

COMMENTARY ON JOHN

LESSON NUMBER 41

John 4:1 *“When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John. ² (Though Jesus Himself baptized not, but His disciples,) ³ He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. ⁴ And He must needs go through Samaria.”* John 4:1-4)

JESUS DEPARTS INTO GALILEE

INTRODUCTION

Jesus was on a mission – sent by His Father in heaven. How often He spoke of this: *“For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me”* (John 6:38). *“I can of Mine own Self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and My judgment is just; because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me”* (John 5:30). He always operated within the knowledge of **why** He was here: *“Though I bear record of Myself, yet My record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go”* (John 8:14). Jesus had a right to speak of Himself, revealing why He was here, and what He was doing. His own witness was in perfect harmony with that of the Father. Therefore He said, *“If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of Me; and I know that the witness which He witnesseth of Me is true”* (John 5:32). **That is, what He said of Himself was not a self-assessment.** It was in perfect accord with what the Father had said of Him: *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”* (Matt 3:17). On a practical note, no man has a right to say He is a messenger sent by God (Rom 10:15) unless he is saying what God affirmed is to be said. It is not enough to “preach the Bible” – although that must most assuredly be done. It is **the message** that is delivered that attests to whether or not a person has been sent by God. **To “preach the Word”** (2 Tim 4:2) means to deliver the message that is contained in the Word of God. That message is hidden from those whose interests lie elsewhere. The heart of the true message is Jesus Himself (John 5:39; Rev 19:19), why He was sent, what He is doing, and what He will do. **Within that context, and within that context alone, the duty of men and the focus of life is properly seen.** This is such a different emphasis that, for those immersed in sectarianism, it often takes years to see it.

One thing will become clear to us as we are exposed to the life and ministry of Jesus. **His work was not crisis-driven.** He did not come to resolve the ails of the world. As noble as that may appear, that is not why Jesus came, and it is not why the church was established. **All legitimate resolution must take place within the framework of the Divine agenda.**

WHEN THE LORD KNEW

John 4:1 *“When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John.”*

There are aspects of the Lord’s character that are made known in His responses. There are

also environments in which the Lord will not remain. We are being exposed to such an environment in our text. All of this is telling us that what becomes an issue or focus of men can actually occasion the withdrawal of Jesus Himself.

WHEN THE LORD KNEW. Other versions read, *"The Pharisees heard that Jesus was,"*^{NIV} *"When Jesus learned,"*^{NRSV} *"when it was clear to the Lord,"*^{BBE} *"When Jesus heard,"*^{NJB} *"when Jesus realized,"*^{ISV} *"Now when the Lord found,"*^{PHILLIPS} *"knew (learned, became aware)."*^{AMPLIFIED}

At this point, some of the versions are very weak, and some are misleading. The NIV says that it was the Pharisees who knew, and that Jesus left that area because of that. Some versions represent Jesus as "learning" that The Pharisees had heard that He was making and baptizing more disciples than John. Still others set this forth as something that gradually dawned upon Jesus.^{BBE, ISV, AMPLIFIED} These are not proper representations of the Lord's Christ! It is written that Jesus *"knew all men"* (John 2:24), *"needed not that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man"* (John 2:25), and knew man's *"thoughts"* (Matt 12:25; Lk 6:8). **When Jesus acted, it was not because of what men said.** He declared that He could do nothing of Himself, but only what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19). When what men said produced an environment that competed with the mission of the Lord, He simply moved on. When the Pharisees and Sadducees tempted Jesus, asking Him to show them a sign, *"He left them and departed"* (Matt 16:4). Mark wrote, *"And He left them, and entering into the ship again departed to the other side"* (Mark 8:13). When the chief priests and scribes questioned the legitimacy of the children praising Him, *"He left them and went out of the city"* (Matt 21:17). On one occasion, when Jesus perceived the people were going to attempt to take Him by force and make Him a king, *"He departed again into a mountain Himself alone"* (John 6:15).

Although this kind of knowledge must not be abused, but handled correctly, and in a godly manner, I have been in meetings when the tone of the gathering became predominantly fleshly. It may have been through inordinate humor, resorting to personal activities in the assembly, or the introduction of a foolish question. When the intrusion occurred, you could sense a kind of Divine withdrawal. Thoughts and expressions were pulled down into the domain of the flesh. This kind of experience was lived out during the ministry of Jesus, and frequently, as in the above texts, the Spirit will draw our attention to it.

The proper awareness of the thorough knowledge of the Lord Jesus will have a role in shaping our lives – what we say and

do. That is what prompted Paul to say, *"God is my witness"* (Rom 1:9), and *"God is witness"* (1 Thess 2:5). There is also the witness of the conscience: *"my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit"* (Rom 9:1). Our conscience is like a sensitive instrument that is played by the Lord. **It will send back to us the effects of our thoughts and deeds upon the Lord.**

In a day when academia has been unduly exalted, a keen awareness of the unfettered and thorough knowledge of the Lord is necessary. The knowledge of the Lord is not passive, or, in a sense, inactive. He testifies, *"I the LORD search the heart, I try [investigate, examine] the reins [deep interior of the mind], even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings"* (Jer 17:10). God sees to it that men correctly reap what they sow – whether it is *"corruption"* or *"eternal life"* (Gal 6:7).

THAT JESUS HAD MADE AND BAPTIZED MORE DISCIPLES THAN JOHN. Jesus knew that the Pharisees had heard how He had *"made and baptized more disciples than John."* That, of course, was the truth. **However the Pharisees could not handle what was true!** They would use such knowledge to cause confusion and unwarranted competition. Truth not only falls in the street (Isa 59:14) when it is not declared, but when it is abused as well. In this case, the knowledge that

Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John was causing a division, rather than throwing the spotlight upon Jesus. Even though John had clearly said, *"He must increase, but I must decrease"* (John 3:30), at that time, some of his disciples were not willing for that to happen. They had considered what was temporary to be permanent. This is an invariable law in the Kingdom of God: Jesus must increase, and we must decrease. His agenda must take the precedence over our agenda. Ideally, we must endeavor to become involved in what He is doing, rather than seeking Him to be involved in what we are doing.

Because the Kingdom over which Jesus is presiding is characterized by *"increase"* of which *"there shall be no end"* (Isa 9:7), decreasing trends must be purged from the church. A practice or teaching that needs to be updated must not be adopted. Trendy and fashionable things must be avoided. The intellectual tendency to *"tell or hear some new thing"* (Acts 17:21), must not be allowed entrance into the church of the Living God. This will spoil a lot of careers – but so be it!

JESUS HIMSELF BAPTIZED NOT

"² (Though Jesus Himself baptized not, but His disciples.)

Jesus knew that, if not checked by faith and a proper perception, He could become the ultimate idol. If they could do so, men, like those of old, *"would come and take Him by force, to make Him a king"* (John 6:15) – doing it because that would serve their own selfish interests. By nature, men think their will is the best will, and their need is the most important one.

Men have this inveterate tendency: When they see someone or something that is obviously greater than themselves, they will make every effort to make that person or thing serve their own interests. This is a primary trait of *"the flesh," "the carnal mind,"* or *"the old man."* Relevancy is seen as things having to do with *"me"* personally, and what I am doing. *"The flesh"* thinks within the boundary of time. By nature, man treats himself as though he was God. He is fundamentally self-centered. If, for example, men are in a democratic form of government, they will try to elect a person who will serve their interests, as compared to one who would rule justly, as God ordained, punishing evil doers, and rewarding those who do well (Rom 13:1-4). If it is in the realm of religion, they will *"after their own lusts . . . heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears"* (2 Tim 4:3).

Jesus conducted His ministry with a keen awareness of human propensity. He did nothing that would tend to contribute to man's self-centeredness. By way of comparison, Satan always appeals to this human trait, as he did in his initial dealings with humanity in Eden. He holds out personal temporal advantage, while Jesus ministers with eternity in mind. It was for this reason that Jesus Himself did not baptize His followers. Men would have, in such a case, made an idol of Jesus instead of receiving Him as Lord and Savior. It was for this same reason that Paul did not baptize those converted under his ministry. It would have made for even more division that developed in Corinth. Therefore he wrote, *"Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name"* (1 Cor 1:12-15). Paul had the Spirit of Christ.

NOT KNOWING JESUS AFTER THE FLESH. Not knowing Jesus after the flesh is the manner of the New Covenant. This truth is sandwiched between two doctrinal statements: The first statement: *"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead: And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again."* (2 Cor 5:14-15). The second statement mandates that from now on Jesus is not to be known after the flesh: *"Wherefore*

henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more" (2 Cor 5:16). That is, our understanding of and fellowship with Him is not based upon when He went about going good, and healing all who were possessed of the devil (Acts 10:38). While that was an essential part of His work, consummating in His death, burial, and resurrection, it is what Jesus is doing now that is saving us – "His LIFE" (Rom 5:10). The third statement affirms that life is now carried out in a new environment, and by new persons: *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new"* (2 Cor 5:17).

There is such a thing as knowing Jesus *"after the flesh"* – seeing Him as a peer rather than as the Lord. In such an case, the accent is placed upon the works He did while He was on earth, rather than upon His vicarious death, and what He is doing now that He is in heaven. Examples of knowing Jesus *"after the flesh"* include seeing Him as a Mender of marriages, a Means of maintaining good health, a Means of obtaining wealth, a Means of solidifying a political environment, etc. In short, it would be viewing Jesus as the way to a utopian-like existence in this present evil world. Mind you, it is not that Jesus will have nothing to do with such things. Rather, He will not confine Himself to such things, or allow them to take the precedence. If you are an apostle like Paul, you may be subject to beatings, hunger, sleeplessness, isolation, and shipwrecks (2 Cor 11:22-28) – and even having to fight with beasts after the manner of men (1 Cor 15:32). You may have a *"thorn in the flesh"* which is difficult to bear, and which the Lord will not take away (2 Cor 12:7-10). When Jesus walked among men, He twice calmed the storm for His disciples. He did not do the same for Paul, and Paul did not know Him after the flesh. Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law (Matt 8:14-15), but left Paul with infirmities (2 Cor 11:5,9). However, this did not offend Paul, for he did not know Christ *"after the flesh."* It is not uncommon for professing believers to require godly improvement in this area.

Had Jesus baptized the people themselves, it would have promoted knowing Him *"after the flesh,"* and would therefore have been counterproductive. It would have turned the attention of the people away from the manner in which Jesus is to be known. **He is not to be considered within the context of our personal lives, but within the greater context of God's eternal purpose.** It is how Jesus relates to God the Father and His purpose that is to be the center of our consideration.

JESUS LEFT JUDAEA

³ He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee."

How was the Lord affected by unproductive conversations, dishonest dialog, and needless controversy? Some people thrive on such things – but not Jesus. It is ever true that when the heart and mind are set on things above, and not on things on the earth, a certain intolerance of unprofitable things begins to emerge. Hungering and thirsting souls cannot be satisfied with religious trivia. Having confronted those with ignoble motives, Jesus no longer remained in that area. He left.

The Lord Jesus had a certain intolerance of the flesh. This is seen in several of His responses to men, and to circumstances as well.

TO HIS DISCIPLES: *"Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to Me" (Matt 17:17). "And He saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" (Matt 8:26). "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matt 14:31). "Which when Jesus perceived, He said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread?" (Matt 16:8).*

TO CIRCUMSTANCES: *"And when He had looked round about on them with anger, being*

grieved for the hardness of their hearts, He saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other" (Mark 3:5). "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled" (John 11:33). "When Jesus had thus said, He was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me" (John 13:21).

TO DEFILING THE TEMPLE. *"And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when He had made a scourge of small cords, He drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not My Father's house an house of merchandise" (John 2:14-16). "And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." (Matt 21:12-13).*

It is good to keep before us the fact that Jesus is among us when we gather together. He notes when we are distracted to lesser things, or when we engage in private things while in His presence. Let no one imagine for a moment that Jesus will remain in an environment where He is not preeminent. In our text, the superfluous observations and questions of the scribes and Pharisees concluded with Him leaving. **There are some environments in which Jesus will not remain.**

- **FACING A WICKED GENERATION.** *"A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. **And He left them, and departed"** (Matt 16:4).*
- **THOSE OBJECTING TO HIS PRAISE.** *"And said unto Him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise? **And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and He lodged there"** (Matt 21:16-17).*
- **AFTER HAVING TO SPEAK IN PARABLES.** *"And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, **He departed thence"** (Matt 13:53).*
- **AFTER THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.** *"And his [John's] disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus. When Jesus heard of it, **He departed thence by ship into a desert place apart:** and when the people had heard thereof, they followed Him on foot out of the cities" (Matt 14:12-13)*
- **WHEN FINISHING HIS SAYINGS.** *"And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings, **He departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judaea beyond Jordan"** (Matt 19:1).*
- **AFTER LAYING HIS HANDS ON LITTLE CHILDREN.** *"Then were there brought unto him little children, that He should put His hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. **And He laid His hands on them, and departed thence"** (Matt 19:13-15).*

Let us cultivate an environment in which Jesus will be pleased to dwell extensively, unveiling the mysteries of the Kingdom, and showing us the riches of His grace. There are places Jesus prefers, and places He disdains. There are people with which He desires to be (Lk 22:15), and there are people with whom He will not remain. Blessed is the person who can receive this.