



For the Week of March 4, 2012

Good Questions, Straight Answers

Life Notes for Missional Communities

Introductions

We are studying the gospel of John together throughout 2012 in order to deepen our understanding of God as we explore tough questions and straight answers. We're so grateful you're joining us for Life Notes, and we pray you'll be able to spend time with God each day, writing, praying and asking the Holy Spirit to guide your heart into healthy relationship with him. One thing we know for certain - if you spend time connecting with God each day, you will experience change. Spiritual formation happens as we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us from the inside out. Let's draw close in an intimate, honest, real relationship with our Creator. **A special welcome to several missional community groups who are now joining *Life Notes*.**

The Word: John 3:22-36

After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. (This was before John was put in prison.) An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less.

"The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

Getting Started

Have someone in your group read John 3:22-36. Then pause and have someone else read the same verses again, asking everyone to listen thoughtfully, taking note of words or phrases that stand out as the passage is read.

Now ask each person in the group to speak aloud the word or phrase from the passage that stood out for him or her. Just speak the word or phrase, not an explanation.

After everyone has finished sharing a word or phrase, have someone read the passage one more time.

Jesus Above All

John the Baptist loved Jesus. His whole life was devoted to preparing the way for Messiah. His whole ministry was devoted to making a way for Jesus. No one was more humanly pleased than John when Jesus entered public ministry. John was committed to becoming less as Jesus became greater.

Discuss together the whole idea of being popular or well known.

Who would you say are the most popular or well-known celebrities or public figures today?

What makes these people so popular or well known?

In our society, what usually follows this kind of popularity? What are the results of being popular or well known or a celebrity?

Now think about role or character models. Discuss who you've looked to in your life as a character model and why.

Now discuss together this whole idea of "becoming less" - a commitment from John the baptizer that seems quite different from our culture's way of doing things. Here are some questions to consider.

Specifically, what do you think John's disciples were worried about or struggling with as they approached John?

What do you think John's disciples heard from John's response?

What about "becoming less" do you think might have been difficult for John's disciples?

Why do you think it was easier for John to accept "becoming less" than it was for his disciples?

How is "becoming less" treated in our society?

How does "becoming less" directly apply to us in our faith journey today?

When, where, with whom, how are we to "become less?"

Take the Micah 6:8 vision of MISSION and discuss "becoming less" in light of that verse.

Paul Metzger, in *The Gospel of John: When Love Comes to Town*, says that becoming less is "a daily

question requiring a daily dying; but it's a daily dying whose answer is a daily living. Each of us has a part to play" (p. 71). Talk about what you think this means for your faith-life. How specifically do you need to daily die and how does that translate into daily living? What is your part to play?

Taking Jesus At His Word

Pastor Mark's main teaching this week is: Good Questions, Straight Answers on Salvation and Wrath.

As we wrestle with our understanding of heaven and hell and salvation from sin, we can either banter back and forth with our own theories or we can look to our only authority. Pastor Mark said this about who we can look to for the truth about God.

Jesus is above all. You're not. I am not. John the Baptist is not. Anything any of us would say about the kingdom of God, outside of what has been divinely revealed, would be complete conjecture, because all of us are from earth. Jesus is from heaven. He is above us all. What he says about God and the kingdom of God isn't theory, it comes from his identity - being God and with God eternally, in the kingdom of God. Jesus is the supreme authority on God and his kingdom. The Father, Son and Spirit are in complete harmony. Therefore, what Jesus speaks are the very words of God. When you accept the words of Jesus as true, you're certifying or agreeing that God is true

So it's Jesus we must look to for the truth about salvation and wrath, even when the truth is difficult for us to grasp and accept. What another person thinks doesn't matter. What God says is what we rely on as truth. It is definitely easier to avoid this conversation, but an accurate understanding of what God has to say is essential as we live our own lives and share his truth and love with others.

What we so often "miss" in our discussions about heaven or hell, forgiveness or wrath is the love and good news the entire discussion is based upon. God loves us. We were separated from him by our sin. He sent Jesus into this world to live life with us and then carry the eternal weight of our sin on himself because of love. Jesus offers forgiveness. And he isn't a God who cannot relate to us, but one who lived this life without sin...for us...for the love of us. We stood condemned, and we stand forgiven because of God's love and commitment to us. (John 3:16,17, Philippians 2:5-11, Hebrews 4:14-16, John 11:25,26).

Whoever rejects the Son does not have life. We stand condemned when we refuse the good news of Jesus (John 3:36). This is what Jesus told us, and he called himself the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). We must believe Jesus, not our own wants or the philosophies of other humans. And while wrath is a difficult concept to handle, it is not wrath alone that is our focus. God loves us and sent his Son into the world to live and then die for us in order that we need not face that wrath. We stand condemned without Jesus. We stand eternally forgiven when we place our trust in him. Have someone in the group read John 3:16-18 aloud.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

For us to fully understand the wrath of God, we have to understand the love of God. We have to understand the reality of God's justice and our sin. We have to receive the truth from God, and not from man.

Spend time in your group sharing about someone in your life that you believe does not know Jesus as Savior. Share about how you know this person, what this person is like, how your stories intersect and why this person is important to you. And when your group has finished sharing, talk together about ways we can share our Jesus-story with others so that they, too, can understand and experience what we understand and experience.

Who in my life needs to hear about Jesus?

How can I make my Jesus-story relevant to others?

What about my life does someone else need to hear?

What about my life might help someone else come to know God's love and forgiveness?

How can we share our Jesus-story with others in a more natural way and on a more regular basis?

Note: this can be a difficult conversation for those who either currently have someone they love who rejects God's truth or someone in their past who rejected God's truth and might not even be alive anymore. Be gracious and compassionate with your words. Listen. Trust each person to God.

Close your time together by praying as a group about those in our lives who do not know Jesus as Savior. Talk about whether you're willing to continue to pray with each other about these people. Talk about the possibility of joining together and inviting others to a barbecue or a Missional Community event in order to begin to build relationship.

We are members of the body of Jesus - the Church. We need each other and we can help each other in so many ways, if we'll just remember to ask each other for support, for prayer, for understanding. We can make such a difference in each other's lives and in the lives we daily touch if we simply become intentional about reaching beyond our own comfort zones and walls.

Remember that God knows the heart, we do not. We are here to support each other, to learn together and to share our longing to see others come to faith in Jesus.

Next Week

To prepare for more discussion in John in the coming weeks, read John 4:1-42 and pages 73-77 in Metzger's *The Gospel of John: When Love Comes to Town*.

Don't forget to email questions you might have on these passages in John to Pastor Mark at markc@mission68.org.