



A Study Through John

ENCOUNTERS WITH

CHRIST

Feb 21 -
April 4



ENCOUNTERS WITH CHRIST

A STUDY

Through the Book of John

February 21 - April 4

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Written by TJ Johnson

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Encounters with Christ

Over the next seven weeks we will look at seven people who encounter Jesus. Each one has a story. Each one has reservations or preconceived ideas about Jesus. Each one, in the end, will realize they must make a decision about Jesus. Surrender to Him or reject Him.

As we encounter these individual we will encounter ourselves. We will encounter Jesus and His great love for each one of them. We will, if we allow ourselves, even encounter Jesus' great love for us. And hopefully, we will encounter a love so divine that it moves us to believe and by believing we will experience abundant life, in His name.



A Confused Minister

John 3

ENCOUNTERS WITH

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Feb 21

A Confused Minister

Perhaps the most quoted verse in the Bible is John 3:16. For God so loved the world... It's famous for a reason. In one sentence it summarizes the gospel. God is love. Sin is deadly (perish). Jesus died in our place (gave). Salvation comes by grace (God gave) through faith (believe in).

But what is the larger context of this verse? Who is Jesus speaking to? Why did this individual come to Jesus? Why at night? What is it that makes this individual reluctant to simply believe? The message found in John 3 isn't just the beginning of the gospel. It isn't gospel lite. It IS the gospel. Jesus' words to Nicodemus speak to us today...will you believe and be born again? Will you give up your reputation, your future, your dreams, for something more secure...a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus?

Believing with you,

Pastor TJ



unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Discussion Questions

1. What are reasons why people, during Jesus' lifetime, ignored the truth of Jesus as Messiah?
2. What are some reasons why people suffocate the truth today?
3. What are the things people try to replace God with?
4. Which Psalm 23 does your life most reflect?
5. What shortcuts do people try to take to discipleship and why is it ineffective?
6. What does it mean to be born again?
7. Discuss the three moments Nicodemus is seen in John and how his faith grows over time.
8. What are some ways you have seen your faith or a friend's faith grow over time?
9. Share a time when you experienced the living-giving power of the Holy Spirit.



unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Discussion Questions

10. How does Nicodemus hide his faith and curiosity in Jesus and what are some ways we might hide our faith in Jesus?
11. Take some time to describe the “world” God so loved.
12. Discuss the Old Testament reference in v. 14 and what it teaches us about Jesus.
13. What are some ways we should look and live differently than the world?



Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



A Desperate Woman

John 4

ENCOUNTERS WITH

CHRIST

Feb 28

A Desperate Woman

Sex is a beautiful gift given to us by which we glorify God with our whole being (body, mind, eyes, emotion, etc). For the married couple it is expressed through a husband and wife remaining faithful to one another. For the single person it is expressed through a life of God-honoring celibacy.

But like everything else in our life, our sexuality has been affected by original sin. Every one of us, at some level, has a distorted view and expression of our sexuality. Every one of us, at some level, has fallen short..way short! Every one of us, through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, has felt the shame of our sexual sins.

So what do we do with that? What do we do with our addictions? What do we do with our unhealthy expressions of our sexuality? What do we do with our great sorrow over failing time and time again?

We turn to Jesus and live. In John 4, Jesus HAD NEED to visit a sexually promiscuous woman, to speak with her, to love her, to confront her in her sin, and to guide her to a better way...the way of worship. As Heath Lambert writes, "When you turn your eyes to Jesus, there isn't room for anything else in your heart because he fills it up. When you open the blinds of a pitch-black room, the sunlight drives away the darkness."

As we come to the well we find that the woman is not alone in her sin...we are there beside her, listening to the words of one who knows everything about us and yet still loves us. Jesus died for every sexual sin you have ever, and will ever, commit. Jesus longs to cleanse you. Jesus longs to receive you to Himself as you find freedom in worship. So come to the well and drink from living waters, not the broken cisterns of unholy sexuality.

Drinking with you,

Pastor TJ



you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you define holy sexuality?
2. As a group list out examples of how our culture normalizes unholy sexuality. (what specific issues do you see in your home culture)?
3. How does the text describe this woman's sexual history and how has it affected her life?
4. How does unholy sexuality affect our lives today?
5. Why does the church traditionally have a bad reputation toward sexual sinners and what can we do to restore our reputation without compromising our convictions?
6. How can the church be better at having open conversation about sexual sin?
7. What other examples in the Bible demonstrate God's great love for sexual sinners and His ability to transform them more and more into His image?
8. What are some ways the Holy Spirit convicts (pushes on our wounds) people of sexual sin?



Discussion Questions

9. What tactics does this woman use to ignore the conviction of sin? What tactics do we use today?
10. In the sermon Pastor TJ said, “The cure to sin is not obsession over and focus on sin, but obsession over and focus on God.” What does this look like practically?
11. Compare what this woman deems as most important in life versus what Jesus deems as most important and how this impacts our sexual life.
12. As a group read 2 Corinthians 3:16-18 and Romans 13:11-14 and discuss how the gospel gives us hope in our unholy sexuality.
13. What jar do you need to leave behind to follow Jesus and how will you go about doing it?
14. Do you have a story of how Jesus met you in your unholy sexuality and transformed you?
15. How can you as a group, “lift up your eyes,” here in Beijing?
16. What are the two extremes the church falls prey to in regards to sexual sin and how can we avoid moving to either extreme?



Prayer & Praise

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Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



A Needy Crowd

John 6

ENCOUNTERS WITH

CHRIST

Mar 7

A Needy Crowd

Have you noticed over the past few years the seemingly increasing number of famous Christian deconversion stories? Have you wondered what in the world is taking place in the church today as we see person after person walk away from the faith? You're not alone; I too have noted this trend. I too have wondered at the 'increasing' number of faithful witnesses turn to a new type of evangelism, not evangelism for Christ but evangelism away from Christ. It has worried and burdened me.

Yet in the midst of letdown after letdown, I take great hope in the gospel. It is when I go back to the history of Scripture that I am reminded that there is nothing new under the sun. While the phrase, "deconversion stories" might be new, the concept is as ancient as the advent of the church. John 6, is one such example of a first century deconversion story.

After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

Disciples were abandoning Jesus in droves, and yet the church marched on. Disciples were deciding and declaring that Jesus was not worth their devotion, and yet these deconversions did not hinder the church. In many ways it strengthened the church. It was the deconversion of the crowd that solidified the true disciples resolve when Jesus asked, "Do you want to go away as well?" As we read this story we hear Jesus asking us the same question. My hope and prayer is that you confidently proclaim:

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

Persevering with you,

Pastor TJ



You have the words of eternal

Discussion Questions

1. Share any personal experiences you have with friends or family who have turned away from the faith.
2. In the sermon, what are the three reasons why the crowd decided to stop following Jesus and what are some other reasons people walk away from the faith?
3. What are the things the crowd tries to force Jesus to do and what are things we try to force Jesus to do for us?
4. What are the dangers of a man-centered Christianity (where we make Jesus our bond-servant δοῦλος rather than us becoming His)?
5. What are the dangers of the health and wealth gospel and how does this contribute to false conversion and future deconversion?
6. How can we discern if we are treating Jesus as the end or a means to an end? See Phil. 3:8
7. The sermon mentions a few people who lost much and still followed Jesus, can you give other examples?



You have the words of eternal

Discussion Questions

8. Why do you think the crowd asks for a sign when they had already seen several signs?
9. What are some modern examples of people demanding a sign from God?
10. How has Jesus proven to the world that He is the Messiah? What “sign” should we be looking for?
11. What hard teachings of Jesus keep people from following Him?
12. How do we balance moments of doubt and faith?
13. Do you have any doubts that you are keeping hidden? Are you, like John the Baptist, willing to allow your doubts to draw you to Jesus and not away from Him? How can the church and Christian homes be better at allowing questions to be asked?
14. Using John 6 only, explain what it means to be a disciple.



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A Life-Long Loser

John 9

ENCOUNTERS WITH

CHRIST

Mar 14

A Life-Long Loser

This past week I sat among a small circle of believers and listened as each one shared how they came to faith. What each of us was struck by is the fact that we all have a unique story. Some were young when they came to faith, some old. Some grew up in Christian homes, others didn't. Some had come to faith because of some tragedy, other from some miraculous event, and other had no specific life event to point to at all.

Yet among the diversity of our progression to faith, one thing remained constant...each described their conversion as a progression. As the Holy Spirit worked on each of us, we moved step by step from doubter to disciple.

In John 9, we encounter a similar encounter. We meet a man who has had the worst of "luck". He was born blind. He was a beggar. Person after person has ignored him, avoided him, exploited him, abused him, until he encounters Jesus. If you read closely, you will see that Jesus' great love for this man stands in stark contrast from EVERYONE else in this chapter, even his parents.

It is this great persistent love that moves this man along in his understanding of who Jesus is. He begins the chapter in spiritual blindness and ends with a spiritual new birth. He begins a mendicant and ends a member of a heavenly Kingdom. We would do well to note how many times he changes his position on Jesus. His first response is, Jesus is merely a man. His last response is to worship the Son of Man.

We would also do well to note HOW this conversion took place. The Holy Spirit uses his retelling and meditation upon his encounter with Jesus to produce greater faith in him. The same is true with us. Each of us has encountered Jesus on some level. For most of us, we move too quickly past our encounters. But if we were to sit in that experience, to relive it, to retell it, we will find that we too will be moved along from faith to faith.

Recounting with you,

Pastor TJ



though I was blind, now I see.

Discussion Questions

1. Allow two or three people in your group to quickly (3-4 min) share how they came to faith in Jesus.
2. Take some time to list out the various people found in this chapter and the ways in which they interacted with the blind man.
3. Read John 9:2-3 and Exodus 4:11. What are some examples in the Bible and in your own life where God used disabilities and weaknesses to reveal His glory?
4. What are the various ways the gospel of John reveals to us that Jesus notices people that others overlook and what does that teach us about how and with whom Jesus interacts with today?
5. What are the ways Jesus has suffered for humanity? How does His willingness to suffer impact our lives today?
6. Read John 10 and discuss how it relates to Jesus seeking the blind man in chapter 9.
7. Share with the group specific ways Jesus has sought you out.



though I was blind, now I see.

Discussion Questions

8. If you had to create an Engle Scale for this man's conversion, what steps would you include?
9. Using the Engle Scale, where would you currently place your walk with Jesus?
10. What does it mean to believe in the Son of Man?
11. How does John 9 help reveal to us Jesus' claim of deity?



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An Interrupted Funeral

John 11

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Mar 21

An Interrupted Funeral

In the fourteen years of living in Beijing my sons have only been to one funeral. If they had grown up in the states that number would be much higher, possibly in the hundreds, but certainly in the double digits. While some may think this is an evil they have been spared from, I would disagree.

Death is everyone's destination. To ignore it is to delay the inevitable. Early on in our children's lives my wife and I bought our children pets with short life spans in order to teach them about the reality of death. Death teaches us about sin. It teaches us about the temporal and eternal. Most importantly, it forces us to be confronted with our own future death.

As Christians, how should we view death? In John 11, Jesus seeks to give us a Biblical framework for death. This is more than a funeral story, this is Jesus' confrontation with death to show us His power over death that we might have hope against our last great enemy, death.

Hoping with you,

Pastor TJ



I am the resurrection and the life

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the tragedies of death that you have personally experienced?
2. What are the various ways John 11 displays human mourning over death? What are some proper ways we can mourn death today?
3. How do Mary and Martha respond differently in the mourning process? How can we be patient with those who take longer to grieve?
4. Discuss Martha's confession of Jesus made after her brother's death and before his resurrection. Why should the death of loved ones not diminish our faith in Jesus?
5. What two things is Jesus teaching in John 11:25-26 and how is that applicable to our lives right now?
6. Discuss the phrase, "The gospel offer of resurrection to life is as wide as the whole world but as narrow as a needle's eye."
7. On at least three occasions the Gospel of John mentions deaths that bring glory to God. How do you suppose your own future death can bring glory to God?



I am the resurrection and the life

Discussion Questions

8. Read John 11:49-53 and discuss why and how Jesus' death was able to purchase resurrection for all those who believe in Him.
9. What are the various Old Testament images that pointed to the need for Jesus' death?

Going Deeper

10. How do we respond to the death of family members who did not put their faith in Jesus?
11. How do we faithfully and lovingly share the gospel in cultures steeped in various forms of ancestor worship?
12. What questions do you have about death and resurrection?



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Praise Reports



An Anxious Politician

John 19

ENCOUNTERS WITH

CHRIST

Mar 28

An Anxious Politician

As we continue our encounters with Jesus series, this week we come to Pontius Pilate. As this “ruler” comes face to face with the Ruler of the universe, will he surrender his power to King Jesus or will his need to please those in power blind him from the eternal joys of being a citizen of God’s Kingdom? This encounter is a reminder to each of us that there is only One who has ultimate authority and that we should strive to please God rather than man.

Striving with you,

Pastor TJ



My Kingdom is not of this world.

Discussion Questions

1. What is one silly thing you have done to gain the approval of others?
2. What are some recent challenges you have faced where you have had to make a choice to please God or people? How did you process that encounter?
3. What were the Jews accusing Jesus of? What was Rome accusing Jesus of? How does Jesus' response to these false (flimsy) accusations speak into situations where we are falsely accused?
4. Have you ever been asked to do something that others were not willing to do themselves? How did/should you respond?
5. What common pressures do we face in China to compromise our integrity as Christians and how can we remain firm in our convictions?
6. Read John 18:38-40. How does the exchange of Jesus and Barabbas display the work of Jesus on the cross? (See Matthew 27:16-26 for larger context).



My Kingdom is not of this world.

Discussion Questions

7. Read James 4:17. What sin of omission (not doing good) was Pilate guilty of? What are common sins of omission in our world today?
8. In the sermon it was stated, “You can’t make concession with sin.” Give some examples of concessions with sin and its consequences.
9. What analogy is given in 1 Corinthians 5:6-7? What does obedience to this passage look like in our life, homes, small groups, church?
10. In John 19:11-16, Pilate chose to serve the people above the Savior. In what ways are we guilty of the same? (See Galatians 1:10).
11. Are there any difficult decisions have you been putting off that you need to make today?
12. Read through John 19 and as a group discuss what the cross means to you.



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A Demanding Skeptic

John 20

ENCOUNTERS WITH

CHRIST

April 4

A Demanding Skeptic

I have REALLY enjoyed the changing weather over the past few weeks. I have enjoyed being able to go on long bike rides. I have enjoyed shedding the extra winter layer of clothing. I have enjoyed not having to keep up with gloves and scarves and hats. But perhaps the thing I have enjoyed the most is the explosion of color in our complex. The brown golf course that sits outside my window is growing greener every day. The once naked trees are now clothed with color. I am assaulted with whites and pinks and yellows and purples.

Psalm 65 reminds us that nature joins together to sing God's praise. Lean in and listen. If you pay attention, particularly at this time of year, to nature's (not Beethoven's) Spring Sonata, you will hear it singing of the greatest event that has ever taken place on this planet. Dead things do come back to life. Though Christ died, He rose again. And His resurrection is all the more glorious after a long bleak winter.

So take some time to bask in nature's beautiful solo of Resurrection. Listen to the buds and blossoms boast: Christ is risen! Listen to the tulips and peonies proclaim: Christ is risen indeed! This Sunday we will see that even "doubting" Thomas can't help but join in the choir as he proclaims...My Lord and my God!

Listening with you,

Pastor TJ



My Lord and my God.

Discussion Questions

1. Of all the eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection, who do you identify with the most and why?
2. Why do you suppose Thomas refused to believe? Was belief in Jesus difficult for you?
3. What examples were given of Jesus' presence even when unseen? Can you think of others?
4. How do we experience the presence of Jesus today when we can't see Him?
5. What are the things we think we "need" in order to believe or worship? What comfort does it give you knowing Jesus is present with you at home as you worship online?
6. In what ways did Jesus personally interact with people throughout the book of John?
7. In what ways have you experienced Jesus' personal interaction?



My Lord and my God.

Discussion Questions

8. Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 and discuss how a dead Jesus is of no help to us.
9. What areas of your life do you currently need Jesus' peace?
10. Discuss (a) how Jesus' death AND resurrection has brought us peace with God and (b) what implications this brings to your life today.
11. As a group, read Thomas' confession of Jesus. Which part is most striking to you and why?
12. Why does Jesus force a decision on Thomas (and us)? Why not allow us to be neutral?
13. What is the gospel and how can one be certain they have truly believed in Jesus?
14. What does "life" in Jesus look like?



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