

The Gospel of John #2

by: Ronald L. Dart

It's hard to imagine what those first encounters with the mature Jesus were like for the people who saw Him for the first time. I have no reason to imagine that Jesus was in any way remarkable to look at, but I know by any human standard, He must've been a very charismatic person to be around.

John the Baptist knew who He was. John the Baptist knew how important He was. He also understood Jesus' mission, and there is only one way he could have known what he had known, he was told!.

Look, the Lamb of God

When Jesus came walking along the bank of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing, John said, for anyone nearby to hear, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Christian readers take that for granted. I mean we all know what that means. We all know that Jesus is the Lamb of God, but I can't think of anything John could've said that would have been more astonishing to the people who were standing around him and heard him say that, because it assumed, John's statement assumed, the sacrifice of the person of whom he was speaking about. Everyone knew the significance of a lamb that took away sin, that was no surprise, but to look to a human being and say, "Look at Him, He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world."

John the Baptist recognized the necessity of a suffering Messiah and not only a suffering Messiah, but a Messiah who would die. No one seemed to have grasped what John was talking about until much later.

John said in verse 30, "This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who was preferred before me, for He was before me.' {31} "I didn't know him, but that He should be made manifest to Israel," that is the only thing I knew, "therefore I came baptizing with water."

We are in John chapter 1 verse 32, "And John bare record, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him, {33} And I didn't know Him." I just knew this one thing, "He that sent me to baptize with water." (We don't know who that was, but we can presume it was God). "The same said to me, "Upon whom you shall see the Spirit descending and remaining on Him the same as He that baptizes with the Holy Spirit." {34} And I saw," John said, "I saw that happen and I bear record that this is the Son of God.""

Now that is an important statement, because to be a son of God is tantamount to being God. That's the way the Jews understood it, and when Jesus suggested it of Himself, they were ready to stone Him for blasphemy, because He made Himself out to be God.

Continuing in verse 35, "Again the next day after that, John stood, with two of his disciples standing by, {36} And He looked at Jesus walking nearby and he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" {37} And the two disciples heard him speak and they follow Jesus. {38} Jesus turned and saw them behind Him, and said, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi, where do you dwell?" {39} He said to them, "Come and see." So they went and saw where He was staying, and stayed with Him that day, for it was late in the day. {40} One of these men was named Andrew."

Andrew and Peter

We will come to know him later but his brother though, we have all heard of him, his name was Simon Peter.

"The first thing Andrew did was to go find his brother Simon and said, "We have found the Messiah, which is being interpreted the Christ, {42} And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus saw him, He said, "You are Simon, the son of Jonah, you shall be called Cephas," which is interpreted, A Stone."

Now by itself this is all unremarkable. We have nicknames for all of our friends but this particular man, his nickname becomes important in his life.

Philip and Nathaniel

Verse 43 of John 1, "The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and He found Philip, and said to him, "Follow me." {44} Philip was from Bethsaida, the city where Andrew and Peter were from. {45} He found Nathaniel and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses and the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Philip is so excited he has to tell everybody but particularly this one, and Nathaniel said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Now I don't know what kind reputation Nazareth had at that time. We can read between the lines on this and see pretty quickly that Nathaniel didn't think much of the town. The whole thing is so down to earth, the skepticism is natural and it is healthy. Jesus' response to it was gentle and even a little bit funny.

Philip said to him, "Come on and see for yourself." {47} "Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to Him and as he walked toward Him, He said, "Look here, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile."

Jesus is basically recognizing the honesty of this man, who wasn't going to get suckered in by some false messiah.

"Nathanael said to Him, {48} "Where do you know me from?" Jesus answered and said, "Before Philip called you, when you were standing under the fig tree, I saw you."

Now the combination of Jesus, His manner, who He was, the approach He took, and the fact that Nathaniel knew, that no one else would know, that he was standing under a fig tree when his Philip called out to him, and so Jesus having known that, had to be pretty special.

"Nathaniel answered and said in verse 49, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Now when you consider the fact that the Jews will take great umbrage with Jesus when He says that He is the Son of God or makes God His Father, they understood it as a claim of divinity and this recognition by an ordinary Israelite of the time that he was the Son of God becomes really remarkable. How did a simple farmer, as it were, already know this of the Messiah?

Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see bigger things than that." {50} Then Jesus said to him, "Verily verily, I say to you, sometime after this you will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Wedding in Cana

Continuing in John chapter 2 and verse 1, "On the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee."

This is a very short period of time from the time of the initial comments by John until this happened.

"On the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. {2} Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding: {3} And when they wanted wine and didn't have any, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."

Plainly she expected Him to do something about it and I think the NIV is right here in the way they translate Jesus' response. He said, "Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come."

Now implicit to all of this was, He didn't really intend to get started doing this kind of thing right off the bat, but it was his mother, and it seems He just doesn't seem to have been able to say no.

His mother said to the servants, taking Him for granted, {5} "Whatever He tells you to do, you do it."

It is interesting to think, what in the world had He done before? What did she know that we don't know? What was it that gave her such confidence in saying, "You need to do something about the fact that these people don't have any wine at the wedding."

So she said to the servants, "Whatever He says, do it!" {6} "There were six water pots of stone, after the manner of purifying of the Jews, and they contained two or three firkins (20 to 30 gallons) a piece. (These are large, these are big). {7} Jesus said unto them, "Fill the water pots with water, up to the brim." {8} He said to them, "Now draw out and carry it to the governor of the feast," and they did. {9} The ruler of the feast tasted the water that had been made wine and didn't know where it came from. (The servants knew precisely what they had done. They knew what they had put into those water pots and they knew that nobody else had come near them. They knew that when they put the cup in and drew it out they had something entirely different.) {10} The governor of the feast called the bridegroom and said, "Well every man at the beginning does normally set forth good wine and when we've all gotten pretty well sknocked he then brings forth that which is worse, the cheap stuff, but you have kept the good wine until now."

Jesus not only made wine, He made good wine and a lot of it.

"This beginning of miracles Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and He showed forth His glory, and His disciples really began. now to believe on Him."

Interestingly enough, they seem to have believed before, but with this type of thing beginning to happen, of course, sealed it.

Jesus Kept the Passover in Jerusalem

Verse 12 of John 2, "After this He went down to Capernaum. He, His mother, His brothers, His disciples and they continued there not many days. {13} And the Jews' Passover was at hand and Jesus went up to Jerusalem."

Now this is one of the reasons we think John wrote his gospel to a non-Jewish readership and with the non-Jewish readership in mind because he calls it the Jews' Passover. Writing to the Jews he would never have used that expression.

"Jesus" {14} "found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves and the changers of money sitting. {15} He went over and found himself some small chords and He made a whip out of them and He came in there and he wacked across the backside of some of the oxen and the sheep and sent them charging all through the moneychangers in the Temple and created absolute chaos in there and Jesus Himself apparently went and grabbed some of their tables and threw them over {16} And He said to those that sold doves, "Take these things out of here. Don't make my Father's house to house of merchandise."

Basically He's telling them to get this stuff outside and if you are going to do it do it somewhere else. Don't do it here. You can imagine, if you have ever seen pictures of, or experienced and been in a Middle Eastern market, you will know pretty much what this was like.

Verse 17, "His disciples remembered when He did this, that it was written. "The zeal of your house has eaten me up."

There are two references in the Psalms that speak of this and I think the one intended is found in Psalms 119 beginning in verse 137, "Righteous are You O LORD, and upright at all your judgments, {138} Your testimonies that you have commanded are righteous and very faithful. {139} My zeal has consumed me, because my enemies have forgotten your words."

This seems to have been the core of the matter. Jesus' zeal just ate Him up, because those people out there had completely forgotten God's word, that they should not make His house, a house of merchandise. God's house is holy,

Verse 140, "Your word is very pure. Therefore, your servant loves it. {141} I am small and despised. I am not going to forget your precepts {142} Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness. Your law is the truth. {143} Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me, yet your Commandments are my delights. {144} The righteousness of your testimonies is everlasting. Give me understanding and I shall live."

A marvelous Psalm.

Now back to John 2 verse 18, "The Jews after Jesus did this said, "What sign do You give us that You do these things? What is your authority? {19} Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I'll raise it up." The Jews, naturally perplexed, said {20} "Forty six years it took to build this building, and You are going to raise it up in three days?" {21} But He was speaking of the temple of His body."

He was already making references to His resurrection in which He would be raised in three days.

Verse 22, "Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said."

Jesus Did Not Commit Himself

There were a lot of people in Jerusalem at this time and a lot of them believed on the name of Jesus when they saw the miracles He did. But John said something curious about it.

He says in verse 24 of John 2, "Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because he knew all men."

Now I kind of understand that, knowing people the way I know them, and I've been reluctant to commit myself to anybody either, but you know later on Jesus will commit himself to His disciples. We will come to that later in the book of John. He definitely makes a complete commitment to them, He said "Whatever you ask me, I'll do it" (John 14:13). But not yet, not until we've actually gotten down the road and found out some things about these people. Jesus didn't need anyone to testify about man to Him, because He knew what was in man.

Nicodemus and Born Again

Now we come to chapter 3 of John's Gospel. "There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, who was a ruler of the Jews. {2} The same came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher come from God for no man can do these miracles that you do except God be with him."

Now it's hard to know what to make of Nicodemus. He was an important man. It is also clear that he was afraid. He was afraid to come to Jesus in the daytime. I can't take John's "He came to him by night" reference any other way. The burning question in Nicodemus' mind was, whether Jesus was the Messiah? Perhaps he hoped that Jesus was only a teacher come from God. But Jesus' reply to him at this point, I think is very revealing.

Jesus answered in verse 3 and said to him, "Verily, verily I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Now what on earth did Jesus mean by this? And perhaps more to the point, what did Nicodemus make of it. I once wondered about this Scripture because it seems like it's a complete non sequitur (a reply that doesn't follow logically from the previous statement), along comes Nicodemus and said, "We know you are a teacher come from God because nobody can do the miracles that you do unless God is with him." Jesus says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" How is what Jesus said related to what Nicodemus asked? If you think about this for a moment, when Nicodemus came to Jesus, his opening statement is, I think, revealing. I think what happened is, that Jesus interrupted him before he was finished. He said "We know you are a teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles you do except God be with him." I think if Jesus had just sat there and waited and said nothing, the question that was following from Nicodemus would have been, "Are you then the Messiah?" The Messiah question was on everybody's mind and Nicodemus by his coming was implying that question, even in

opening this up by him saying, "We know you are a teacher who has come from God" But you see, in addition to this, the Messiah was the one who was to bring in the kingdom of God, and the hope that beat in every Jewish breast at that time was that the Messiah would come, that He would be their king, that there would be a new kingdom of Israel set up, the Romans would be thrown out, and God would reign through His Messiah here on earth.

So the question that was implicit in all that he was saying. "Are you the Messiah? Is the kingdom right behind you? Have you come to establish it?" And Jesus said , "I am going to have to tell you something, Unless a man is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said in verse 4, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Now whatever linguistics you may want to argue about at this point and some people do, Nicodemus understood Jesus to be talking in terms of a real birth from the womb. In other words, let's go in there again and be born and come out again.

Jesus clarifies in verse 5 and says, "I'm going to tell you the truth, Except a man be born of the water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. {6} That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

We will learn that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, so consequently, the implicit questions, Are you the Messiah? Is the kingdom coming? Are you going to establish the kingdom? It had to be made plain to this man that the Kingdom, that we are talking about here, at this time, is not throwing out the Romans and establishing a new king on the throne of Israel.

Now Jesus went on to say, "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

He is talking about spiritual rebirth, but it's far more than a metaphor. It is spirit. Flesh is one thing and spirit is quite another.

Jesus said in verse 7, "Marvel not that I said to you, you must be born again. {8} The wind blows where it wants to and you hear the sound and you can't tell where it's going, so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Now I don't want to pick an argument with born-again Christians. There is a sense in which a man has a new beginning in life. He repents, he gets baptized and he is forgiven. He is a new creature in Christ, but he is still flesh and blood. He can't blow through the trees like the wind. Metaphorically, baptism is a rebirth. I've had that rebirth myself but that is not what Jesus and Nicodemus were talking about. Jesus is telling him, "You have to be born from the

dead into the spirit and into the kingdom. You have to be spirit to see the kingdom of God, for it is not merely an earthly kingdom.

Nicodemus, in verse 9, answered and said, "How can that be?" {10} "Jesus answered and said to him, "You are a master in Israel and you don't know these things?"

Now I have to conclude from this that Jesus felt that from the Scriptures that this man knew quite well, that he should clearly understand that there is a resurrection from the dead. He should clearly understand that the kingdom of God to come is not merely a mortal kingdom, not just the kingdom of flesh and blood people.

Jesus said, {11} "I've told you these things. We speak what we know. We testify what we have seen and you don't get it. {12} If I've told you earthly things and you don't believe, how are you going to believe Me if I tell you heavenly things? {13} No man has ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven even the Son of Man, which is in heaven. {14} As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, {15} Now whoever believes on Him should not perish but have eternal life."

You have to understand we are not talking about the kingdom here, now, where you will live, grow old and die. It is not something where you get to sit under your own vine or under your fig tree and see your children and your grandchildren and to grow old and gather your feet up in your bed and expire like anybody else. We are talking about a kingdom where people will not die.

It is Through Jesus that the World Might Be Saved

Let's continue in John 3 verse 16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. {17} For God sent not His son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

I really get the feeling that people think God is looking for an excuse to whack people, to condemn them and it is an easy mistake to make. The fact of the matter is, God didn't send his Son to condemn the world. The problem was the world was already condemned. It is through the Son of God that the world might be saved.

"He that believes on Him is not condemned, but he that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

The construction of this is kind of funny in a way, if you don't understand the principle I just told you, that is the world is already condemned, it isn't that God has to do something to

condemn it, and then He goes on to say, ""He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Continuing in verse 19, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

I guess that's normal, when your deeds are evil, you want to stay out of sight,

"For everyone that does evil hates the light, and will not come to the light, lest his deeds be reproved. {21} But he that does the truth (an honest man) comes to the light, so his deeds may come out and be made manifest, that they are done through God." {22} After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there He waited around there for a while and baptized people."

Jesus Must Increase and John Must Decrease

Let's continue in John 3 verse 22, "Jesus and His disciples then came in the land of Judea. He stayed there for quite a while baptizing {23} And John was baptizing not that far away, because there was a lot of water there and people came and were baptized. {25} Then there rose a question between some of disciples of John and some of the the Jews about purifying {26} And they came to John and they said to him, "Rabbi, He that was with you on the other side of Jordan to whom you bear witness. He's now baptizing and everyone is following Him." {27} John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing except it be given to him from heaven. {28} You yourselves, bear witness of me of what I said, I am not the Christ. I am sent before Him. {29} He that has the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands by and hears him, and rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This is my joy therefore it is fulfilled."

In essence what John is saying is, "All you're doing by telling me this is making me happy." You would think that somebody came there to see if they couldn't provoke him a little bit and make him jealous. "Look, here Jesus is getting all the disciples and yours are leaving you in droves," and John says, "Hey, it makes me happy." {30} "He must increase and I must decrease."

Now this is a very unusual man because not too many men think that way.

Verse 31, "He that comes from above is above all. He that is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all."

John had absolutely no question that Jesus came from above. He was not an ordinary man who was endued with power from above, because you see very early in the Christian church, this was a heresy that entered the church, that Jesus was born of Mary. He was an ordinary

man. He was not the Son of God. He was just simply the Son of Man. He became the Son of God when the Holy Spirit came on Him that fell on Him after His baptism.

That's not what John is saying, he is saying that Jesus came down from heaven, and He is above all. The difference is everything.

"And" {32} "what he has seen and what he has heard, that he testifies and nobody seems to want to listen to his testimony. {33} He that hath received his testimony has set his seal that God is true. {34} For He whom God hath sent speaks the words of God: for God gives not the Spirit by measure unto Him."

Wow, what John is saying is, that we human beings who may receive the spirit receive a measure of it, but to Jesus it was poured out without measure.

"The Father loves the son and the Father has given all things into His hand. {36} He that believes on the Son has everlasting life, and he that believes not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides or remains on him."

Now it isn't just because you're a skeptic that the wrath of God abides on you. The truth is that the way this world is living and the way we live our lives, we are under the wrath of God anyhow, but because of those of us who believe in the Son of God, we're going to see life. The wrath of God does not abide on us.

John chapter 4 and verse 1, "When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, {2} (Although Jesus Himself did not baptize, by the way, His disciples did all that), but when all this word was going around, {3} He left Judea and went back up to Galilee. {4} In the process, He had to go up through Samaria {5} and He came to a city in Samaria called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph."

We are casting way back into the Old Testament looking at the history of all the things that happened in those days.

"Jesus" {6} "came to a well about the sixth hour of the day and {7} There was a woman of Samaria who came out the same time to draw water and Jesus, (for reasons of His own decided that He would engage this woman in conversation.) He said to her, "Give Me something to drink." {8} (For His disciples had already gone away and there was nobody there to do it.) {9} The woman of Samaria said to him, "How is it that you being a Jew, asks me for a drink, a woman of Samaria.""

And so one of the oldest problems known to man arises, racial problems. Why would you a Jew speak to me a Samaritan?

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