

The Savior of the World

Read John, chapters 3 & 4

I / INTRODUCTION: THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

1 / The title of this lesson comes from **chapter 4.41-42: And many more believed because of his word.** ⁴² **They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”**

2 / This lesson is going to cover two of the fullest and richest chapters in the Gospel of John. I fully recognize that there are hundreds of truths and teachings that we are not going to have time to cover in this brief lesson. But what I do want to do is point out what I believe is one of John’s purposes in putting these three stories together the way he does here.

3 / First of all, let’s identify the three stories I’m referring to:

1. Nicodemus, **ch 3.1-21**
2. The Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, **ch 4.1-42**
3. The official [probably of Herod’s court and a Gentile], **ch 4.43-54**.

We’ll say more about each of these characters as we survey their stories.

4 / I am calling these three stories ‘**Savior of the World**’ because I think that’s the theme John wanted to present to tie them together in this place. The ‘**Savior of the World**’ is highlighted in all three stories:

1. in the first story, we find **John 3.16; For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**
2. in the second story, the men of Samaria recognized, believed in, and confessed Jesus as ‘**the Savior of the world,**’ **verse 42;**
3. in the third story, the ‘official’ represents the outside, larger, wider ‘world’ beyond the Jews.

5 / But, our purpose for right now is to point out that these three characters represent all the peoples of the world to the Jewish way of thinking. For example, think of **Acts 1.8**: when Jesus wanted to emphasize that we should be His witnesses to all the peoples of the world, He described them as:

1. Jerusalem and all Judea
2. and Samaria
3. and to the end of the earth (meaning all the Gentile nations).

6 / So, look again at our three characters in John, **chapters 3 & 4**:

1. Nicodemus represents Jerusalem and all Judea: ‘**ruler of the Jews**’
2. The Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well represents Samaria: ‘**For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans**’
3. The official [*basilikos*] from Capernaum represents the wider outside ‘world’ of the Gentiles [Let’s just make some notes here about this ‘official.’ We know from the word that is used that he is connected with a royal position. The word here is derived from the word for ‘king.’ There are two other accounts of Jesus’ encounter with a Roman centurion in Capernaum whose servant was sick (see **Matthew 8.5-13 & Luke 7.1-10**). They were certainly Gentiles and military commanders of the occupying Roman army. This *basilikos* seems to be a different character and story from those, but he is from the same town Capernaum and also seems to be a Gentile who was a believer in Jesus Christ.]

II / WHAT IS ‘THE WORLD’? WHAT DOES THE WORD ‘WORLD’ MEAN?

1 / I just want to point out that ‘**the Savior of the world**’ is a theme that John is introducing here in the beginning of his Gospel, and this theme will be a prominent thread that John weaves in and out throughout Jesus’ encounters. John will use the word just in this Gospel fifty-seven times.

2 / For example:

1. John opens up his Gospel by declaring that **“The true Light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world” / ch 1.9.** John had just said before this in **verse 7 [about John the Baptist’s witness ‘that all might believe through Him.’**
2. And then, in **verses 10-11,** ‘the world’ seems to be set in contrast with ‘His own[things/people],’ which would contrast the Gentile peoples of the world with the Jewish peoples.
3. And then, in **chapter 3.16-17,** we are assured **‘For God so loved the world...’** and that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, and Jesus came into the world of creation and humanity **‘that the world might be saved through Him.’**

What that shows us is that John’s purpose early on in this Gospel is to demonstrate that Jesus Christ came into the ‘world’ **‘that the world might be saved through Him’** – in other words, to be **‘the Savior of the world.’**

3 / So, the word ‘world’ means a lot of different things in the Bible.

1. Sometimes it means ‘the world of creation’ / **ch 1.10**
2. Sometimes it means ‘the world of humanity without exception, every person’ / **ch 3.19**
3. But sometimes it means *‘all the peoples of the world ... not without exception ... but without distinction’* / **ch 1.29; 3.16-17; 4.42; 12.47.**
 - Jesus does not save every person in the world without exception because there are multitudes who will remain in condemnation and be condemned forever / **ch 3.16-19.**
 - ***But those ‘in the world’ who do believe in Jesus – put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior from their sins – will be saved ... regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, cultural background, or personal history.***

THAT is what these stories are meant to present, highlight, and emphasize!

4 / We need to interpret the word ‘world’ the way John meant it and the ways the people who first received this book understood it. John is using ‘world’ in the sense that a Jew of his day would use it and mean it. And, to the Jews, ‘the world’ was everybody else out there besides them. The ‘world’ would mean everybody else besides them, the Jews.

5 / And so this was a radical idea: that Jesus Christ, the Messiah sent by God, would come to be the Savior of anybody else besides them, the Jews. **BUT He Himself declared and demonstrated that He had come ‘to save the world,’ ‘that the world might be saved through Him,’ to be ‘THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD!’**

6 / So, with that background in mind, let’s watch as John presents these three encounters with Jesus, and how they demonstrate and illustrate that Jesus Christ is **‘THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD!’**

III / chapter 3.1-21 / NICODEMUS: ‘A RULER OF THE JEWS’

1 / Before we get into talking about Nicodemus personally, we just need to not some other theme-threads that John is weaving throughout these stories and his Gospel. For example, we know that one of the most common theme-threads that John is emphasizing is the *‘signs/miracles’* that Jesus did. In fact, this is one of the most very prominent theme-threads John weaves throughout this Book / **see ch 20.30-31.** John has already pointed out the first of these *‘signs/miracles’* that Jesus worked in **ch 2.11.** All of these signs evidence, witness, and testify that Jesus Christ is **‘the Son of God,’** that is, **God Himself.**

2 / Nicodemus admits that the highest Jewish council and authorities knew about Jesus’ signs/miracles, and couldn’t deny them or explain them away / **vv 1-2.** **“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with Him.”**

3 / Nicodemus is as Jewish as a Jew could be, especially in his day. John wants us to see this. After all, the Gospel is **‘the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek’ / Romans 1.16.** And, Jesus said, **“Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” / Matthew 10.6 & 15.24.** So we know that His first and priority recipients of the Gospel were His fellow Jews.

4 / Nicodemus was ‘**a man of the Pharisees,**’ ‘**a ruler of the Jews,**’ and Jesus called him ‘**the teacher of Israel,**’ which means Nicodemus was the most authoritative, most influential, top-dog Jew in their community.

5 / However, Nicodemus was not saved by his Jewishness, nor by virtue of his religious experience, background, or service. Nicodemus didn’t qualify himself to ‘see’ or ‘enter’ the Kingdom of Heaven by his history, heritage, or legacy. Nor by his good works. Jesus said to Nicodemus three times: “**You must be born again [from above]**” / vv 3, 5, 7.

Religious people are not saved by their religiousness ... nor do they qualify themselves or gain entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven by any or any amount of good works they do.

6 / This new birth is being supernaturally regenerated, or born again by the sovereign act of the Holy Spirit and the gift of eternal life that is given to us by the Holy Spirit when we believe / vv 5-8. It is a radical transformation of our very inner being, our spiritual nature. We are birthed with a spiritual nature we didn’t have before. We are born again with the very life of God, the Spirit of Christ Himself, that is given to us as a free gift when we believe in and trust Jesus Christ to be our Savior from our sins.

7 / So yes! Jesus came to save Nicodemus. He came to save Jews. And we know Nicodemus did become a believer in Christ from his subsequent appearances in the Gospel of John / chs 7.50 & 19.39. But he became a believer just like every other believer became a believer – by placing all his faith and trust in Jesus Christ – whom he had come to see. See Acts 15.11 & Galatians 2.15-16.

IV / chapter 4.1-42 / THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT JACOB’S WELL IN SYCHAR: ‘FOR JEWS HAVE NO DEALINGS WITH SAMARITANS’

1 / Now we come to the second character and encounter that John presents to show that Jesus Christ is ‘**the Savior of the world.**’ And it is in this story that this particular recognition and profession of faith in Christ is recognized and confessed / v 42.

2 / Jesus left Judea [Jerusalem vicinity] and headed north for Galilee, where He had taken up His residence. “**And He had to pass through Samaria**” / v 4. He ‘**had to**’ [*edeil*] because His saving desires and purposes required him to go through Samaria. Fact is, Jews did not normally ‘have to’ go through Samaria. They had other circuitous routes they would follow to get from the Judean south to the Galilee northern regions. They would go miles out of their way to skirt around Samaria because “**...the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans**” / v 9. The Samaritans were not ‘their kind.’ The Samaritans were inferior to them. The Samaritans were not pure Jewish. So they were not worthy of Jewish recognition, association, or even contact. There were invisible, cultural ‘walls’ of bigotry and prejudice between these two peoples.

3 / Jews would not save a Samaritan even if they happened to be in the way they were traveling, and they certainly would not go out of their way to save a Samaritan. That’s what makes the story of ‘The Good Samaritan’ so remarkable; the Good Samaritan went way out of his way to save a Jerusalemite / see Luke 10.25-37. But this Jew, Jesus, intentionally, deliberately went out of His way to save this Samaritan woman and many of her friends and companions in the city ... because He came ‘**to save the world,**’ and He is ‘**the Savior of the world.**’

4 / [A little side of historical background and context here: the Jews had animosity toward the Samaritans ever since the northern Kingdom Israel went off into captivity into Assyria / 2 Kings 17. When the Assyrians carried off the Israelite inhabitants of Samaria into captivity, they replaced them with many other nationalities and ethnicities of other peoples they had conquered. The result was that the Samaritans became mixed with many other nationalities. They had been Jews originally, but now they were mingled with numerous other peoples. So they became ‘defiled,’ ‘corrupt,’ and unworthy of association with a true, pure, and orthodox Jew.]

5 / Of course, the way Jesus saved this Samaritan woman was:

1. first of all, go to her / vv 1-6
2. then reach out to her with kindness / vv 7-9

3. He piqued her interest in spiritual satisfaction by offering ‘living water’ to her / vv 10-15
4. He gently exposed her sin by demonstrating His penetrating and thorough knowledge of past and the innermost, most intimate secret of her life and heart / vv 16-18
5. finally, He revealed Himself to her as the ‘Living Water’ He had offered to her (vv 10-15), the Prophet they were all looking for (vv 19-24), and The Christ/Messiah who would come and tell them all things (vv 25-26).

6 / Although the ‘signs/miracles’ theme-thread that John is using to tie his Gospel together are not named by that word in this section, still every revelation Jesus makes to this Samaritan woman is a sign. He is revealing the heart of God to her. He is demonstrating that He is the Son of God. And most of all, He is witnessing that He had come to save her!

7 / This is what she goes off into the city to tell her friends and companions / vv 28-30. When they come to see, meet, and hear Jesus for themselves, they, too, believe in Him and are saved. That’s when they give this testimony we are using for the theme of this lesson: **Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.”**⁴⁰ **So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days.**⁴¹ **And many more believed because of his word.**⁴² **They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world” / vv 39-42.**

V / chapter 4.43-54 / THE ‘OFFICIAL’ FROM CAPERNAUM

1 / We say again [as we have said above], the text does not explicitly say that this ‘official’ is a Gentile. But just from his title ‘official,’ we know he is probably an important, high-ranking, influential official to the king.

2 / The word that John uses here for ‘official’ is *basilikos*. The word for ‘kingdom’ is *basileian*. The word for ‘king’ is *basileus*. So you see this official’s connection with royal authority. Whether he is a royal ‘official’ for King Herod or King Caesar, we don’t know.

3 / He also comes from Capernaum. And we know from other stories that there were centurions, Roman military commanders, stationed and living in Capernaum / see **Matthew 8.5-13 & Luke 7.1-10**. Some commentators believe that this ‘official’ is the same as the ‘centurion’ in the Matthew and Luke accounts. But there are several differences in these stories which lead us to believe these are separate stories and characters; and without a doubt, there were many Gentile royal officials of various kinds living in Capernaum.

4 / By the way, heads-up, John is going to pin this story in his story line this way: **“This was now the second sign that Jesus did when He had come from Judea to Galilee” / see v 54**. And what is this ‘second sign/miracle’ going to be? It’s going to be the healing of the son of a Gentile courtier! He is going to show Himself as **‘the Savior of the world’!**

5 / This *basilikos* has a son who is deathly ill. He travels the twenty miles from Capernaum to Cana to beseech Jesus to come back home with him and heal his darling son. Jesus tests the sincerity and genuineness of his faith by ‘teasing’ that the official will have to see signs and wonders before he believes in Jesus / v 48. The official begs Him again to *‘please, just come! I do believe you can! I don’t need to see any additional signs that this one I’m asking for!’*

6 / So Jesus tells him to go back home to a healed child: **“Go; your son will live.”** The courtier believes and trusts Jesus. He takes Him at His word.

7 / **“And he himself believed, and all his household.”** He had believed in the power of Jesus’ physical healing ... and now he was believing in Jesus as **‘the Savior of the world.’**

8 / And so, with these three salvation encounters with a religious Jew, an immoral Samaritan woman, and a Gentile courtier – Jesus shows Himself to be **‘the Savior of the world.’**

DO YOU BELIEVE?