

The Words of Jesus #4

by: Ronald L. Dart

I doubt if there is any statement of Jesus more widely quoted and better known than His little statement in John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. That whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” But you know, it’s hard to grasp how a first century Jew would have taken that. Listen to the emphasis. “God so loved the world.” Not just the Israelites and not just the Jews. And it is everlasting life we’re talking about here and it’s for whoever believes Him. Not just, for the Jews.

Now it’s difficult looking back from our perspective in the 20th century to the first century. We already have a concept of Jesus. We already have a very strong idea of what He taught, what He believed. And so, we have our Christianity and our ideas and we have attached enormous meaning to this one little verse. But it’s hard to imagine what that verse sounded like or what it meant to the man who first heard it. His name was Nicodemus. He was a leader among the Jewish people. And he had come to Jesus by night. Some think that means it was in order to keep from being seen. That he really wanted to talk to Jesus, but it wasn’t necessarily a politically correct thing to do.

But you see, Judaism was the religion of the Jews. Gentiles were shut out unless they made the complete transition, including circumcision. And circumcision, you’ll have to say, involved a pretty high level of commitment. They had to observe the whole package, including all the oral law and the traditions of the Jews in order to have any access to God at all. And observant Jews would not so much as eat with a gentile. So when Jesus says, “God so loved the world and whosoever believes him,” He had rather broadened the scope of who it was on planet earth that God was interested in. Who was He concerned about? Is this just going to be a Jewish religion? Or is it going to be rather more than that?

Now what Jesus is saying here is not new. The prevailing doctrine of the Jews was not what the Old Testament taught. The prophets, especially Isaiah, spoke quite frankly of the conversion of the gentiles. And the Torah made definite provision for gentiles to worship God and to adore Him and to observe most, if not all of His festivals. So Jesus, in a manner that must have gone over His listeners head, speaks of God loving the whole world and extending salvation to all people.

Nicodemus having heard this, we just don’t know how it registered on him. And Jesus continued, having said that, He said, “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.” Notice, the Jewish

approach was that we are God's people. That we are the ones upon whom God has bestowed this special blessing. And among many Jews, not necessarily all, there was a conception that God was going to condemn the world, all of them, except them. But Jesus said, "No. He was not sent into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."

There is another little, what shall we say, Joker in the deck here. Jesus said, "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved." Who do suppose Nicodemus thought He was talking about? We know Jesus was talking about Himself, but one can't help but wonder what Nicodemus might have thought by that.

Jesus went on to say, "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. Now this is the condemnation. That light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil." The image that comes to mind is going into a kitchen in a house and turning on the light and then suddenly seeing all sorts of cockroaches start scurrying for cover. They are happy to be out in the light, but you turn that light on, those cockroaches are gone like a shot. That's the image that Jesus holds out for us here; of men who were in the world scurrying around in the dark and enjoying themselves in the dark and then light is turned out. Light comes into the world and the light that came into the world was Jesus. He says "Everyone that does evil hates the light. They do not come to the light because their deeds will be reprov'd. But he that does truth comes to the light so that his deeds may be fully manifest, that they are wrought in God."

Well, how you live your life and how you feel about your life, whether you feel that your ways are honest and upright before God, has a great deal to do with how you feel when you come into the presence of God either in worship or in prayer or any other way. And so in this, what must be the longest of the messages or statements that Jesus has made up until this time, He lets us know that man in general, even those of us who are doing evil, we really know that we are wrong and whenever light comes into our presence, we tend to want to shrink back into the dark.

On another occasion, Jesus came to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar. It was near a piece of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph and Jacob's well was there. Now, there is something about Samaria that you ought to know. In the years preceding the fall of Jerusalem, well quite a long time before, the Kingdom of Israel had been divided in two. The northern tribes were headquartered in Samaria in the north and the southern ones in Jerusalem in the south. The ten northern tribes went into captivity quite a long time ahead of Judah in the south. And after they had been carried away into captivity, the King of Assyria, brought in people from the East who were not Israelites and settled them in that land. Now in the earliest years that they were there, they had a big problem with wild beasts. The land was vacant for a while. The animals increased, and so it became dangerous really for people to live there. Their theory was, well, the people of the land do not know the God of the land

because we moved them in from Babylon. So let's teach them the way of the God of the land. And the result of this was the development of a set of scriptures based upon the Pentateuch, upon the Torah. It is called the Samaritan Pentateuch. So these people in the north, sort of knew God and worshiped God and they had their own set of scriptures up there, but they were not Israelites. They were treated with and looked upon with considerable contempt by the Jews. This is where Jesus is when He goes up to Jacob's well.

He was sitting by the well. His disciples had gone into town to buy food, when a woman of the city came near to draw water out of the well. Jesus said to the woman, "Would you give me something to drink?" Now this is unusual. You might not think so, but it really was at the time; (A.) For a Jew to speak to a Samaritan, and (B.) For a man to speak to a woman. Women, you know, they were just servants. They did their thing and they were not as important as men. So the fact that Jesus spoke to this woman was by itself rather unusual. But I think He sensed something in this woman, because she herself is a little unusual.

She comes back and says, "Now wait a minute. How is it that you being a Jew asked drink of me which is a woman of Samaria? For the Jews, like you have no dealings with the Samaritans." Now she was a little ticked off and, perhaps to some extent justifiably so. Because I am sure the Samaritans in generations past had really gotten a little bit weary of the superior attitude of many Jews who happened to come through their country, and, who would not speak with them, would not deal with them, and treated them as scum. So for a Jew to say, "Would you mind giving me a drink".....well, (laughs) it was a provocation to the lady.

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and if you knew who it is that says to you, "Give me a drink," then you would have asked of Him and He would have given you living water." Now you and I again, we've got the whole New Testament, we've got all four gospels and the epistles of Paul. And so, we know what Jesus is talking about here, but she didn't. She didn't have a clue. Now why would Jesus speak to her this way knowing that she was not going to understand what He was talking about? Well He kind of gave her a choice, when He said this back to her. She could say, ha, draw her water out, turn her back on him, and flounce away back into the town. Or she could inquire into what He is talking about, which might give him an opportunity to explain further whatever it was that He wanted to say to her. Well, she took the bait.

As I said earlier, Jesus is apt to use enigmatic statements. He is apt to use leading statements. He almost tempts a person to reply, to come back. And she said, "Sir, you've got nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where are you going to get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us the well? And drank there of himself and his children, and his cattle." It is interesting that she traces her lineage back to Jacob as well, considering that she considers herself at least in some measure, perhaps half-breed, an Israelite. Well Jesus listened and said "Well, whoever drinks of this water will get thirsty again. But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him, will never thirst, because the

water that I shall give him shall be a well of water springing up to everlasting life.” Now I don’t know quite what to make of her response. She may be being sarcastic, or she may have said “Well, I really would like to have that,” for she says to him, “Sir give me this water, so that I am not thirsty and I don’t have to come out here anymore to draw.” That last statement, I will confess, does begin to sound a little bit like she is being sarcastic. Jesus, I think taking her that way said, “Go call your husband and come back.” And the woman answered and said, “I have no husband.” And Jesus said, “Ahh, you have well said, you have no husband, for you have had five husbands. And he whom you now have is not your husband. In that, you spoke the truth.”

Now, the little exchange that leads up to here, as I said, Jesus often speaks enigmatically, He tempts a person to reply. And depending upon the way in which that person comes back to Him and how persistent they are, they learn something. This woman, who was, I think, a little bit sarcastic in coming back to Jesus, and who even was smarting off when she said, “Well give me this water so I don’t have to come back here anymore.” He goes right to the heart of the matter, “Go get your husband,” and when she says, I don’t have one. He said, “That’s the truth.”

The woman then said, “Sir, I perceive you are a prophet.” She was a swift little lady. She realized He was a prophet, because no stranger would have known that she had five husbands. And no stranger would have known that she was shackled up with the man that she was living with at that time. She went on to say, “Our fathers worshiped in this mountain. But you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” She does not give up easy. She is still rankled by the distinctions that Jews draw between themselves and Samaritans. Well, between themselves and the rest of the world, in that time many of them did. And I don’t mean this to be taken in an anti-Semitic way, that the Jews are this way, because the Jews that you meet today are not necessarily. But in that time, a certain segment of the Jewish society was pretty arrogant about their relationship with God. And pretty much put down anyone else who claimed to have that kind of relationship, and she was tired of it.

So she persisted, and she said, “I don’t get this thing with you. You’re a prophet, okay, but I don’t get this thing that our fathers have always worshiped in this mountain and you say that Jerusalem is the place that men have to worship.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman believe me, the hour comes when you shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father.” That the worship of the Father is not a matter of place. “You worship, you know not what. We know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But, the hour comes and now is, when true worshipers, shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth for the Father seeks such to worship him. God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” What a statement.

For what Jesus is doing at this point in time is yanking religion up by its roots. He is saying, forget about this mountain. Forget about that mountain. Forget about places and people. Forget about the physical aspects of all of this, for what God is looking for is a man

who can worship Him anywhere, anytime, from the heart, in truth, for it is truth that God is looking for. Not spin, not angles, not arguments.

Now our little lady listened to Jesus, and then she said to Him, “Well I know that the Messiah comes (which is called Christ), and when He has come He will teach us all things.” It is fascinating that even among the Samaritans, there was this Messianic fever. There was this awareness that the Messiah was coming. This hope for the Messiah, even as throughout all Jerusalem and Judea, there was the hope of the Messiah. And she says, “I know that the Messiah is coming. Well He will teach us and then we will know.” And Jesus said to her, “I that speak to you am He.” I think this is probably the first time that Jesus told anyone outright that He was the Messiah, and He told a woman, a Samaritan, who was argumentative.

Upon this scene came Jesus’ disciples and they marveled that He talked with a woman. (Laughs). They walked to Him and said, “What’s going on here?” This woman is a Samaritan, and a woman!! Yet none of them would say to Him, well, uh Master what are you doing? Why are you talking with her? Well the woman then left her water pot and she went her way into the city. She said to the men of the city, I want you to come see a man who told me all things I ever did. Isn’t this the Christ? He has got to be the Christ. He has to be the Messiah. So they all went out of the city and came to Him.

While all of this was going on, His disciples prayed to Him saying, “Master, eat.” And He said to them, “I have food to eat that you don’t know anything about.” The disciples looked at each other. You know, here again is one of those statements that Jesus is prone to make that is enigmatic. It is almost like a riddle and His disciples are left to figure it out in many cases. They said, “Has anybody brought him something to eat already?” And Jesus then replied and made it clear and said, “My food is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work. This is my food, this is my drink. This is what I live for every day.” You know it is really something and it is natural of course, that human beings are concerned about what goes into their belly. We are concerned about our daily food. We get hungry and we want to eat. If we get hungry, we get faint. So the preoccupation is, well, here Master, let’s have something to eat. But Jesus was so full of His work that food was not important. Then He said to His disciples. “Don’t you say there are yet four months and then comes the harvest?” “I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields for they are white already to harvest.”

Now this is an interesting little metaphor that He uses here, because the disciples would have been looking at the calendar and the crops. And they would have said, “Yeah there is three months until harvest.” And Jesus said, “No, no, no, look around you. The fields already are white to harvest.” What He is talking about here, in His mystical way, is the harvest of people. It is the reaching out to people. It is introducing people to God. Introducing people to Himself. He continued to say, “He that reaps receives wages and gathers fruit unto life eternal that both he that sows and he that reaps may rejoice together. And here in is that saying true: One sows and another reaps. I sent you to reap that, where

upon you bestowed no labor. Other men labored and you have entered into their labors.” What in the world do you mean by that? Well He meant actually that the prophets in times gone by had sewn seeds, the knowledge, the information that had come by these men of old was out there and had been working for generations. And everyone was standing around waiting and saying when is the Messiah coming? I know the Messiah is coming. And when He comes, He will teach us all things. And Jesus said, “I sent you out there to reap, that upon which you had bestowed no labor.” Other men did it. Other men died to do it. And you, well you have entered into their work. I hope you never forget that.

Many of the Samaritans of that city believed on Him, because of the saying of the woman that testified. “Well He told me all I ever did.” And when the Samaritans were come to Him, they besought Him that He would tarry with them. He stayed there for two days. That is something Jews don’t do. They do not hang out with Samaritans. They do not stay in Samaria. They keep going when they get into Samaria. They want to get out the other side of it as fast as possible, but Jesus didn’t. He stayed. And many more believed because of His own word. They said to the woman, “Now we believe. Not because of your saying, for we have heard him ourselves and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the World.” Not just Judea, and not just Jerusalem, but the Savior of all of us.

I keep finding myself mildly frustrated when I read the gospel accounts. I am frustrated a little bit because Jesus was so economical with His words and I am a little frustrated with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, because they did not get them all down. I would have liked very much to know what Jesus talked to the Samaritans about for two days as He stayed with them and talked. Well, we will not know that definitely, although I suspect that we find the message elsewhere. Jesus was an itinerant preacher, and as an itinerant preacher He said the same thing over and over again in different places at different times. He did not have someone wandering around with a tape recorder, spreading each message all over the landscapes so He couldn’t repeat it somewhere else. So, we have, I think, the gist of everything that Jesus said, we just have it spread all over the gospel accounts and we have to go pull it out in the many small statements that Jesus made.

On another occasion, Jesus came into Canaan of Galilee and He encountered a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. And when he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and he asked Him to come down and heal his son, he said, “For he’s at the point of death.” And Jesus said to him, “Except you see signs and wonders, you just aren’t going to believe are you?” It seems a strange comment to make back to a man who has just come to you with perhaps tears in his eyes, that his son is dying and he desperately wants Jesus to come heal him. But Jesus said, I guess you people aren’t going to really believe me unless you see signs and wonders. You won’t really take the message, for the message. And the nobleman said, “Please sir, come down lest my child die.” And Jesus said to him, “Go your way, your son lives.” And the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and he turned around and went home. You know it’s interesting that, in the face of that challenge from Jesus, this very short statement. “Except you see signs and wonders you will not believe will you?” Just that one short statement and “Go your way,

your son lives.” And the man took it and believed it. And as he was now going down, his servants met him and said, “Your son lives.” He inquired of them, the hour when he began to mend. And they said to him, “Yesterday at the 7th hour, the fever left him.” And the father knew that it was at the same hour, in which Jesus said to him, “Your son lives.” So he himself believed and his whole house.

Well, Jesus came down to Nazareth where He had been brought up and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. It was Jesus’ custom. He kept the Sabbath day you know. He was a Sabbath observing Jew. He went into the synagogue every Sabbath day. On this occasion, He stood up to read. It was customary. Any man in the synagogue could stand and read the scriptures, and the scriptures were read standing. It is an interesting difference between our customs and theirs. They read the scriptures when they were standing and they sat down to teach.

Well, there was delivered unto Him, the book of the prophet Isaiah and when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written. He stood up and He read these words to the congregation. Now this is about the words of Jesus that we are talking about here, but He reads these straight out of the Old Testament. “The spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of the sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” He closed the book and handed it back to the servant in the synagogue and He sat down, which was the custom when one was preparing to teach. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him and He said to them, “On this day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” Now isn’t that interesting? He goes back to this and says, “Right now in your presence, this scripture is being fulfilled.” What scripture? Well “The spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me.” The word anointed is unmistakable, that is the word which means Messiah. The Messiah is the anointed one. “He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, to the down trodden.” This is not something that is available only to the exalted or to the rich. “He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are bruised and to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

What is the acceptable year of the Lord? Well the Law of God required that every seven years, that there was a year of release. Captives were turned loose, debts were released and let go. And every, seven times seven, forty nine years were followed by a 50th or Jubilee year in which all captives were set free, all land returned to its original owner, all debts were canceled. Everything was set right. And so Jesus told these men in the synagogue on this day, that this is what His ministry was all about. Well they all bore Him witness. And they all wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth, but they said, “Isn’t this Joseph’s son? Who does he think he is? Who gives him the right to come in here and make that kind of a pronouncement about himself?” These men were setting themselves up as losers.

Until next time, this is Ronald Dart. Remember, you were *Born to Win*.

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