

The Jesus of John: Lover of Men and Women

by Ronald W. Graham

The sermon explores the theme of God's love as presented in the Gospel of John, highlighting Jesus' love for humanity and the importance of loving one another.

Scripture: John 3:16, John 4:24, John 8:7, John 11:25, John 15:14, 1 John 4:16

Topics: "Gods Love", "Jesus Ministry"

Description

Ronald W. Graham preaches about the Jesus of John, focusing on His portrayal as a lover of men and women. The sermon delves into the deep theological implications of God's love as central to His nature, as seen in the Epistle and Gospel of John. Specific individuals in the Gospel, such as Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the Jerusalem woman caught in adultery, and the Bethany friends, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, are highlighted to showcase Jesus' love, respect, sensitivity, and transformative relationships with each person.

Transcript

"When Jesus saw him and knew that he had been lying there a long time, he said to him, 'Do you want to be healed?'" (John 5:6).

Introduction

I should like this evening to speak about the Jesus of John and concentrate on his presentation of Jesus as a lover of men and women, of women and men.

We shall begin by putting back to back the statement by the author of the First Epistle of John (whom we shall call the Epistler, a term that goes back to the 17th century), "God is love,"¹ and the assertion by the writer of the Fourth Gospel (whom we shall designate the Gospeller, a term that goes back to the 10th century), "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son."² Then, second, we shall consider certain individuals in the Gospel of John whose lives move into the circle of light whose center is Jesus of Nazareth: Nicodemus, the scribe, of Jerusalem; the much-married Samaritan woman; the Jerusalem woman caught in adultery; and the Bethany friends, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. Finally, we shall gather up three conclusions.

1. The Epistle and the Gospel

a. "God is love" (1 John 4:16)

John the Epistler says that "God is love." Like Biblical writers in general, he believes in a living God, a personal God, a God active in

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history, a God who means well and does good, a God whose characteristic activity is loving.³ God, for this writer, is "love-in-action." As a statement, "God loves" can stand alongside other statements, such as 'God creates,' 'God rules,' 'God judges'; that is to say, it means that love is one of His activities. But to say 'God is love' implies that all His activity is loving activity. If He creates, He creates in love; if He rules, He rules in love; if He judges, He judges in love. All that He does is the expression of His nature, which is--to love.⁴

It is obvious, I trust, that the theological consequences of this principle are very far-reaching indeed.

If the reality of love is absolutely central, and if all other so-called divine attributes are secondary to that love, then it is no longer adequate to think of God in terms of absolute power, or stark, dictatorial moral demand, or a metaphysical first cause never Itself--I say Itself advisedly, because Himself or Herself would be inappropriate to such an understanding--a metaphysical first cause never Itself affected by us men and women. If we begin with God self-disclosed in human affairs as love-in-action, then we have to begin to think in terms like these:

God as love-in-action is more than any particular expression of His love (hence He is transcendent); God as love-in-action is always available (hence He is omnipresent); God as love-in-action is able to envisage every situation in its deepest and truest reality and accommodate Himself to it, so that He can indeed achieve His loving ends (hence He is omniscient and omnipotent); God as love-in-action is unswerving in His love, unfailing in its expression, unyielding

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in His desire to confront men [and women] with the demands of love (hence He is righteous).⁵

John the Epistler does not define in any comprehensive way what he means by love though he does disclose a few of the understandings he is working with.

1) The first thing he says is that the most significant expression of God's love-in-action is Jesus Christ--an active expression of God's readiness to forgive sins.⁶ I take it that Jesus is no abstract principle for him, but an enfleshed spirit: one whom "we have seen with our eyes, [whom] we have looked upon and touched with our hands." His was a "life [that] was made manifest; we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim that which we have seen and heard."⁷ His conviction and point of view are like the Apostle's: "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us"; and "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself."⁸

2) The second word the Epistler has to say is that the person "who loves is born of God and knows God."⁹ He repeats that: "No [one] has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us."¹⁰ The reverse of that is that "[the one] who does not love does not know God, for God is love."¹¹ This too is repeated: "If any one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen."¹²

3) The Epistler's third word is that when we say "God is love" we are being profoundly human though not humanistic. "We love because he first loved us"; "in this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved

us."13

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4) The fourth thing the Epistler writes is that we prove that we love God in two intimately related ways: "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and this [is the] commandment, . . . that he who loves God should love his brother also."14 And the other side to that he also keeps in mind: "he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen."15

5) Fifth, it may be that the Epistler has the loving Christian reaching out no further than fellow members of the church--"the brother," and "the child of God"16--but that is defensible. If the gospel is that God is love, then that Good News has not only to be proclaimed but has also to be given hands and feet; it has to be seen not only in individuals but in the community of faith and hope and love. Deriving from the fact that God is love, the church not only proclaims the Good News but is itself the Good News.

b. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16)

John the Epistler claims that "God is love" and then spells out some, but not all, of the conclusions to be drawn from that.

John the Gospeller does not begin with where the Epistler does. We may phrase it like this: "God is love, such love as is seen in . . .," and the Gospeller is all taken up with the "as seen in . . ." It is not that the Gospeller just takes for granted that God is love and is ready to pass over that and move on to something else. Not that at all. If there is something about Jesus that is everlastingly true, true about God, then "the Word was with God," "the Word was God," "[the Word] was in the beginning with God."17 If Jesus was experienced as full of grace and truth, it is because God is a God of grace and a God of truth.18

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For both Epistler and Gospeller it is a fact of great importance that "no one has ever seen God."19 But neither rests content with that as all that can and should be said. For the one, it is crucial that "if we love one another God abides in us," and for the other it is definitive that "the only Son, who is nearest to the Father's heart, he has made [God] known" (NEB).20

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.21

The Gospel, then, is a gathering up of traditions about the creative and revelatory22 life of the man in whom God acted definitively.

c. Agapao, agape; phileo; philos

The Gospeller uses these three words to denote love: the verb agapao, "to love," which he uses 36 times; the verb phileo, "to love," 13 times; the noun, agape, "love," seven times.

In addition, the word philos, "friend," occurs six times.

He obviously has a marked preference for the verb forms, that is, for "love-in-action." Furthermore, he uses these three words in a variety of relationships. so interrelated that it is somewhat artificial to separate

their and categorize them. For example, in 14:21 the Jesus of John says:

Anybody who receives my commandments and keeps them will be one who loves me; and anybody who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I shall love him and show myself to him (JB).

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And again, in 15:9, 10, 12:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you (JB).

And yet once more, in 17:23:

With me in them and you in me, may they be so completely one that the world will realize that it was you who sent me and that I have loved them as much as you loved me (JB).

In spite of my reservation, let me distinguish the various facets of "love" that we find in the Fourth Gospel:

1) God is presented as one who loves. God loves the world; God loves those who love Jesus; God loves Jesus.²³ If Jesus is God's idea of a human being, in whom He therefore takes pleasure, It follows that God will delight in those who are at home in the company of Jesus.

2) Often it is said that God loves Jesus as a Father loves a son--or a parent a child.²⁴ If parental love is one of the great loves of our human experience, it is right and proper to think of God in terms of a value that we rate among the highest.

3) The most frequent references--about two-fifths of the total--are to Jesus as one who loves. If God so loved the world that he gave his only Son; if God is love; then Jesus must pre-eminently be one who loves. If God, who cannot be seen, is love; and if Jesus of Nazareth who can be seen is an expression of that love; then it follows that it is of crucial importance that Jesus be seen or be portrayed as one who loves. John, I take it, understands the implication of what he is claiming for Jesus.

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Only once is it said that Jesus loves God the Father.²⁵ That may reflect something immensely significant about Jesus, namely, his reticence with respect to his deepest personal religious experience.

Rightly understood this reticence is positive evidence of two things: the intense reality and deep sacredness of the experience itself, and the true manhood of Jesus. We are so made that we cannot lightly speak of the things that most profoundly move us: and for every man the Holy of Holies in his life is hedged about with silence. The thoughts that lie too deep for tears do not easily clothe themselves with words: and, if they do, the words are not such as can be shouted from the housetops. Such things as these may be spoken of--or hinted at--only to those who know to take their shoes from off their feet because the place whereon they stand is holy ground. In this matter the Jesus of our [earliest] records is at one with us.²⁶

Only once is it said that Jesus loves God but many times is it written that Jesus loved people: Martha of Bethany; the circle of intimate friends; the disciple who reclined on the couch close to him at the last

supper; those who keep his commandments; and Lazarus;²⁷ and twice folk are spoken of as friends: Lazarus and the disciples.²⁸

4) Often enough the disciples are described as those who love Jesus.²⁹

If God is love; if what is at stake in human history is the triumph or the tragedy of the love of God; if God so loved that he gave his only Son; and if Jesus loved as he was convinced that he was loved by God, then what he looked for supremely was a beloved community made up of

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women and men who loved him and each other as he loved them. That is all love asks for: recognition, and a loving response.

5) A number of times the disciples are enjoined to love one another.³⁰

These, then, are the five facets of the language of love in the Gospel of John. Strangely enough it is never once said that the disciples love God.³¹ The movement is from God to Jesus to the disciples, and from the disciples to Jesus and to one another.

When Jesus is said to be doing the loving, it is most commonly the disciples who are loved. How Jesus loved them is not stated in so many words. It is in the friendships, the teaching and sharing, and the laying down of his life for them. But for the most part it is not particularized, much less dramatized: not for any one of them. How did he love Andrew? How did he love Philip? How did he love Nathanael? John does not say.

So I should like now to turn to certain persons--Nicodemus, the scribe of Jerusalem, the much-married Samaritan woman, the Jerusalem woman caught in adultery, and the Bethany friends, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha--whose encounters with Jesus constitute a significant part of the Gospel and study these narratives to see what they disclose about Jesus as a lover of men and women, of women and men.

2. Jesus as Lover of Men and Women in John

a. Nicodemus, the scribe, of Jerusalem: 3:1-15; 7:45-52; 19:38-40

1) Nicodemus of Jerusalem appears on stage three times in the Fourth Gospel, the first occasion being more germane to our purpose than the other two. The first is found in chapter 4, the second in chapter 7, and the third in chapter 19.

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In chapter 7:45-52, we read that the command was given for Jesus to be arrested by the Temple police but they returned to the chief priests and Pharisees empty handed. Understandably they were met with the question, "Why didn't you bring him in?" (NIV). The officers weakly replied, "No one ever spoke the way this man does" (NIV). To which the authorities said, "Is there a single one of our rulers who has believed in him, or of the Pharisees? As for this rabble, which cares nothing for the Law, a curse is on them" (NEB). Then it was that one of their rulers indeed, Nicodemus, raised a lonely voice in protest on behalf of Jesus, "Does our law permit us to pass judgement on a man unless we have first given him a hearing and learned the facts?" (NEB).

In chapter 19:38-42, we come to the first sequel to Jesus' being tried, convicted, and crucified. It was the day for preparing for the holy Sabbath and there was a hurried up burying of the bodies broken on the cross. Joseph of Arimathea, secretly a disciple of Jesus, asked for his body and was given permission to take it and bury it. "Nicodemus," writes the Gospeller, "went with Joseph, taking with him about one hundred pounds of spices, a mixture of myrrh and aloes. The two men took Jesus' body and wrapped it in linen cloths with the spices." They paid their last loving rites to the body of a crucified man which was regarded as a sheer pollution, and then laid Jesus in "a new tomb where no one had ever been buried" (TEV).

That brings us to chapter 3:1-15, which tells of the visit of Nicodemus to Jesus. It is what in John leads up to "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son."

The Gospeller says that Nicodemus was "a man of the Pharisees, a ruler of the Jews." By that no doubt he means that Nicodemus was a

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member of the Sanhedrin, the highest governing body of the Jewish people. Its 70 members, presided over by the high priest, came from priests (Sadducees), scribes (Pharisees), and lay elders of the aristocracy.

He came to Jesus on the strength of what John calls "signs" and which Mark describes as "mighty works." It seemed to him that Jesus might be engaged in a mission that had God's approval and that the presence of God was with him. Presumably (vv. 3, 5) there was also in the foreground of his mind the stir aroused by the preaching of John the Baptist and the early preaching by Jesus. He addressed Jesus as "Rabbi." Nicodemus might have been brought up in the schools, trained to expect to find God's activity in the conventional, "the tradition of the elders,"³² but he had managed to keep a certain open-mindedness. He apparently felt that there was something here in Jesus or in the "Jesus movement" that was not to be dismissed out of hand but should be looked at with care and at firsthand.

He came to Jesus by night. Perhaps because by nature he was a cautious man. though subsequent events would somewhat qualify that, unless his meeting with Jesus that night invested him with a courage that he had not been wont to manifest prior to that. Perhaps because he was conscious of being a leader of the people and therefore had no business following on impulse every seeming prophet and plunging enthusiastically after every last cause. He therefore felt obliged to meet Jesus face to face and base his decision not on carried stories but on firsthand experience. Or perhaps his coming by night reflected the rabbinic custom of staying up at night to study the Law and Jesus was acquiring a reputation for being an interpreter of that Law.³³

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"Rabbi," the scribe said, "we know that you are a teacher sent by God; no one could perform these signs of yours unless God were with him" (NEB).

"Jesus answered" is how his response is introduced but if there was a question it is unvoiced in the narrative. The scribe's address has to do with Jesus as a person of authority; the Teacher's first word has to do with the rule of God in the human heart. There is the assumption here that the rule of God is all about life, new life; and the substance of the Teacher's word is, "if the new life is ever to be lived, there

rust be a wholly new creature-mere tinkering at oneself is of little or no use."

The Teacher goes on to say that in the renewing of a person's spiritual nature, there is a certain spontaneity to the divine action that is akin to the wind's blowing "where it listeth" (KJV).

The scribe is puzzled by the assertion that a new spirit in a person has to come from Someone beyond the self. "How can one be born anew? How can one come to shrink from evil as from pain, to deeply feel the hurts of others, and be sensitive to God's touch?"

And the Teacher said to the scribe: "Are you a 'famous teacher of Israel [and yet] ignorant of such things?'" (NEB). In his pouring over the scripture, had the scribe been deaf to God's word to Ezekiel: A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you;³⁴ and had he never stood where the Psalmist stood: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and steadfast spirit within me"?³⁵

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One is left with the feeling that the scribe was stumbled at the idea of starting anew. The commentaries on the scripture had already been written, and what was written must stand: there was no revising. There is no going back to live things over again. Character has been shaped and cannot be reshaped. Not even the miracle worker can make an old man young again.

On the other hand, one is given the impression that the younger Teacher did not agree with the older scribe. God is a freshening, cleansing, invigorating Spirit, so he was persuaded, who can break in--who can guess where, who can tell when?--to make over dull flesh into spirit, with new spiritual dreams and purposes and deeds.

2) Wherein do you see the Teacher loving the scribe?

First, no teacher can really teach unless there is the expectation that the other wants to learn, to grow, to at least entertain the possibility of change. To live by that expectation is how every teacher loves his or her students. So did Jesus love Nicodemus.

Second, every good teacher begins where people are and teases, entices, prods them to move beyond the known to the unknown, the familiar to the unfamiliar. In this case, a scribe had become so at home in the familiar scriptures that he had become blind to some of their deeper thought and further reaches. And the Teacher sought to lure him out of his place of dull safety. That is how Jesus loved Nicodemus of Jerusalem.

b. The much-married Samaritan woman: 5:5-30, 39-43

1) There is a Galilean emphasis to the ministry of Jesus in the first three Gospels and a Jerusalem/Judean stress in the Fourth Gospel. As the Gospeller puts it, Judea is "his own country" (4:44). According

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to the Synoptists, it is Galilee. In the first three Gospels, Jesus makes but one visit to Jerusalem during the days of his ministry: the last visit, which results in his crucifixion. In the Fourth Gospel, he makes at least three.

After one of these, perhaps the first, Jesus returned to Galilee and did so by the way of the patriarchs, up through the hill country that constitutes Palestine's backbone, rather than by the Transjordan. So "he must needs go through Samaria" (KJV).

He came to Sychar (Shechem), some 40 miles (60 kilometers) north of Jerusalem. Sychar was at the crossroads of the Jerusalem-Galilee road and the East-West road that led from the Mediterranean, 25 miles away, through the pass down to the valley of the Jordan. To the southwest was Mount Gerizim, the Samaritan rival to Mount Zion (Jerusalem), and to the east lay a fertile valley.³⁶

Jesus stopped by Jacob's well, a place of holy memories.³⁷ It was about one hundred feet deep: both a spring (pege, vv. 6, 14) and a cistern (phrear, vv.11-12), as the Gospeller says. It was high noon and Jesus, tired out and thirsty, sat by the wellhead. The disciples, meanwhile, had gone to town to buy food.

And a woman came to draw water. She was a Samaritan. The usual time for drawing water was the cool of the evening, when the women gathered to get water for sure but also to hear and tell the news. Strange that this woman should have come at midday. Perhaps it was to fetch water for the men working in the fields close by. Perhaps she was a bedraggled person, always behindtime, her whole life disordered. Or perhaps her seamy life had made her unpopular in the town, and the other women pointedly ignored and shunned her. And rather than be publicly

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snubbed, she had taken to going out to the well when it was reasonably certain she would meet no-one.

For whatever reason, there she was. And it was Jesus who made the first move. He threw himself upon her courtesy, asking something of her, "Give me a drink."

Simple though the request was, the woman was taken aback by it, and responded, "What! You, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a Samaritan woman?" (NEB). (The Gospeller's comment on this runs, "Jews will not use the same dishes that Samaritans use" [TEV].)

And the Jew looked pityingly at this faded Samaritan, so eager for what she took to be a colorful life yet with only this drab, blemished thing to show for it, and said, "If only you knew what God gives, and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would ask him and he would give you living water" (TEV).

Naturally enough, the Samaritan woman could not see how this thirsty Jew sitting there without bucket or rope could possibly give her water from a deep well, and "perhaps with a flicker of the old archness of long ago she attempted to rally him as one talking boastfully or without meaning":³⁸ "Sir, . . . you have no bucket and this well is deep. How can you give me 'living water'?" (NEB). To which he answered, "Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Understanding him prosaically, the woman responded eagerly, feeling that if there were any substance to what this Jew was saying, here was a possible end to her trudging through the glare of the noontday sunshine,

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and her tiring carrying of heavy waterpots, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water" (NIV).

Then comes an abrupt shift in the conversation: "'Go call your husband,' Jesus told her, 'and come back here'" (TEV). She hesitated, but answered honestly enough, as far as it went: "I have no husband." But then Jesus pressed her further, reminding her of the fact that she had had five husbands and that her present husband was indeed a live-in companion. The woman, feeling that things were growing too probing and uncomfortable, tried to escape by beginning a conversation about religion--hers and his, the Samaritans' and the Jews'.

She raises the question of the relative merits of worship centered in Mount Gerizim and worship made local in Mount Zion, and asks Jesus as a prophet who knows the mind of the Lord to settle the issue. Jesus accepts the role and responds that a new day is dawning when the religions of both Mount Gerizim and Mount Zion will be superseded by a knowledge of God as universal Father (or parent) and when God will be worshiped accordingly:

Believe me, woman, the time will come when men will not worship the Father either on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans do not really know whom you worship; we Jews know whom we worship, because salvation is from the Jews. But the time is coming, and is already here, when the real worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. These are the worshipers the Father wants to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth (TEV).

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(I take it that when the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel says that "salvation comes from the Jews" he has in mind the universalism that is found in a number of the prophetic writings like Isaiah and Malachi which the Samaritans, who regarded only the first five books of the Old Testament as scripture, did not accept.³⁹

The woman was impressed and, looking at Jesus, began to size him up afresh. A prophet, with eyes that had seen clearly and deeply into her life? That for sure, but perhaps more than that, the thought half-phrased in her words: "I know that the Messiah . . . will come. When he comes he will tell us everything" (TEV). To which Jesus said, "I who speak to you am he."

Whereupon the Samaritan woman left her water pot, went back to town, and said to the folk there, "Come and see the man who told me everything I have ever done. Could he be the Messiah?" (TEV). In consequence of which people left the town and made their way out to see Jesus.

Two other facets of the Gospeller's story we must take note of: one, when the disciples returned, as the Samaritan woman was on the point of leaving, they were astonished to find Jesus talking to a woman; and two, many of the Samaritans living in Sychar came to believe in Jesus because of the woman's testimony.

3) Wherein do you see this Jewish man loving this Samaritan woman?

First, it could be that Jesus' taking the first step in the conversation was an honoring thing for him to do. There are people who are convinced that Jesus loves them because they feel he has asked them to do something for him. They are attracted to him not because he gives

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but because he asks. Here was a woman being asked to hold a pitcher to Jesus' lips to make him less tired and thirsty.

Second, the fact that this Jew asked a drink of this Samaritan, this man of this woman, transcended the barriers of religion and sex. Jesus related to this Samaritan woman as a person. To show respect for the other as person is one of the most significant ways in which any one of us can show love toward that other. There is a freedom and a sanity to Jesus' chance encounter at Jacob's well with this Samaritan woman from Sychar.

Third, according to the narrative, it was enormously releasing for this woman to face herself, get the facts out in front of her eyes, see herself honestly and realistically, and not hide any longer behind subterfuge:

Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly." The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet."

Fourth, Jesus related to this woman hopefully. He was attempting to arouse in her a thirst for some quality of life that she had never envisaged before. She was being incited by Jesus to reach out further and further for some higher level of spirituality, some broader ecumenical fellowship, some more searching genuineness in her religion, and resources to sustain such a life:

Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never thirst; the water that I shall give . . . will become in [her] a spring of water welling up to eternal lifeThe hour is coming and now is, when the true worshipers will worship

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the Father in Spirit and truth, God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

Fifth, at least as far as the Fourth Gospel goes, for Jesus to respond to "I know that the Messiah will come" with "I am he" (TEV) was the clearest revelation, up to that time, granted to anyone. And it was made to this faded failure of a woman--a most unlikely person indeed.

So did Jesus love the much-married Samaritan woman from Sychar.

c. The Jerusalem woman caught in adultery: 7:53-8:11

1) I am running a risk in including in a study of the Jesus of John the narrative of the Jerusalem woman caught in the act of adultery and brought to Jesus. The translators of the RSV put the passage, 7:53-8:11, in small print at the bottom of the page. The TEV has it in parenthesis. The NIV says, "The most reliable early manuscripts omit [it]." The Jerusalem Bible has this: "The author of this passage is not John; the oldest [manuscripts] do not include it or place it elsewhere." The NEB has this note:

This passage, which in the most widely received editions of the New Testament is printed in the text of John, 7:53-8:11, has no fixed place in our witnesses. Some of them do not contain it at all. Some place it after Luke 21:38, others after John 7:36, or 7:52, or 21:24.

In the end, the NEB chooses to place it after 21:24.

It is a "happy chance" that this passage has been preserved in the manuscript tradition of John and a fact that all five modern versions include it in John.

Its being a piece of "floating tradition" does not make it any the less authentic, for it is a passage whose portrayal of Jesus is all of

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a piece with what we see in a number of different strands of the tradition:

the call of Levi the tax collector, which is in Mark (No. 53: 2:14) and then Luke (5:27-28);

the feast that follows this call with tax collectors and irreligious folk (No. 53: Mark 2:15-17; Luke 5:29-32);

the recognition of the worth of Zacchaeus, which is in Luke's special source (No. 194: 19:1-10);

the woman who had lived an "immoral life" (NEB) and who in the house of Simon the Pharisee anointed Jesus' feet with ointment, which story is primarily teaching on forgiveness and which also is in Luke's special source (No. 83: 7:36-50);

the parable of the lost sheep, which deals with the grace of God and is in "Q," the source common to Matthew and Luke (No. 133: Matt. 18:12-13; Luke 15:4-7);

the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, which also comes from Luke's special source and is teaching on prayer (No. 186: 18:9-14);

the parable of the children in the market place, from "Q," the source common to Matthew and Luke (No. 65: Matt. 11:16-19; Luke 7:31-35) and the saying, "the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you," which is from Matthew's special source (No. 203: Matt. 21:31), both of which are simple comments on the actual situation in the ministry of Jesus.

"All of [these] in their different ways exhibit Jesus as an historical personality distinguished from other religious personalities of His time by His friendly attitude to the outcasts of society."⁴⁰

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The incident recounted in this passage is set in the Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus was seated, teaching, with a crowd gathered around him. Some teachers of the Law and some Pharisees interrupted his teaching as they brought to him a woman caught committing adultery. They stood before her "in full view of everybody" (JB). They reminded him that in the Mosaic Law it was commanded that such a woman be stoned to death and they put the question, "What have you to say?" (NIV).

The narrative continues: "They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him" (NIV).

What was it that Jesus was being asked to decide? One (unlikely) suggestion is that the woman had been tried but not sentenced and Jesus was being asked to decide the punishment. A second is that the woman had not yet been tried because the Sanhedrin had lost the power to decide cases that might call for capital punishment. If in accordance with Mosaic Law Jesus declared that she be stoned, he would be deciding contrary to Roman Law. If, on the other hand, he decided the case in the woman's favor and advocated

her release, he would be contravening the Law of Moses. A third suggestion is that in spite of Rome's restriction on the Sanhedrin, some Pharisees and others were about to exercise lynch law and stone the woman. But there was an unresolved point of law which Jesus was being asked to settle: Was it necessary for the woman to have been warned about the punishment that committing adultery would entail?⁴¹

For a time, Jesus made no reply, save what he wrote with his finger on the ground. His critics pressed their question. Whereupon he sat upright and said: "That one of you who is faultless shall throw the

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first stone" (NEB). He then bent over again and once more wrote on the ground. Unable to pass the test that Jesus put to them, they slipped away one by one, the elders making the first move. Then Jesus, left alone with the woman still standing before him, said to her: "Where are they? Has no one condemned you?" Her reply was pointedly brief: "No one, sir." In response to this Jesus said: "Nor do I condemn you. You may go; do not sin again" (NEB).

2) Wherein do you see the judge, Jesus, loving this woman? First, Jesus was most unwilling to pass judgment either on the woman or on the case. He "bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground." But the accusers "continued to press their question" (NEB). They had first of all trapped the woman and now they sought to entrap Jesus. Finally he "straightened up" (TEV) and said to them, "Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her" (TEV). Then he bent over once more and again wrote on the ground.

Jesus took no pleasure in being dragged in on such a situation.

Second, there were the questions of fairness and mercy. In order for the case against the woman to be sustained, there would have to be two witnesses who could testify that she had willingly had intercourse with the man who was not her husband. However could that have been brought to pass? Had the husband, perchance, cynically arranged to have his wife caught by carefully prearranging that there be witnesses to her sin, perhaps witnesses who were scribes and Pharisees? That, instead of seeking to win her back by love?

Jesus' judgment on his critics and her accusers was that they were zealous for the letter of the Law but had little or no concern for its purpose: they were all for justice with nothing of compassion for her and only malevolence toward him.

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Third, Jesus accepted the woman as she was and affirmed her as a person. He did not play games and pretend that she had not sinned. He did not condone or explain away her adultery. He did not throw it up at her. But whereas her accusers probably only made her bitter and afraid and defiant, Jesus challenged her to a new self-understanding, a new dignity and self-respect, and a new way of life: "Go now and leave your life of sin" (NIV).

So did Jesus love the Jerusalem woman who was caught in the act of adultery.

d. The Bethany friends: Lazarus, Mary, and Martha: 11:1-44

1) Lazarus, the brother of 'Martha and Mary, appears only in the Gospel of John. In chapter 12 he is present, on the eve of the Passion, when Jesus and at least Judas were guests in the Bethany home. The sisters served, Lazarus reclined at table with the guests, and Mary at one point anointed the feet of Jesus with fragrant, costly perfume.

According to chapter 11, Lazarus fell ill and his sisters sent for Jesus. Lazarus died and for some unstated reason Jesus did not come until he had been in the tomb four days. When the grieving sisters heard that Jesus was on his way, Martha went to meet him. There may be rebuke in her greeting to Jesus: "If you had been here, sir, my brother would not have died" (NEB). Martha went and got Mary and they returned to Jesus, still strangely where Martha had left him. Mary reiterates Martha's rebuke or plea. Then all three made their way to the tomb and Jesus raised Lazarus, restoring him to life.

The narrative centers on Jesus and his being "the resurrection and the life" to every person who has faith in him (v. 25), but what it says about his relationship to this family of three is not without importance.

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Martha could converse with Jesus about her belief in the resurrection (vv. 21-27), indicating that her mind was not confined to the kitchen.

When Martha and Mary went to Jesus, weeping, he was deeply moved and burst into tears (vv. 31-35).

At the tomb, it was Martha who protested rolling away the stone that sealed it on the ground that smell and sight would be too much to bear. After the raising of Lazarus, "many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary [after her brother's death] . . . put their faith in [Jesus]" (v. 45, NIV). The way the Gospeller presents it, first one sister, then the other, is featured and each has her identity.

2) Wherein do you see Jesus loving his friends, Lazarus, Martha, and Mary?

First, the Jesus of John can refer to Lazarus as friend (v.11). That Jesus needed and had friends is itself of huge importance in understanding him and seeking to discern the lineaments of his loving. Later, in chapter 15, he will speak of his disciples not simply as servants but as friends (vv. 14-15) and friends by definition are givers as well as receivers: mutuality is of the essence of friendship. Discipleship has become a transforming friendship. Jesus loved Lazarus (v. 3) as a friend loves a friend.

Second, there is an astonishing openness in the relationship between Jesus and Martha and Jesus and Mary. Martha felt free to rebuke him, even though, or because, she respected him. Jesus could take issue with her without condescension. Feelings between them could run deep. From the two women Jesus could receive; to them he could give. Tension, sorrow, and joy they could openly share. So did Jesus love these two sisters.

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Conclusion

First, the passages we have studied, albeit from one point of view only, all bear testimony to a Jesus who did not relate to people in any formalistic or mechanical way. People are not all lumped together and treated alike; no one is dealt with as a stereotype. There are a thousand different ways to love and the Jesus of John manifests love's knowledge of the other, respect for the other, sensitivity to the uniqueness

of the other.

Second, in the first three passages, each of these persons is related to hopefully. Love is at work broadening horizons, arousing new expectations, stirring people to learn, to grow, to change. These are illustrations of the fact that love is infinitely resourceful, unfailingly creative, and always ready to believe and hope for the best.

Third, human beings are magnificently important to Jesus of Nazareth. If it is true that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son," then the Good News is the trouble that God took to fashion a world of people.

God seemingly values people enough both to make them and save them. The work of Christ was never a raid on an alien world universe; God saves what He first created . . . The fulfilment of human beings, whatever that means exactly, is wanted by God even at a great price.⁴²

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ronald-w-graham/the-jesus-of-john-lover-of-men-and-women/>

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