall not perish [die] but have eternal¹ life’ ” (John 3:16, NIV).

IMPORTANT THOUGHT: The grace of God shown on the Cross plays no favorites. “Whoever believes” will find life in Jesus.

GRACE IS FOR ALL PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE. In John 3 and 4, we see two living parables² in the stories about Nicodemus and the Samaritan³ woman. Jesus meets two persons who are very different. Both are different in race, religion, reputation, gender (sex), wealth, location, and behavior. Both meet Jesus in private. Both find the meeting challenging and life changing.

In these two stories, we see a living parable that shows the promise of John 3:16. John 3:16 is perhaps the most beloved verse in the Bible. God loved the world so much that He gave His beloved Son so that “whoever” believes in His Son might not perish but have eternal life. Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman were very different from each other. God does not play favorites (Acts 10:34, 35). No matter who you are, no matter what you have done, no matter what your pedigree,⁴ no matter how other people treat you, Jesus shows no prejudice.⁵ He is truly the “Savior of the world” (John 4:42, NIV).

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 24.

¹eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

²living parables—stories of things that really happened. We use these stories to teach a truth.

³Samaritan—a person from Samaria. The Samaritans and Jews were enemies.

⁴pedigree—who your parents and other relatives are.

⁵prejudice—hating a person because of that person’s skin color, religion, sex; not liking a person because that person is different from you.

SUNDAY—JANUARY 18

WHEN MIRACLES ARE NOT ENOUGH (John 2:23-25).

How did many people at the Pass-over feast come to have “faith” in Jesus? John 2:23.

The book of John uses the word *faith* in more than one way. *Faith* can mean the saving faith in Jesus that the disciples received after He turned the water into wine (John 2:11). The same disciples received an even deeper, more lasting faith after the Cross (John 2:22) and the giving of the Holy Spirit (John 7:39).

But John 2:23-25 describes another type of faith: weak faith that depends on miracles. This faith does not lead to a saving relationship with Jesus. In John 2:23-25, Jesus sees right through some followers’ real reasons for their weak faith.

As a result of His miracles, many people came to believe in Jesus. Are miracles alone enough for someone to have a saving faith in Him? Also read Luke 16:31. Explain your answer.

People sometimes think that if they could see miracles, they would have more faith. But miracles are no cure for weak faith. Miracles sometimes can block true faith. They can prevent us from understanding the deeper parts of a relationship with Jesus.

Even with all the miracles Jesus did throughout His work on earth many people still refused to accept Him. Many people left Him when they saw that He was not going to do everything they wanted Him to do. (Read John 6:51-66 and Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, “The Crisis in Galilee.”) This should tell us that a personal experience with Jesus is important for a saving faith. But faith needs to be more than just experience. Faith needs to be rooted in a living knowledge of who we are, what our condition is, and what Jesus has done in order to save us from being lost.

Does your relationship with Jesus depend on miracles, experience, reason, emotion? Or is your faith more real than just emotions or experience alone? Write a paragraph describing what you think is the basis of your faith.

MONDAY—JANUARY 19

HE CAME BY NIGHT (John 3:1-21).

In the book of John, the stories are living parables teaching spiritual lessons through Jesus. “Nicodemus saw Jesus drive out the buyers and the sellers in the temple.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 168. We see Nicodemus as a living example of a religious leader who had weak faith.

Why does Nicodemus think Jesus is a teacher who has come from God? John 3:2. Also read John 2:23-25.

When Nicodemus says, “We know,” he speaks for himself and for people who saw what Jesus did in the temple but had weak faith anyway (John 2:23-25). “His (Nicodemus’s) words were designed to invite confidence (faith). But they really showed unbelief.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 168.

The Greek word for “night” in John 1:2 does not only mean how dark the night was. The word also points to the darkness in Nicodemus’s soul when he came to Jesus. Nicodemus saw what Jesus had done in the temple. But he did not see the real truth that Jesus is God in human form.

Read Jesus’ answer to Nicodemus in John 3:3-10. Why does Nicodemus’s answer show just how little he knew about the truth in Jesus?

This story shows Jesus reading the heart of another human being (John 2:25). Nicodemus cannot cover up his lack of spiritual knowledge while hiding behind his position as a religious leader. He cannot hide from Jesus.

In the Nicodemus story, John continues the themes taught in John 2. Jesus replaces Nicodemus’s religious ideas with the truth about the new birth.⁶ Jesus points to the Cross as the foundation (basis) for everything He teaches. A person does not enter the kingdom of God by physical birth. Instead, we all need to make a personal decision to believe in and follow Jesus.



Jesus taught Nicodemus about the new birth.

We might do a lot of religious things. But according to today’s lesson, what is the one thing we must have to be saved? Ask yourself which kind of faith you have. If it is not the right kind of faith, what must happen for you to be changed?

TUESDAY—JANUARY 20

THE NEW BIRTH (John 3:3-8).

Nicodemus’s name means “leader of the people.” No doubt he was a reli-

⁶new birth—receiving forgiveness and having the Holy Spirit come to live in your life to guide you; when God forgives your sins and helps you not to sin.

gious man. As a Pharisee,⁷ he took the Bible and his faith seriously. Nicodemus would have made a good neighbor. So Jesus' answer to Nicodemus comes as a surprise.

What do even “good” religious people need in order to enter the kingdom of God? John 3:3, 5. What do you understand this to mean?

Suppose Nicodemus had been in the group of Pharisees who questioned John the Baptist (John 1:24-28). Then he would have known of John's claim that baptism by water would open the way for the coming of the Messiah (the Savior). Nicodemus might be good and religious. But he needed a new birth that could come only from the Messiah through baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Water and the Holy Spirit are closely connected in Jesus' teaching (John 4:10-14, 23, 24; John 7:37-39). And the idea of being “born from above” is connected to the ministry (work) of John the Baptist in John 3:22-36. So Jesus' teaching suggests the need for a double baptism—(1) an “outside” baptism by water and (2) an “inside” baptism by the Holy Spirit.

Read again what Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:3, 5-8, 10-21. How do His words show that it is useless for us to save ourselves? Instead, we should depend fully

upon God for salvation. Also read Isaiah 25:9; Titus 3:5; and Hebrews 9:12.



Moses lifted up the bronze snake to show that Jesus would be lifted up on the cross.

We saw in Sunday's lesson how experience alone (such as seeing miracles) is not enough to have a saving faith. But Jesus' words to Nicodemus show at the same time just how important experience is to the Christian. The new birth is an experience. Jesus is telling Nicodemus, and us, that being religious is not enough. We must experience Jesus' saving power in our lives.

If someone asked you, Have you been born again? how would you answer? If your answer is Yes, what reasons do you have for saying so?

⁷Pharisee—a religious leader of Jesus' day who believed a person must keep God's law to be saved.

WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 21

SHE CAME BY DAY (John 4:1-42).

Read the whole story of Jesus with the woman at the well in John 4:1-42. Then answer these questions:

1. How does the woman at the well at first act toward Jesus?
2. What makes the woman believe Jesus is a prophet?

Put yourself in this woman's place: Here is this stranger from a different religion. He quickly shows that He knows some of her darkest, most personal secrets. No wonder the woman's attitude⁸ changed! It is not Jesus' physical looks that make the woman believe He is the Messiah (Savior). (His physical appear-

ance really meant nothing to her.) His words make her believe! Here again, John points to the theme that Jesus' word is as good as His touch.

What point is Jesus making to the woman in John 4:21-24?

John 4:23, 24 reminds us of the cleansing of the temple in John 2. Jesus has come to earth to show us the proper way to worship God. A local temple favors one people over other people. But worship from the heart is worldwide. Worship from the heart is not tied to any geographical place or group of people. Jesus is making a point that the location of worship is not as important as the attitude of the worshiper. Where we worship is not so important as *whom* we worship.

In the story of the Samaritan woman, John continues the themes of John 2 and 3. Jesus knows all about the Samaritan woman. He reads her heart and her history. And that gives her confidence (faith) to believe in Him. In return, Jesus shows her the true way to worship God.

Jesus tells the woman about her darkest sins. But she is still excited about Jesus and tries to get other people to come to Him! What does her attitude about Jesus tell us about how He must have treated her, even though she sinned? What lessons are here for us in how we work with sinners?

⁸attitude—how you feel and think about something or someone.

THURSDAY—JANUARY 22

NOT RACE NOR GEOGRAPHY
(John 4:42).

From the woman's testimony,⁹ and from their own meeting with Jesus, what did the Samaritans come to believe about Jesus? John 4:42. What else did Jesus teach that made them believe?

"'Savior of the world'" means that salvation is not limited to race or geography. In Jesus, all kinds of peoples, including the hated Samaritans, can claim God's favor. For people who are hated and rejected, this kind of salvation comes as a great and welcome surprise. To people who claim to decide what is right and good, this salvation breaks down bar-



Jesus came to save us all.

riers in a world in which everyone knows their place.

What do the following verses tell us? Acts 10:28; Acts 17:26; Colossians 3:11; 1 John 2:2.

Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman were very different from each other. Nicodemus was a man. The Samaritan was a woman. Nicodemus was a Jew—a proud Pharisee. She was a humble Samaritan. He came by night. She came at noon. He was rich (John 19:39). She was poor (or she would not have been trying to get her own water during the hottest part of the day). He was educated ("the" teacher of Israel [John 3:10]). As a woman in first-century Palestine, she was probably not educated. He was very religious. She was an adulterer. He was highly respected. She was probably hated because of her sins. He was a famous name, known even from writings outside the Bible. She does not have a name. He lived in the Holy City, Jerusalem. She lived in Sychar. We do not know where Sychar was. (*Nelson's Bible Dictionary* says the meaning of the name *Sychar* is not known. Most other Bible dictionaries do not try to explain this name.) Nicodemus was open to believe. But he was slow to accept. The woman was suspicious at first. But she was quick to accept Jesus when she understood who He was.

⁹testimony—what the woman said about Jesus.

In these two stories, we see a living parable of John 3:16. God sent His Son so that “whoever believes” might have eternal life. In Nicodemus and the woman, we see two people who are very different. No matter who you are, your position in life, or your sinful condition, you are welcome to receive Jesus. He is truly the “Savior of the world” (John 4:42).

Thinking about what we have studied today, why is God not so pleased with people who are prejudiced?

FRIDAY—JANUARY 23

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Jesus had begun to break down the wall that separated Jew from Gentile (non-Jew). He also preached salvation to the whole world. Jesus was a Jew. But He mixed freely with Samaritans. He tore down the wall of prejudice that the Pharisees had against the Samaritans. Jesus accepted the friendship of the hated Samaritans. He slept under their roofs and ate with them at their tables. He taught in their streets and treated them with kindness.

“Those people who call themselves Jesus’ followers may hate people who are not popular and sinful. But no matter how and where people are born, Jesus will not turn them away from His love. To every sinful person Jesus says, If you had asked Me, I would have given you living water.

“The gospel invitation is not to be limited to people we like. The message is to be given to all people.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 193, 194.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How can we better understand that our hearts are very sinful? In what kind of setting (or situation) are you most willing to admit your sins to other people? How can the church help?
2. Jesus knew what other people were thinking and feeling. How far can we go in trying to “read” another person’s thoughts and feelings? Why do we need to be very careful not to judge the hearts of other people?

SUMMARY: The all-seeing look of Jesus changes everything. Confident people become uncertain. Hated people find new life. Comfortable churches can be lazy. The Holy Spirit blows where it wills. So there should be no surprise that when Christians become more like Jesus, they shake things up. Jesus made people unhappy at first with His new teachings. In the same way, this “shaking” will not make all Christians happy. Both inside the church and outside the church, many people choose the comfortable security (safety) of a life that is not bothered by the troublesome wind of the Holy Spirit. These Christians oppose the freedom of the Holy Spirit.