

Episode 9a: Conversations in the Gospel of John

Stan:

Welcome to Conversations in the Gospel of John this is episode 9 in season 2 this episode was recorded in the spring of 2024 at Friends University in Wichita Kansas welcome to conversations in the Gospel of John I'm Stan Harstine your host today Douglas Estes has other priorities and won't be with us but we want to thank him for all that he has done and will do in the future today our guest is Jaime Clark-Soles Jaime is at the Perkins School of Theology and Jaime how would you like to introduce yourself to our audience

Jaime:

well hello and thank you for having me stan I'm really honored to be here and love this podcast that you all are doing uh yes as you said I'm Jaime Clark-Soles I teach New Testament here at Perkins School of Theology at SMU in Dallas I'm also the founding director of the Baptist House Of Studies uh I have been here for 23 years so just loving it I love teaching my Seminary students I love being out and about in the community

Stan:

what got you interested in the gospel John in the first place

Jaime:

yeah I love this question that you ask each of your guests um so yeah it's hard it's hard to narrow it down to one thing but I'm going to narrow it down to a couple so I was as an undergrad I was a philosophy major so really interested in all the Big Ideas what is truth what is beauty what is you know what is how should we live um what's worth living for what's worth dying for so all of those really big questions I love them and I think we find those in the Gospel of John I also love poetry and metaphor so again the Gospel of John has all of that the other thing I would say and this sounds this is kind of on kind of maybe an odd thing thing but I also love Russian literature so I was at a young age a fan of dooi and I don't know if people know but his favorite gospel was the Gospel of John so that's another way I kind of got hooked in when I noticed how much the Gospel of John uh and the ideas got used in that literature so yeah and then more personally I didn't grow up at church but my mom used to send me to Vacation Bible School to kind of get me out of her hair get me spiritually formed whatever you want to say anyway I have a distinct memory even now all these years later 50 years after the fact of a vacation bible school where Lazarus the Lazarus story was acted out on all of us

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little kids where they wheeled in a grown man on a stretcher wrapped all up in mummy clothes he got up came walking towards us this was the reenact of The Story of Lazarus little traumatic um and so I tell my students now that's one of my very earliest religious memories so I'm pretty sure my whole adult life has been working that experience out of vacation bible school and finding the good news in The Story of Lazarus and I have

Stan:

there is good news in The Story of Lazarus that's for sure

Jaime:

so much so much so but there's a way to present it and there's a way not to present it

Stan:

talk about your method that you're using now as you're exploring the Gospel of John so that we can introduce that and make sure that's clear before we actually get into the teaser John 12 and 13 so what methodology are you looking at that we'll be using as we look at those two chapters

Jaime:

yeah so I've gotten really interested in addition as you said to the other things you know I've done in the past I've gotten really interested in everything related to to the body and Experiencing God through scripture so I've been reading around so academically there's all this stuff going on with emotions and the senses but where my real passion has come from is this I'm out about speaking and preaching in churches all the time so when I ask pastors you know what they're hoping to get out of the the study with their parishioners what I'm really hearing is a thirst for experiencing God I mean really from from like the top of our head down to our toes so pastors are telling me my people are faithful they're doing all the right things they care about social justice they're doing good in our community but what what the pastors are wanting for their people is just that deep down into the bones and the center of our guts the real lived embodied experience of the God who loves us and that life abundant that the gospel promises not just as an idea in our heads but just something we know to our very core and so that that really got me interested in starting to explore all the interdisciplinary work that's going on on on where do our emotion I mean where is our body basically that's my question where is our body

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in our faith whether it's worshipping together in community or whether it's living Our Lives as individual disciples where's our body including our emotions

Stan:

I think it's great that there's a transition from the mental part of knowing God which we don't have to get into the Greek to explain sometimes it's just what I think versus knowing the person and it's great that they're expressing that in different ways and it caused you to start thinking in another way so what's the most exciting thing that you've come across in these interdisciplinary studies that you've been so uh enticed by over the past few years

Jaime:

so one thing leads to another as always with the Gospel of John um so you know first I read around a lot about what what do we even mean you all this language and I know you had another guest on already talking about John 17 so that all that language in John about I'm you know Jesus saying that God is in Jesus and Jesus is in us and all this actual participatory language of of this kind of relational really embodied um relationship so one thing leads to so I wanted to think about participatory stuff which gets us into the mystical right how do we experience all the stories in the Gospel of John about the Risen Christ I mean how are we experiencing Jesus on Earth but then how do we experience we say we believe in and long to experience the Risen Christ what does that mean to encounter I mean even metaphysically instead of a you said just a concept or a symbol but truly experience the Risen Jesus and and also truly experience our text itself self as revelatory and not just something that tells us about God but is actually a site for encounter with that God

Stan:

so let's explore that term mystical for just a little bit because um there there is within the Gospel of John the reference to go John is the spiritual gospel so when you're using the term mystical experience do you have any other parameters that helps identify what it is you looking for and seeking to um Express for those pastors who are out there in those churches and encountering this in their parishioners

Jaime:

yeah because you're right a mystical can also imply the opposite of what I mean it can imply kind of Escapist go out of the world just go into yourself and Naval gaze and be very

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interior when in fact what I mean by it is um is an encounter with the Divine that compels us towards community and compels US towards service to the world and that's what I see in the Gospel of John so it's true encounter I mean very physical incredibly touchy Very sensual range of human emotions but the whole thing is so first of all honored right right I think it honors the fact that we're real human beings and we're finite and that's beautiful and that's part of God's intended created order is that we that we are embodied and we are emotional and then the trick with everything I think is to say how do we take all that we are and um direct it towards you know feeding feeding God's sheep you know Etc and so um so that's what I mean by the mystical and that's a really important uh distinction because the gospel writer would not recognize any kind of a wonderful fantastic encounter with God that stops there just between you and God

Stan:

because I mean one of the things we do know as before we get into the text is that um there is a lot of um we'll call them heretical for purposes of History um takes on the Gospel of John that separated the spirit from the body and you're not indicating that at all you're saying our body is a complete item and the entire body com is encountering God almost shamal like right

Jaime:

yeah 100% so yes overcoming those binaries which you and I know well I mean it's ironic right because our gospel uh gets used to kind of prop up binaries like you said but also it's the very place that that kind of overcomes them I me you know nothing in creation was not created through the logos therefore indicating that every single thing in creation reflects God you know and so it all has implications for right where are our energies directed I mean what does it mean to participate and really have God and Jesus in us and for us to be in each other how does that turn out to be good news yes for us but also for the whole creation not just other people but all of creation including our relationship to the earth and the cosmos itself right so yes it's exactly the opposite of that by the way there's real gender implications to that binary we also know right the separation when separate the body and emotions from the rational intellectual automatically we create a hierarchy and we associate the you know as we know the emotions um the emotions in the body with that which is female and less than and the goal is to be more rational and

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emotionless because that's and we inherit that right we all know we inherit that from Antiquity but the Gospel of John I think offers a different way to say that's not that is not at all right we were created with bodies from the start God intended it and again how do we integrate how do we remember ourselves as individuals and then as a community to again go out and yeah be good news

Stan:

so let's go ahead and become really practical talk to us about how we can experience in a holistic fashion this Divine One the Theos God as we are looking and reading through the text

Jaime:

yeah so this time around uh like you I've written on 12 and 13 uh in a number of different places from different angles but this time around I'm looking at it with this emphasis on embodied experience and so all of the senses the Gospel of John loves the senses every single one of the senses we can find in the Gospel of John like like you said what's fascinating about this is right at that transition period so we're ending Jesus's public Ministry to where he turns towards the farewell discourse where he prepares them right for his leaving we see all the emotions we hear language of joy and grief there's weeping all kinds of emotions going on but this this kind of stop and slow down and take a look and kind of zoom in with our camera and magnify what's happening in this transition period how are we closing out the public Ministry and so as you said uh we find uh Mary anointing Jesus and so it's already in the context of a meal so I'm not going to go into taste as much um I recently wrote an article Experiencing God in the Gospel of John I do go through this in more detail so it's in the context of a meal so we can already if we start picturing it we can already start kind of smelling the whole tasting uh piece but the I want to focus a bit on the touch and smell that comes up in the passage so we know that um Mary who this is important to always important to remember this is not Mary Magdalene uh this is Mary the sister of Martha this is not a prostitute and this is right so so this is Mary so what we have here first of all is radical hospitality and what we find is that she takes we we hear that she takes this you know large amount of nard and she anoints Jesus's feet and I think that's important I mean there's a real emphasis here on the physical the feet and as we know it's not his head I mean this is different this is a kind of servant

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this a very humble thing to do anointing someone's feet right so she's there and we can just picture and smell right we hear that the smell of it fills the room and that word we know that we've just come off the story of the raising of Lazarus which is another place we hear about the smell in that case of course it was the stench of the Tomb but I'm so fascinated aren't you by the by the emphasis on the smell I mean really putting our bodies into this story pulling our whole cells not just our mind about symbols you know metaphor but our whole bodies

Stan:

I think part of the reason that that the smell is so crucial for us to pay attention to we live in a sanitized world in the west yeah in especially in the US we have a hard time imagining actually what that room smelled like before she opened the nard it was probably a stench ahead of time and it became the entire room became aromatic because of that it's part of the reason

Jaime:

I think we have a hard time when we're in vulnerable physical spaces letting people come in and love on us because we're like wait I have to know in advance because I have to shower and get prepped and be presentable because it's too embarrassing if somebody from church comes to love on me and yeah there are odors or yeah I mean it's all tied up to me in vulnerability and Hospitality which I think the story is about but we can't do true hospitality and true vulnerability if we don't do emotions and don't do the senses I mean I just really don't think we can and and she you know what's interesting is in the story so anyway so there's these emotions right then of course Judas has his emotions and then Jesus you know jumps on Judas's case so there's a lot of emotions flying which I also love because guess what that's real life in community but focusing on um those senses and again not shying away from the sensuality of the fact that she's in community with her hair down doing this very um what very tender act while also being prophetic right because of course he already states she's doing to prepare for his burial which is the whole things driving at we just have with Lazarus so it's not just oh Mar's being like doing the typical female service thing there's nothing wrong with that but the ACT is I mean I guess what it's kind of saying is Hospitality itself is prophetic when it's radical Christian Hospitality right that's that is prophetic itself

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Stan:

there's a whole another topic we could talk about so let's go ahead and keep on going with the senses um or if you want to compare with 13 or do you have some more in 12 that you want to

Jaime:

well yes so I love the fact so yeah just just paying attention to the senses there and then the fact that it pulls right over and I know there's you mentioned the other things we understand after 13 there's a lot other uh pericopes in there that you mentioned before we get to 13 but I want to jump over to 13 which again another very tender moment so there you see Jesus I love the way it opens now before the Festival of Passover Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the father and of course I love this line having loved his own who were in the world back to your point about mysticism right it's not that who were in the world he loved them and then of course it says eis to telos so which means either he loved them to the end which means you know temporally or however you want to but we also of course can translate it fully completely and I love that right and then we learn that uh that Jesus himself takes the towel and he turn in turn then washes their feet um and so an important point to make I would make for pastors who are preaching on this it's not just a an idea or image connection right the only place the word ekmassō that word for wiping only occurs in the story of what Mary did and then what Jesus does with the towel so the author at 11 it says 11:2 So before she ever even does this we hear in 11:2 Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair so all the things the author could tell us about Mary before we even hear the story this matters so much that we already hear this before it even happens so then Jesus turns around and does this for the disciples and it's in his touch I mean presumably Jesus could have just been like poof you're clean poof I declare you what

Stan:

the miraculous to happen right

Jaime:

yeah I was about to say Shazam but that will date my age but do you is it accidental I what do you think it can't be accidental that somehow the the healing and the cleaning that comes

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comes through the touch again uh of the feet and so it's really important to know that Mary has already anticipated the need before anybody spoke it so she's tuned in she pays attention to bodies and emotions and somehow senses this is what Jesus needs she attends to his need and now over in 13 Jesus does the same thing and Peter's like what are you doing I don't need this Jesus and they don't even know what they need yet he anticipates the need and he attends to the body and soul because they can't be divided and then he commands the rest of us to do the same to do the same thing that Mary already did before he even commanded it which I think is amazing because it goes back to the gospel kind of um lifting up also of you know women as um paradigmatic followers in John too

Stan:

what really jumps out at me in your discussion of that is that neither Mary nor Jesus would have been expected to do this yeah this activity was socially not appropriate and yet she is not recalled for all the I'm going to use word from your book ordinary things that she did she is recalled for the extraordinary that she did pastors are not remembered for what the ordinary things they do they are remembered when they do something that is Christlike and breaks social tradition it breaks a pattern of what they what has to happen and I think that's part of part of the entire mystical element of encountering the Divine is not ordinary and it is not

Jaime:

it's unruly

Stan:

it is unruly it's it especially for us it really disrupts who we are and where we are and what we're doing

Stan:

the conversation with Jaime Clark-Soles was so interesting that it ran a little bit long and so we are splitting it into two episodes you can find the remainder of this conversation on episode 10 thank you