

Ev221 Sharing Your Spiritual Journey

Lesson Ev221-9 Salvation: Quest

At times people find god-substitutes that make them happy for a short time. This might be a spouse, a child, a career, drugs, alcohol, or any number of other material things. They often find that such substitutes fail to satisfy the emptiness inside and their hunger for God. This lesson discusses the ‘quest’ phase of salvation. God created humans to seek after him.

The early first century was similar to today in some ways. People were searching for something. Sometimes one by one, sometimes in twos and threes, people came out of the city into the wilderness. They were people on a journey, seeking for spiritual truth—out of Jerusalem into the wilderness by the river Jordan. Why? They were hungry to find God.

They had heard about the strange man in the desert who wore clothes made from camel’s hair. He lived by eating wild honey and locusts. Some said he was crazy; others said he was a prophet. Still others claimed that he spoke truth directly from God. Who was this John the Baptist? He was becoming famous for his wilderness living and harsh sayings that rang of truth.

When they came, they heard his challenge: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” So, they confessed their sins and were baptized by him in the Jordan River (Matt 3:1-3).

Even the Pharisees and Sadducees were coming to where he was baptizing, but John rebuked them saying: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.” John the Baptist told the seekers, “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt 3:7-9, 11). The people were seeking spiritual truth and he was giving them more than they expected. His words pointed to the coming Messiah, Jesus, who would bring God’s power to earth.

After John was put in prison, he sent some of his followers to ask Jesus if he was the Messiah. Jesus challenged them, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you’” (Matt 11:7-10). Apparently, there was much spiritual curiosity stirring in the hearts of the people.

Historians claim there were more than 40 so-called ‘Messiah-deliverers’ in Jesus’ day. Many of them wandered and taught throughout the countryside with their bands of followers like John the Baptist and Jesus did. These men all claimed a call from God to deliver the people from Roman rule and corrupt religious leaders. The city of Jerusalem was known to swell to more than

twice its size during the various religious feasts. People from all over Palestine would come there from the smaller villages to learn about God and visit the temple.

Since the beginning of time people have been searching for spiritual truth. God has “set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end” (Ecc 3:11). God’s beautiful world is too big for us, yet its pleasures are too small. We were created for eternity. Our fulfillment is found in God alone.

Paul wrote to the Romans that “the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse” (Rom 1:18-20). The nature of the created world tells us that a greater power exists. He created what we see and holds it all together. We know we don’t have within ourselves the ability to create or sustain the world as we experience it. We know we are only here on the earth for a relatively short while and then we die.

Yet we are like God, in that we can think and dream and wish for more. We wish for an existence beyond ourselves. This makes us feel like gods in comparison to animals. We can fly to the far corner of the universe in our minds, but are restrained by the limited nature of our bodies. Things of this world never fully satisfy or give meaning to life. Sexual relations give pleasure, food tastes good, but in the end we all die. One might argue we spend most of our lives denying our creaturely existence and certain death. Our animal-like bodies limit us, yet we desire something beyond ourselves.

We know there is something greater, something unexplainable, but real—Someone worth pursuing. So, we seek after spiritual truth. In our seeking, we realize our separateness from the spirit person we know as God. One organization that deals with overcoming addictions helps people recognize: “There is a God and you’re not him!” Admitting our human limitations is a critical step in the salvation process.

This awareness of our limited being—that we are separated from God—is the beginning of the spiritual process we call salvation. It is part of what Jesus was talking about as quoted in the previous lesson. He said that the Holy Spirit would convict the world of its sin, “because they do not believe in me” (John 16: 9). Sin can be described as separation from God, due to our lack of belief in him.

As you witness to others and share your spiritual journey, be sure to start with this basic step. A person must first admit their need of God. As they seek him, they can be told of his provision of a Savior and can come to believe in Jesus. He will forgive their sins. They will find peace and true fulfillment in having a relationship with God. Your next lesson will explain more about the encounter phase of salvation.

This story is **important** as it shows us how the initial phase of the process of accepting Christ is part of a God-given spiritual hunger and curiosity in people.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that all people are on a God-given spiritual quest. They seek answers about God and their relationship with him. This is part of being created in the image of God. It's an awareness of God and our separation from him because of unbelief. He created human beings to be his children and to have a loving relationship with him.

Review Questions:

1. Why were the people going out into the wilderness to see John the Baptist? [Pause 5 seconds.]
A. If you said that they were seeking after spiritual truth and fulfillment, you are right.
2. What was the message of John the Baptist? [Pause]
A. If you said, "He was calling people to repent and be baptized," you are correct.
3. According to Paul's words in Romans, what is it about the created world around us that helps us in our spiritual quest? [Pause]
A. If you said, "The nature of the created world tells us there must be some power greater than us to create what we see and hold it all together," you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to reflect on the idea that all humans are searching for spiritual truth, something beyond themselves. Consider how that has been true in your own spiritual journey. Answer these questions: How can your understanding of this first aspect of the salvation process assist you to help others on their spiritual journey? In what ways can you encourage others to seek after answers from the life of Jesus and the stories in the Scriptures? Explain in your own words how people can find the truth about God and his desire for a relationship with them.