

In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, God is presented as speaking the creation into existence. God speaks the word and it happens: heaven and earth, ocean and stream, trees and grass, birds and fish, animals and humans. Everything, seen and unseen, called into being by God's spoken word.

In deliberate parallel to the opening words of Genesis, John presents God as speaking salvation into existence. This time God's word takes on human form and enters history in the person of Jesus. Jesus speaks the word and it happens: forgiveness and judgment, healing and illumination, mercy and grace, joy and love, freedom and resurrection. Everything broken and fallen, sinful and diseased, called into salvation by God's spoken word.

For, somewhere along the line things went wrong (Genesis tells that story, too) and are in desperate need of fixing. The fixing is all accomplished by speaking—God speaking salvation into being in the person of Jesus. Jesus, in this account, not only speaks the word of God; he is the Word of God.

Keeping company with these words, we begin to realize that our words are more important than we ever supposed. Saying "I believe," for instance, marks the difference between life and death. Our words accrue dignity and gravity in conversation with Jesus. For Jesus doesn't impose salvation as a solution; he narrates salvation into being through leisurely conversation, intimate personal relationships, compassionate responses, passionate prayer, and—putting it all together—a sacrificial death. We don't casually walk away from words like that.

*For more introductory material on John, visit <https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-john/>*

**Read John 3-4**

### *Opening*

- What did you and your brothers or sisters fight about? How would you try to get your way?
- At family reunions, what subject is bound to start an argument?
- What causes you to skip a meal? To eat too much unintentionally?
- When you were a child, what was the most serious illness or injury you ever had?

### *Digging in — Discovering the Word*

- What is significant about Nicodemus coming to Jesus? Why at night? Why was Jesus so direct with him?
- What two ideas about birth are Jesus and Nicodemus thinking of? What point is Jesus making by comparing spiritual birth to the wind? How does Jesus account for Nicodemus' lack of understanding?
- What does Jesus claim about himself in verses 13-15?
- From verses 16-18, what stands out to you about God? About what he wants to do? About how a person is condemned? How will belief show itself (vv. 15-21)?
- How is Jesus' use of the words "born again" similar to and different from the way it is used today? How would you define "born again" in your own words?
- Since "nice" girls did not come to draw water at noontime ("the sixth hour"), why do you think Jesus risked his reputation to ask a favor of this woman?
- How would you describe the woman's response? How did Jesus turn the tables on her in verse 10?
- In the woman's reply, what is she really saying? How is she like Nicodemus?
- Why does Jesus change the topic of conversation so abruptly to her personal life (vv. 16-18)? What strikes you about the way he responds to her claim to not have a husband?
- Why do you think this woman changed the conversation to focus on a religious controversy? In this story, what does Jesus mean by telling her that God is interested in worshipers who will do so in "spirit and truth"?
- What is significant about Jesus choosing this woman as the first person to whom he revealed himself (see vv. 39-42)?
- Why were the disciples surprised to find Jesus with this woman?
- What does "leaving her water jar" reveal about Jesus' impact on the woman? How did she affect others?
- How is Jesus' figurative speech once again misunderstood? Why does he continue to speak like this? In what ways is God like food for him?
- How does the parable of harvesting apply to the disciples?
- Given the social barriers between Jews and Samaritans, what do you verses 40-42 teach you about Jesus?

### *Connecting the Dots — Applying the Word*

- What first brought about your interest in Jesus? Why?
- Where are you right now in the birthing process of spiritual life: Not yet conceived? Developing, but not so anyone could tell? Heavy child and waiting? Kicking and screaming like an infant? Growing daily? Explain.
- When did you begin to see God as saving you, rather than condemning you?
- What social, ethnic or religious barriers have you overcome in Jesus' name?
- What aspects of Jesus' conversation could you use as a model for your own discussions with searching friends?
- What are you constantly "thirsting for? How has Jesus satisfied you?
- Considering your interest in "spiritual things," are you more like the disciples or the woman? Why?
- Is doing God's will as essential to you as eating food? Why?
- What do you learn from the woman about telling others about Jesus? From the parable (vv. 35-38)
- When you bring your problem to God (such as a sickness in the family), do you tend to accept his word or keep fretting and fussing? When have you taken God at his word (even though the circumstances were seeming impossible), and discovered that he did exactly what was promised?

(adapted from the Serendipity Bible and The Invitation by Eugene Peterson)