

God's Big, Big House

A sermon by Pr. David Johnson

Last week we spent some time looking at John 3 & 4 from the perspective of Charles Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*, "It was the best of times - worst of times... we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way..." We contrasted Jesus' Nicodemus encounter from John 3, and His interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. Nicodemus was the best of men, apparently going directly to heaven; while the Samaritan woman represented the polar opposite, going the other way – and fast.

In either case, we see Jesus compassionately and decidedly living out both the universal and particular grace of God described in John 3:16-17:

John 3:16-17 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

In comparing Jesus' unique approaches towards these two people from opposite sides of the tracks, we see His own concern for all lost souls, and His challenge to emulate the same in the lives of His disciples. He brings us face-to-face with the questions and needs of the righteous and lost alike. And by His own behavior, Jesus paints an amazing portrait of God's passion for all wandering souls; both those who live behind lofty facades, and those who are clearly condemned.

I'm reminded of an old joke about a man who went to heaven and was given the normal introductory tour. St. Peter showed the new arrival the play area, the massive garden courtyard, and the awe-inspiring worship center. But then he went past an area with high walls, and plain gates. The man asked, "What happens behind those walls. What's that area for?" To which Peter responded, "Oh, that's the area for the _____ believers. They don't think anyone else will make it to heaven."

There are going to be many who enter the Pearly Gates of Glory and are surprised to see those who are already there...or those who are yet to come. In fact, when we see the people included in Hebrews 11 (*God's Hall-of-Faith*), and the genealogies of Matthew and Luke, we may be taken aback by the names on those lists. After all, the unabashed grace of God, and the people transformed by its power, are a marvelously varied group indeed.

I remember an old song by *Audio Adrenaline* called *Big, Big, House*.

*Come and go with me, To my Father's house
Come and go with me, To my Father's house
It's a big big house, With lots and lots a room
A big big table, With lots and lots of food
A big big yard, Where we can play football
A big big house, Its my Father's house*

The church has often forgotten that when God first delivered the promise of a Redeemer in Genesis 3, He didn't include a qualifier for a special sub-group of people. In fact, when the covenant was shared with Abraham, we see that "...in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." God has always desired that ALL His creation would be saved and transformed (*though He will never force or coerce anyone*).

Ezekiel 18:23 Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord God, "rather than that he should turn from his ways and live? ... **32** For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord God. "Therefore, repent and live.

1 Timothy 2:3-6 This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

It is for this reason that John continues with his account of Jesus' ministry from the point of the Samaritan Woman's transformation.

John 4:27-30 At this point His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why do You speak with her?" ²⁸ So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and *said to the men, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?" ³⁰ They went out of the city, and were coming to Him.

The shock and condescension of the disciples was palpable. They leave Jesus alone for a moment and look what He does. You can almost hear the disciples thinking, "*We just can't take Jesus anywhere? Why can't He just stick with His own kind?*" But they didn't say a thing as they stood nearby.

The woman, on the other hand, couldn't stay silent. She was excited and even forgot about the very thing she had come to do. She left her waterpot (both water and pottery were precious) and ran into the city to share what had happened. She told the people (*ESV, CSB, NLT; anthrōpos*) everything Jesus had said. She hoped they could answer her question, "...this is not the Christ, is it?" But rather than answer the woman, they went to see for themselves.

However, while the woman was away, the disciples saw their chance to get Jesus' focus where they thought it needed to be...on Himself:

John 4:31-34 Meanwhile the disciples were urging Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." ³² But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³ So the disciples were saying to one another, "No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?" ³⁴ Jesus *said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.

There are times when I read the Bible and think, "I'm so glad I wasn't one of the disciples; Jesus would know

what I'm thinking, and my answers would be written down in a book for all time." This was one of those times.

Remember, the disciples went looking for food. They came back to find Jesus talking to a woman (*a compromised woman*), something that was unheard of in those days. So when she finally runs off, they try to get Jesus to eat. They weren't expecting a theology lesson, after all, this wasn't Sunday School time. This was time for food...for material sustenance.

Jesus didn't compartmentalize the way humans do. He didn't live in a world where one moment was material while the next was spiritual. He walked with one foot in heaven and the other in the world; both walking side by side. All of life was integrated, the material and the spiritual.

So when the disciples said, "Jesus, it's time to eat," Jesus answered that He already had food. He didn't say He'd eaten. Jesus meant that God had sustained Him physically, as He'd done the Father's will spiritually.

The disciples didn't know what to do with this news. So Jesus explained, "*My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.*" Jesus understood that nothing on earth could, or should, surpass the obedience of a child of God. The heavenly Father would never abuse an obedient child.

But then Jesus broadens this lesson on evangelism from one woman to the whole landscape.

John 4:35 Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest.

While the disciples were searching for food, Jesus was searching for souls. While the disciples were concerned with material nourishment, Jesus was bringing living water to the thirsty soul of a dying woman. Likewise, Jesus wants to open the disciple's eyes to the stark need of so many around them. In fact, He challenges, the field of needy people is ready for "harvesters" now, not only at some point in the distant future.

John 4:36-38 Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. ³⁷ For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor."

Jesus challenges the disciples to begin seeing with heavenly eyes even now. He explains how a believer can begin earning "eternal wages" now, through the spiritual harvesting of human souls. Not that a lost person is simply heavenly "piece-work," but as a harvest from whom someone has sown seed (*The parable of the soils*). In this case, Jesus and the woman sowed seed, and the people came from the city. But in other cases, it may have been John the Baptist, or one of the prophets. All of them have played a part in the planting of seed, and someone needs to be there to harvest. The disciples (and we) have

that great honor...and responsibility. How blessed are the reapers who harvest what they did not sow.

John 4:39-42 From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all the things that I have done." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. ⁴¹ Many more believed because of His word; ⁴² and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world."

"...many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman..."

"Many more believed because of His word..."

Some believed because of the woman's testimony. Others were drawn to Christ by the woman, and came to faith because of their own experience with Jesus. In both cases, the Word of God moved to transform and renew all their lives. There were no evaluations or prior qualifications required. All were welcome into God's big, big, household of faith. And each of us should keep that in mind as we experience God's divine appointments of harvest every day.