

DWELL

Knowing Jesus in John's Gospel



NBC

NARRABEEN BAPTIST CHURCH

An Eight Week Community Group Study



DWELL

JOHN 1-3 (Part One)
Community Group Bible Study

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John 1:14

WEEK ONE: John 1:1-18

WEEK TWO: John 1:19-34

WEEK THREE: John 1:35-51

WEEK FOUR: John 2:1-11

WEEK FIVE: John 2:13-25

WEEK SIX: John 3:1-21

WEEK SEVEN: John 3:22-36

BONUS STUDY

WEEK EIGHT: The Dispersed Church

INTRODUCTION

The author of this letter describes himself this way: “the disciple Jesus loved.” That description isn’t a jab at the other disciples (so as to cause us to think Jesus loved this guy more) – but rather a reflection of how he now understood himself in his foundational core – “I, incredibly, am someone Jesus has chosen to love.”

You can almost feel the emotion in that description. That’s because Jesus loves him – everything is different. And this is what leads John to write this letter – to tell the world things are no longer the same.

John’s purpose statement is found in 20:31 “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

To John, Jesus is not some storybook character or just a great historical figure, but the one who holds all life in His hands. And that means we should pay attention!

Throughout John’s Gospel you will see the reoccurrence of this word “believe”, which to John, means more than thinking something is true. To believe means to center your whole self on something, to completely trust and depend on, to find your identity in.

This should cause you, the reader, to stop and ask yourself –

“Does my experience of Jesus merely consist of head knowledge about Him? Or in light of who He is and what He has done – do I find, without Jesus, I can’t even breathe, let alone live, work, rest, etc.?”

So, to begin, a prayer. Jesus, we pray that as we explore this gospel we may really BELIEVE, and by believing, have life in Your name. Amen.

WEEK ONE

John 1:1-18

Every good story has a beginning. In the most well known fairytales, the story usually starts this way: “Once upon a time...” We then get introduced, in many stories, to some sort of ruler (“Once upon a time there was a king...”). Things always start well (“Once upon a time there was a king who ruled over a beautiful kingdom”). But as we’ve learned, fairytales often turn bad very quickly (“Once upon a time there was a king who ruled over a beautiful kingdom. But not everyone in this kingdom liked the king or how he ran things”).

The Gospel of John starts in similar fashion.

Read John 1:1-11.

Where do you see the above-mentioned parts of the story happening in these verses?

John actually combines two popular story introductions into his preface. These two narrative formulas would be widely known in the ancient world (to their respective audiences).

Where have you heard the introduction, “In the beginning...” before? Whose story does that tell? (Hint: if you’re unsure, just read the very first page of the Bible).

So John here is saying to a Jewish audience: That same story you grew up hearing over and over again about God making the world – well, that same God who by His word made everything good and gave life to all things – He walked amongst us and can be known personally (we’ll get to that last part in a bit). In other words, this God is present and not far off. How do you think someone hearing their story like this would respond?

THE WORD

In John 1, the author mentions “the Word” multiple times, who he later tells us is Jesus (verses 17-18). This is not just an awesome sounding title for Jesus, but something that would resonate with anyone living in the Greco-Roman world. The Greek word for “Word” is *logos* (pronounced “law-goss”). This is a loaded word. According to the ancient Greek philosophers, the *Logos* is the force that holds all things together. [These philosophers would ask: if people look at a flower, for example, and all agree that that flower is beautiful – why? Or if people see a certain act – giving someone a gift, per se – that people determine that that act was “good”...why do people agree that it was good?] So it was reasoned that there must be something bigger, an unseen constant truth that informs us that there is in fact beauty or goodness. A reality that is metaphysical (beyond what we can see) that guides us, created us, informs us, leads us.

That reality, that truth, was called the *Logos*.





So when John here calls Jesus the Logos, he is giving a name to this mysterious force. He essentially is speaking into the ancient Greco-Roman “beginnings” story – of who we are, why we’re here, and who put us here to begin with. This unnamed, unknowable force actually has a name and it’s possible for you to know Him!

The point of all of this (in just half a sentence even!) is Jesus speaks into our stories. Not just Jewish stories or Greek stories, but YOUR story as well.

Have you ever experienced this in your own life, where Jesus inserted Himself right in the middle of whatever chapter your life happened to be in? Or....if maybe you feel this isn’t true for you, what WOULD it look like if Jesus spoke into your story?

Verse 4 says in Jesus is life. This life, he says is “the light of all mankind.” He then goes on to say in verse 5, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” What do you think this all means? Do you think this is actually true?

Verses 10-11 brings us to the “villain” in the story. Who, according to John, is that villain?

Let's say you created your own world, inhabited by people you personally made. Now let's say you decided to visit this world and hang out with the people you formed with your own hands. What would you do if they did not recognize you AND did not care for you to be around in the first place? What would that say about what they thought about you? What would that say about them?

But the story isn't over, even though the villain seems to have the upper hand. Read verses 12-13 again.

**Have you stopped and fathomed the fact
that through believing in Jesus, you can be
a son or daughter of the King?**

If the truth about us (as the Bible instructs us) is that we are broken, sinful, messed up, lost, blind, poor, destined for destruction, unable to rescue ourselves - what must it mean if instead, because of Jesus, you are adopted, loved, lavished, cherished, whole, found?

Is there an appropriate response to that kind of plot twist?
Does YOUR life reflect this response?

Read verse 14 again.

Here again, John points us back to our “beginning” stories. This Word (Logos) became flesh, physical, flesh and blood – something the Greeks thought the Logos wasn’t. The Logos was a cosmic governing principle somewhere unseen...but John says this Word is HERE! And this Word made His dwelling among us...something the Jews thought God wouldn’t do. In fact, the phrase “made His dwelling among us” is better translated as “tabernacled among us” – relating back to the Jewish story of God’s presence resting on the Tabernacle in the wilderness (the Tabernacle was like a mobile tent...you can read about it more in Exodus 25 and following).

Most of us probably take this astonishing truth for granted – that God Himself came in physical form to live amongst us. Have you wrestled with what that means? What does this say about who God is? What does it say about His relationship with His world?

GLORY

Verse 14 also contains the first reference to a major thematic word in John’s Gospel: ‘glory’. It says, “We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son...” The word “glory” is the Greek word “doxa” (where we get the word “doxology”). It is a translation of the Hebrew word “kavod” – which in its simplest definition means “weightiness”. Back in ancient times, one’s “glory” was determined by how much their possessions weighed.





So if you had the most and fattest cattle, you had a lot of glory for yourself. If you had the biggest bag of coins, it

was a display of your glory. But God's glory, the biblical authors remind us, is found in the weight of all the earth and everything in it, all the stars and planets – everything declares God's glory (see Psalm 19:1). That's a LOT of weight if you add it all up. But

here, and repeated through John's Gospel, he declares that we have seen God's glory (all that weight) in the person of Jesus. As the story unfolds, who Jesus is and what He does, the evidence of God's glory is seen in Him. In later studies we'll explore the effect Jesus' glory has on others, but do you know what event speaks most of God's glory according to John? (hint: it happens at the end of the story).

Read verses 16-18.

Verse 16 literally reads this way, "For out of His fullness we all have received grace upon grace." The word for "fullness" is a maritime word that was used to describe a ship that contained all it needs to have a successful journey – supplies, sailors, sails, maps, cargo. John tells us that Jesus is that full and ready ship for our lives. This fullness overflows into our lives, giving us more and more grace than we know what to do with.

Has this ever been true of your life? Have you felt that in Jesus is all you need?

Has there ever been a time that He has given you more abundance than you could have ever dreamed?

What about now? Is there an area in your life where you could certainly use this sort of grace to overflow?

John ends his prologue by saying in verse 18 that “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son...” who has made Him (God) known to us. This idea is repeated in John 14:6 when Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth and the life...no one comes to the Father except through me.”

What does this tell us about the importance of Jesus? Does John say there is any hope apart from Him? Is there a way, you know, other than Jesus we might sneak in the back door to a relationship with God (living a good life, for example)? How does this sit with you?

Taking John 1:1-18 as a whole, what does this tell us about who Jesus is?

Should this revelation cause us to do anything?

WEEK TWO

John 1:19-34

First century Judaism was a hotbed for conflicting and competing ideas – about God, about the world, about God’s people. There were as many strands of Judaism then as there are Christian denominations today. These various versions of Judaism played a significant part in how people went about their daily lives. By understanding the culture of 1st century Judea, we will better understand Jesus – not only how people viewed Him then, but how we understand Him now.

Read John 1:19-28.

What do we know about John the Baptist? (you can read Luke 1:5-25 and Luke 3:1-20 for a full summary or John 1:6-8 for a short summary).

Why is John the Baptist such an important figure (he’s mentioned in all four Gospels)? Who is he meant to remind us of?

The “Silent” Years of the Bible

Scholars believe the events in the Old Testament book of Nehemiah and the writings of the prophet Malachi are probably the latest writings of the Hebrew Bible – dated between 424-400 BC. The birth of Jesus (and John the Baptist) are the first events mentioned chronologically in the New Testament – the birth of Jesus believed to have been between 6-4 BC (funny how the later chroniclers got the dates of Jesus’ birth wrong by a few years!).

That leaves roughly 400 years of no biblical writings. However, that 400-year period was hardly “silent”. A lot of significant events happened in the intertestamental period, most notably the Greek and Roman occupations of Israel. Though there was relative stability in Israel after the Exile (520-330BC), Greek king Alexander the Great conquered much of the world, including Israel, which had to pay tribute to the Greeks. Things slowly got worse and worse for the Jews under Greek rule, culminating in a bloody rebellion in 174 BC, in which Greek ruler Antiochus IV tried to forcibly convert the Jews to Greek culture, including desecrating the Temple. The Jews were successful in ousting the Greeks (this is why Hanukkah is celebrated) and had another 100 years of self-rule (the highlight of which is Israel being ruled by a Queen – one of the earliest cultures in that region to have such a thing!). But in 63 BC the Romans forced their way in and brutally subjected the Jews to their rule. During this time, direct messages from God seemed to have ceased – no prophets were to be found. So the Jews held steadfastly to their own understanding of scripture – scripture which many sects of





Judaism believed would culminate in God's personal return to the land – first by sending a messenger to announce the way (known as “the Prophet”), and then by showing up Himself (known as “the Messiah” or “the Christ”)...usually to rid the land of foreign oppression and usher in the golden age of Israel.

We read in verse 19 about the Jewish leaders (probably a mix of two major groups known commonly as the Pharisees and Sadducees). What was their purpose in seeking out John the Baptist? What does their curiosity say about how important and influential John was?

What bigger question are these people after? And how does John respond?

Baptism

Baptism was not a commonly held practice in the ancient world. There are some instances of what we might consider baptism in the Old Testament, such as when Elisha instructs Naaman to wash himself in the Jordan to rid himself of a skin disease. This act later became symbolic in the years after the Exile. In some areas, foreigners who wanted to convert to Judaism were instructed to be baptized as a sign of purifying themselves of their old life. At a place called Qumran, beyond the Jordan near the Dead Sea (the same location John happened to be baptizing) lived a community of Jews who separated themselves from the rest of





the world (believing even their fellow Jews to be impure). They practiced a form of baptism there that was a ritual cleansing signifying one's pure moral state. This was done to prepare themselves for the coming of the Messiah (or the Prophet). They believed that in order for God (or His chosen one) to come, everyone needed to be holy and pure. John's baptism was in some ways similar to that at Qumram, with the major exception being ANYONE, even non-Jews, were invited to be baptized. So John was quite radical and unique: his baptisms were open to all, something unheard of in Jewish circles, as people from all backgrounds, even those who had not traditionally been part of God's "family", were invited in.

Why is the mention of Elijah significant here? How is John like Elijah of the Old Testament?

What does verse 27 say about John's status compared to Jesus? Who traditionally tied and untied sandals in the ancient world?

The author wants us to know that John the Baptist is a HUGE figure in God's plan to save the world. And yet he says about himself that he is nothing compared to this one who is coming. What does that tell us about Jesus?

Read John 1:29-34.

How is it that John says, on several occasions, he didn't know Jesus (v. 31, 33), when Luke's Gospel tells us that John is actually Jesus' cousin? Can you know someone without actually knowing them? How do you reconcile this?

According to John himself, what is the purpose of his ministry?

What is the significance of the title "Lamb of God" that John applies to Jesus? What sort of meaning would that have in the Jewish world? (see Exodus 12 for a hint)

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament pops up in many stories, primarily as a sign of God's power and authority dwelling on certain chosen individuals... for a certain length of time (never permanent), in order to do a certain task (like lead the people in a battle or give someone special wisdom and insight).

What is the significance of verse 33 - where of Jesus, John declares, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit."? What's the difference between being baptized with water and being baptized with the Holy Spirit?

According to John the Baptist, this one who has come “takes away the sin of the world”. He existed BEFORE John as well, though he technically is younger in age. What does all this tell us about Jesus?

What is your reaction to Jesus? After years of watching and waiting and wondering, all the old promises from all the old stories seem to be coming true. A messenger has arrived and is preparing all people, not just the special ones, for God’s arrival. And now one shows up on the scene, who is pre-existent, one who is remarkably greater than someone as great as John the Baptist, who can remove the sin of the entire planet and who gives people God’s Spirit to rest in them.

Have you grasped this truth for
yourself?

Does your life reflect it?

WEEK THREE

John 1:35-51

Read John 1:35-39.

Verse 35 picks up from the previous story with John the Baptist. You will have noticed that this series of events happens in quick sequential order (verses 29, 35 and 43 all read, “The next day...”). This signifies a very quick beginning to the ministry of Jesus – people do not seem to be wasting time following him.

Given what we have already studied, why do you think the two disciples of John so rapidly and easily followed after Jesus? What is the meaning of “following” Jesus here?

What exactly does Jesus invite them to?

How might this function as a call to discipleship today? Does someone need to “have it all together” to become a disciple of Jesus? Do they need to go through an initiation process first?

Is it difficult for us to invite people to “Come and see” Jesus? Why or why not?

Read John 1:40-46.

What can we learn about discipleship and evangelism from Andrew and Philip?

What is it about Jesus, that within hours of meeting him, causes these men to go out and tell their friends and relatives about him?

Why is it that many of us have known Jesus for decades and yet fail to do what Andrew and Philip did?

Can Anything Good Come From Nazareth?

Not much is known about Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. Though born in His family ancestral roots in Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth and there raised Jesus. Nazareth was a small village in Galilee, in the northern part of Judea. It was most likely what we might consider a small backwater town. It did, however, have some interesting history during Jesus' day. It was the place where several self-proclaimed "Messiahs" announced their arrival – with disastrous results. So Nathanael's reaction to Jesus can probably best be understood like this: "Another would-be Saviour from a nowhere town who is claiming to rescue us? No thanks."

Read John 1:47-51.

How does Jesus respond to Nathanael's cynicism?

What causes Nathanael to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God, when a minute ago he thought Jesus was just another pretender?

Jesus, without having met these men before, knows the names of both Simon AND Nathanael. He also gives each a nickname (verses 42 and 47). What is the significance of these names?

Based on these incidents, what sort of thing may happen to you when you meet and follow Jesus?

Do you see yourself as known and named by Jesus? If Jesus were to appear right now, what sort of nickname might he give you?

Have you ever got up and left your comfortable life to follow Jesus? Why or why not?

What do you think would happen if you reacted like these men here?

WEEK FOUR

John 2:1-11

Read John 2:1-11.

John's Gospel can and has been divided in many ways by scholars attempting to formulate a logical breakdown of the book. Perhaps one of the easiest and most insightful ways to understand John's Gospel is dividing it into two sections: The Book of Signs (chapters 1-12) and the Book of Glory (chapters 13-21). The Book of Signs describes how the light shines in the darkness, while the Book of Glory tells how the darkness has not overcome it. This first section, the Book of Signs, finds Jesus in the middle of the festivals and institutions of Judaism, exploiting symbols associated with these events as a way to make His identity clear, providing something in abundance that the event promises – all of which are reinterpreted as pointing to Himself. John 2, a wedding, is one of these events.

The chapter begins with “On the third day...” We may naturally want to ask, “Three days after what?” Chapter 1 said a series of events happened one day after the other, but this “third day” does not seem to line up with John 1. Knowing what we know about the phrase “third day”, what might John be trying to say to us?

Why would Mary care if the wedding had run out of wine? What must this say about her relationship with either the bride or groom?

Why would running out of wine at a wedding be such a big deal?

How do you understand Jesus' response to his mother in verse 4? Is he just being a jerk or what?

What does "My hour has not yet come" mean?

Why does Mary assume Jesus will respond in verse 5?

Jesus then somehow (the text doesn't tell us how exactly) turns 6 huge jars of water (approximately 75-115 litres) of water to wine. The jars are not just any type of jar, but jars used by the Jews for ceremonial washing (verse 6). Jews used the water from these jars not only for cleaning themselves, but as a symbol of being purified and healed - made right in the sight of God. What significance does this play in the story?

My Big, Fat Jewish Wedding

If you have ever been to a wedding in a Mediterranean or Middle Eastern culture, you'll know weddings are a big deal. A Jewish wedding was a massive celebration that involved the entire community and could take place over days or weeks.





Unlike weddings today, however, weddings were primarily for the community more than the bride and groom. This meant that if something went awry with the wedding, it would be considered a great offense to the community who helped bring everything together. Something that was out of order could end up bringing shame on a couple for their entire lives.

Jesus, we are told, not only “saves” the wedding by turning water into wine, but into the very best wine – something that would bring honour to this couple in the sight of their community.

Verse 11 says that this was the first “sign” which Jesus revealed His glory. Why does John use the term “sign” instead of “miracle”? What’s the purpose of a sign?

John also tells us in verse 11 that because of this sign, the disciples “believed in” Jesus.

Though turning water into wine is pretty special (I have been unable to do this personally despite many attempts), is this something revolutionary that should cause a person to fully place their trust in Jesus?

We’ve seen Egyptian magicians copy many of the miraculous things Moses does in the Exodus story. There are lots of ancient writings that describe people doing rather remarkable things – none of which necessarily lead anyone to believe in them, to fully depend on them

for their very lives. So why is this event so different? Is turning water into wine that special? Is that what made the disciples believe? Or is it something else...something involving the future of this couple?

How is a wedding banquet the perfect setting for Jesus to start his ministry? What symbolism is there in a wedding banquet where God is present?

If Jesus can save someone from shame in a community by divine intervention, what or who else can He save?

WEEK FIVE

John 2:13-25

Read John 2:13-17.

Again, Jesus appears at a major Jewish institution, the Temple. As seen from the last study, Jesus (in the first half of John's Gospel) will appear and speak into many of the events and places that make up the Jewish cultural identity.

What do you know about the history and importance of the Temple in Jerusalem?

What did (and still does) the Temple stand for to the Jewish people?

Turn to the Old Testament book of Malachi (last book of the Old Testament). Read Malachi 3:1-4.

According to Malachi, how do the prophets understand the relationship between the Temple and the coming of the Lord (Messiah)?

How then, do you gauge Jesus' actions in the Temple? Why does He respond the way He does? Is He simply angry, or as we just read in Malachi, is there also symbolic meaning attached to what He is doing?

A Messy House

The Temple was not only the central place of worship for the Jewish people, but the very epicenter of Jewish thought and culture. For the Jews, it was the source of their identity – people who belong to and follow Yahweh. But Caiaphas, who as the high priest at the time of Jesus' ministry, passed a law stating that in order to keep sacrifices to the Lord pure (and done according to the Torah), special designated vendors would be allowed into the Temple courtyard. These vendors' purpose was to sell animals for sacrifices that were clean and unblemished, as well as to exchange Roman money (with images of Caesar on its coins) with money without any image on it. Though this idea may have been born out of a desire to steadfastly uphold the Jewish law, Jesus obviously saw something different: common people being taken advantage of in a place of worship! We must assume that these vendors were less interested in sacrificial purity than they were in turning a profit. And Jesus emphatically states with His actions (and with His words later on) that this is not how worship of God is to happen.

Read John 2:18-22.

It is clear from the Jewish leaders' reactions that Jesus was doing something significant – more than simply demonstrating the indignation of an angry man. So what do they want from Jesus? And what does Jesus actually give them? Do those two things line up?

In the Old Testament prophetic book of Ezekiel, chapters 40-46 describe a vision the prophet has of the rebuilding of the Temple – a permanent re-creation of the structure that will no longer be able to be destroyed. Many Jews in Jesus' time believed this Temple (king Herod the Great began reconstructing this Temple, as the text says, 46 years prior) WAS the temple Ezekiel spoke about.

But as we've seen (and will continue to see) in John's Gospel, Jesus redefines these symbols of Jewish identity. How does Jesus reimagine the Temple?

What do we know about the fate of Herod's Temple? Is it still 100% in tact?

It appears, from John 2:22, that at the time, even the disciples didn't know what Jesus was talking about in regards to the destruction and raising of the Temple. This fits into John's ongoing suspense – that there are some who experience and come to believe in Jesus and others who, despite the evidence, don't.

If you were around in that day, how do you honestly think YOU would respond to Jesus and the things He was saying and doing?

How do you respond TODAY to things Jesus is doing and speaking into?

Read John 2:23-25.

The story goes on. Jesus, apparently, performs various “signs” (which we already have seen are in a different category than simply “miracles”). John never tells us what these signs are here, but does tell us what they accomplished: many people believed.

But then the tone of the text seems to change (in verse 24), that despite the people believing in him, Jesus “would not entrust himself to them...” The word translated as “entrust” is actually the word “believe”. So a closer reading of the text would say this: “Many people believed in his name. But Jesus would not believe in them.”

Why do you think Jesus responds this way? What does John say about the reliability of human understanding of Jesus at this point (see verses 24b and 25)?

The question for us from this section is this: what is YOUR belief in Jesus based on?

For the crowds, belief probably revolved around words and deeds associated with the coming of the Messiah which they saw in Jesus. But John (and Jesus) makes it clear that there was something incomplete or dysfunctional about WHAT exactly they believed about Jesus.

Many people have left Jesus behind because there was an imbalance between their understanding and expectations of Jesus versus their reality and experience of Him. Have you ever had your understanding/expectations of Jesus radically changed?

Here's the scarier question: What about your understanding or expectation of Jesus NEEDS to be changed - and how can this start to take place?

WEEK SIX

John 3:1-21

At the end of chapter 2 of John's Gospel, we read that many people believed in Jesus, but that Jesus would not believe in them. The reason? "Because He knew all people", which is a way of saying that though they had some sort of belief in Jesus, there must have been something deficient or lacking about it. John 2 ends by telling us, essentially, that humans are still in the dark - and that Jesus (as it says in the original Greek) "knew what was in man."

John 3:1 then begins "Now there was a man..." - which links these two chapters together. Nicodemus, who we'll find out about more in a moment, steps forward as a representative of these people - people who believe in Jesus but still don't quite get it.

Read John 3:1-2.

Nicodemus literally means "victor of the people", which again highlights his role as representing humanity as a whole. We are told he is a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council (called the Sanhedrin). In other words, good old Nick is an upstanding member of Jewish society. He's got it together.

Yet when does Nicodemus approach Jesus? What is significant about this? How does this idea relate back to a major ongoing theme in John's Gospel (hint: re-read John 1:5, 9-11)?

What does Nicodemus recognize about Jesus? What is still missing from Nicodemus' understanding?

Read John 3:3-8.

Jesus seemingly switches topics here. Nicodemus is flattering Jesus with praise, but Jesus does not seem interested in Nick's assessment of him. Instead, Jesus is more concerned about what it means to see/experience God's kingdom.

What do YOU think it means to see/experience God's kingdom? How would a 1st century Jewish person understand this concept?

Born Again?

Jesus says here that to see God's kingdom, one must be "born again" (as translated by the NIV Bible). The word translated as "again" is the Greek word *anōthen* which elsewhere in John's Gospel CLEARLY is translated as "above" (3:31, 19:11, 23). So which is it? Born again? Or born from above? If you read the text, it is obvious that Nicodemus understands this word one way (born again) and Jesus means another (born from above).





Nicodemus' thinking is purely limited to the physical world around him. He cannot even comprehend the deeper and fuller meaning of Jesus and His ministry. If we take Jesus to mean "born from above" (as most scholars do) what He means is that unless a person has been divinely enlightened and transformed by God Himself, it will be impossible to really understand who Jesus is. And that's the whole point of this interaction. Nicodemus represents a curious but limited man approaching (in the dark) Jesus, the Light of the World.

Nicodemus, in verse 4, cannot make proper sense of what Jesus is saying - "Can a man go back into his mother's womb a second time?". How is his question indicative of people's reaction to Jesus so far in John's Gospel?

Nick's confusion allows Jesus to further explain what He means...to bring light to Nicodemus' darkened mind. How then can one enter or experience God's kingdom (see verses 5-8)?

What do you think it means to be "born of water and the Spirit?"

Wind

In both the Greek and Hebrew languages, the word for “Spirit” (or “spirit”) actually has several meanings, including “breath” (as when God breathed life into Adam in Genesis 2) and “wind”. In many places in the Old Testament the concepts of water and wind are linked together as examples of the life-giving symbols of the Spirit of God at work in people (see Isaiah 44:3-5, Ezekiel 37:9-10 and Proverbs 30:4-5). Here again, Jesus is using words common to His audience and giving them new meaning. When Jesus speaks of the Spirit (or lowercase: spirit) and wind in these verses, we need to remember in Greek it’s all the same word.

We know Jesus isn’t just interested in water and wind – He’s demonstrating there’s more to the story than what our limited eyes can see. Consider this phrase, after Jesus calms the storm: “What kind of man is this that even the wind and waves (water) obey him!” Jesus points us to something bigger!

Read John 3:9-15.

Nicodemus was either baffled or disturbed (or both) by what Jesus has just said. We need to remember he represents not only darkened humanity in general, but also a religious institution that centered around the Jewish Law. What is more important to Jesus - moral obligation to the Jewish Law or living in the Spirit of God?

Jesus' response to Nicodemus' isn't positive: "You are Israel's teacher and you do not understand these things?" Why do you think it was so hard for people like the Pharisees to see Jesus for who He really was?

In what ways have YOU maybe heard about what it means to belong to God's family but have MISSED OUT on Jesus for who He is? Is it possible to come to church, Bible study, small groups your whole life and think you've understood it, but in reality are completely missing out like Nicodemus?

Jesus mentions a story from Numbers 21, where the Israelites turned their backs on God and were punished with an attack of deadly snakes. Moses built a bronze serpent and lifted it up so that all who look on it may be saved. How does Jesus' life fit into this story?

Read John 3:16-21.

Here we find the crux of Jesus' message – the part of the story that people (like Nicodemus) can't seem to wrap their minds around. Instead of people experiencing life and salvation through military conquest or political might or vanquishing of enemies, how do people attain salvation?

How might the phrase "God so loved the world" have been radical for someone like Nicodemus?

John finishes by using courtroom language to describe the cosmic reality happening around us. God sent His Son so that we can be saved.

But what, according to John, do we need to be saved from (hint: see verses 19-20)?

We can't experience the light (by which John means "real life) apart from God sending His Son.

How often, during the week, do you try to live by the Light, honestly?

WEEK SEVEN

John 3:22-36

“If anyone could easily have fallen into the trap of pride, it would have been John the Baptist. Who else in human history (apart from Jesus Himself) could claim to have been filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb (Luke 1:15)! No one else in human history had the important role of being the forerunner of Messiah (Luke 1:17, 76). John enjoyed immediate popular success, as all Jerusalem, Judea, and those from surrounding areas were going out to him in the wilderness to confess their sins and be baptized (Matt. 3:5-6). Even Jesus testified of John that he was the greatest man in human history (Matt. 11:11). All these things could have fed the pride of this young prophet, barely in his thirties.” (from Steven J. Cole, “A Lesson in Humility”).

Read John 3:22-26.

We are told that Jesus has now gained quite a following: “everyone is going to Him” (verse 26). John’s own disciples become quite worried because even his radical baptism ministry seems to have been hijacked by Jesus (though John 4:2 tells us that it was the disciples, not Jesus himself, who were baptizing). The “argument” that happened between John’s disciples and “a certain Jew” was over the matter of ceremonial washing – a common

practice in Jewish culture. The argument was probably about why John was baptizing JEWS as well as non-Jews (which baptism was normally set aside for). The argument apparently turns away from this topic to questioning Jesus and His rising popularity.

If YOU were John the Baptist and you had been enjoying a massive following with many people's lives being transformed, how would you feel if Jesus appeared and stole your thunder?

Or to put it in a more appropriate context - what if people started leaving our church in droves in order to go to another church down the road that was trendier?

Read John 3:27-30.

How does John reply to this news about Jesus?

How does John see his role in relation to Jesus?

The "friend" of the groom (mentioned in verse 29) may be similar to the "best man" role in modern weddings. What, essentially, is the role of the best man? Is it to draw attention to himself?

Specifically, John says, the “friend” has four duties: attending to the groom, waiting for groom, listening for the groom and responding to his voice. How might these four roles play out for us as Christians in relation to Jesus and according to John what is the result when we do these things well?

FOUR DUTIES:

1. Attending to the groom

2. Waiting for groom

3. Listening for the groom

4. Responding to his voice.

In verse 30, John humbly claims: “He must become greater (or He must increase); I must become less (or I must decrease)”. What do you think he means by that?

What do you think this looks like in the life of a Christian? What SHOULD it look like in every area of your life (be specific!)?

Does your life model the sort of humility that John demonstrates?

Read John 3:31-36.

Throughout John's Gospel, the author adds these explanatory comments between stories, acting as both a summary and application of what was just stated.

What is the gist of these verses?

Another ongoing theme in John's Gospel is that no one can possibly KNOW God and what He is up to except someone who has hung out with God in the flesh. You see over and over again stories of people who either have no clue about who God really is or only a partial, distorted picture. A focal point in the book of John is that even those who have the most knowledge of God (the Jewish leaders, in particular), still don't get it.

Why then is Jesus so important? Is He just a "great teacher or prophet" as most people believe? Or in another category entirely?

What is the good news and bad news of verse 36?

Who do you know who is currently "rejecting the Son"? How ought you respond to that?

BONUS SENT STUDY

The Dispersed Church

Read Acts 7:54-8:1.

At the dawn of the early church until now, Christians have suffered persecution in all kinds of forms. Stephen, one of the first evangelists, is dragged in front a a Jewish religious council and ultimately killed for his witness about Jesus. This then results in the first recorded persecution of Christians (which to this day, has not ended).

According to Acts 8:1 – what happened to the church as a result of the persecution?

Is this a good or bad thing?

Rewind and read Acts 1:4-8.

Acts 1:8 serves as the outline for the rest of the book. That Jesus calls his followers, after receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (in Jerusalem), to scatter to all areas of the world: their immediate neighbours (Jerusalem), the nearest geographical regions (Judea and Samaria) and also to the ends of the earth. Acts 2 details the Holy Spirit being given to believers in Jerusalem and empowering them with Jesus' own power and authority to do incredible things.

In Acts 8:1, where were the believers all located until the persecution started? Why is this a problem (in relation to Acts 1:8)?

Why, according to Luke, was it a bad thing that all the believers are huddled together in the same place with each other?

Does this contradict Hebrews 10:24-25?

Is the church supposed to be gathered together? Or is it supposed to go out? Or something else all together?

We've been learning from John's Gospel over the past couple of sessions some incredible things about Jesus. John 1:14 tells us that The Word (the divine governing force of all life in the universe) became flesh and made his dwelling among us. Or, another way to put it – God left heaven (His “home”) and set up His tent with the rest of us (where we live). In John 3:16 we are told that “God so loved the world that He GAVE His One and Only Son...” The “world” in John's Gospel (and elsewhere in Scripture) usually means humanity that is vehemently opposed to God. So despite our active hatred and rebellion against Him, God gave His most valuable possession (Himself in the form of Jesus) so that we might have life.

If God is like this, what should that say about us who follow Him?

God left the comforts of heaven and surrendered Himself to the world “outside”. Does this reflect what the church should look like?

In what ways do you see our church (including the people who are a part of it) going out into the world to share the good news of Jesus in love and good deeds (as Hebrews 10:24 says!)?

In what ways are YOU sent out into the world as a representative of Jesus (see 2 Corinthians 5:20)? Do you do this well or do you need God’s help in certain areas (as the church did in Acts 8:1)?

What would it look like if instead of all your Christian activities being confined to a building for a few hours on a Sunday morning, they spilled over into your workplace? Your conversations? Your sports field? Your friendships? The way you spent your money? Time?

Read Matthew 28:18-20.

What do you think Jesus means when He says we are to “go”?

What do you think he means when He says “all nations”?

Is there anyone you are actively discipling? If this is something we are commanded to do (and it IS a command), why don't we do this? How can YOU do it?

Read Isaiah 6:1-8.

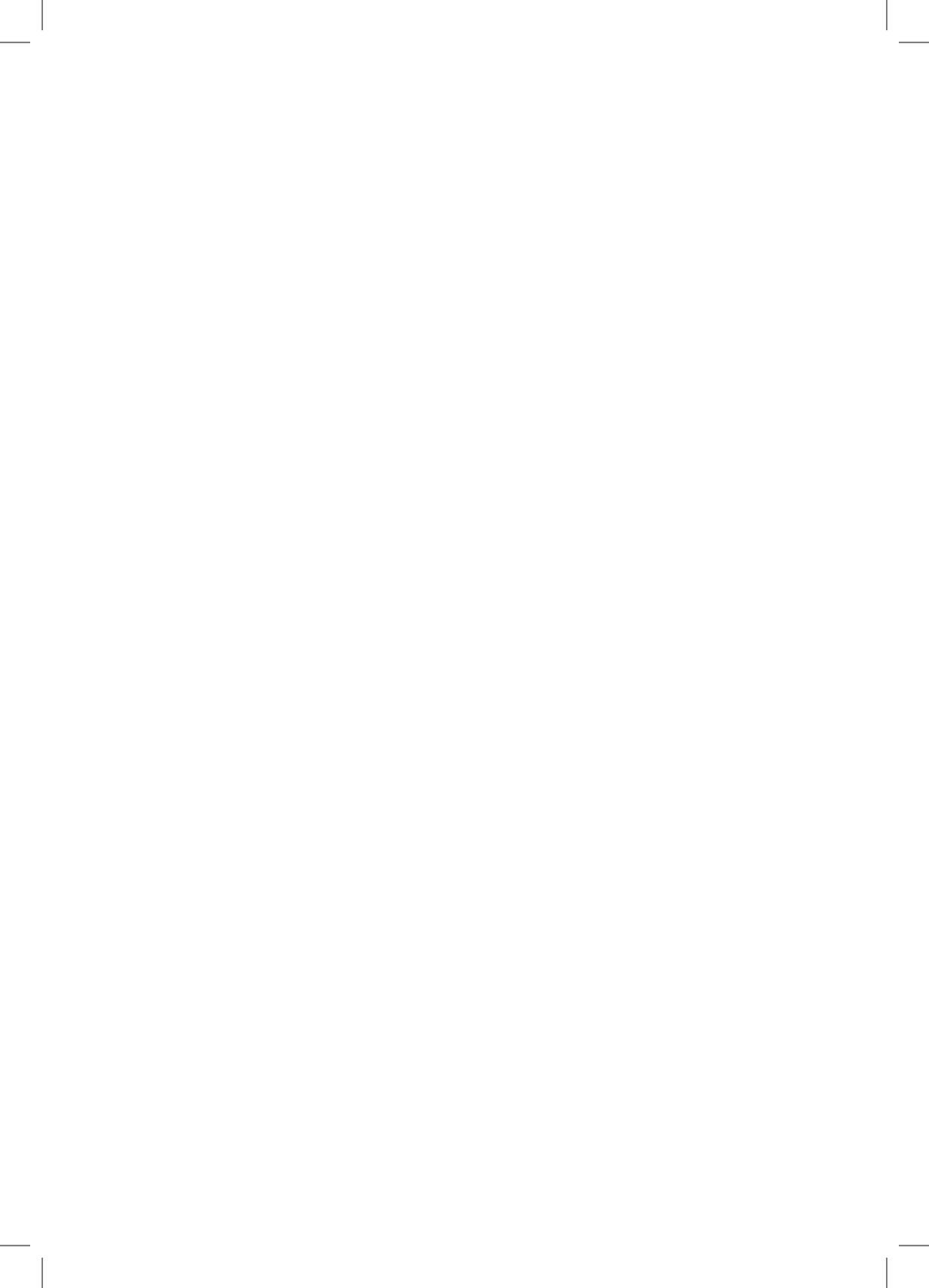
What is happening here?

Why does Isaiah think he's going to die?

When he doesn't die, but is shown great mercy, how does Isaiah respond (verse 8)?

Why does he react this way?

Do you have the same perspective as Isaiah? That because of God's great love for you, because You've been gifted with the power of God's very Spirit inside of you - you cannot help but go out and tell people about this God in word and in action. Does this describe your life?





An Eight Week Community Group Study