

Part 4, Paper 167, The Visit to Philadelphia, Midwayer Commission

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Jesus's teachings, Philadelphia visit, Sabbath breakfast, religious scholars, Pharisee tension, healing on Sabbath, parable critique, mental health, marriage laws, children's blessing, Lazarus illness, divine perspective, angel discussion, social justice, faith reflections

SPEAKERS

John, Sarah

 Sarah 00:00
Ready for a journey back in time.

 John 00:01
I'm always ready for a good time travel adventure, especially when it involves following Jesus.

 Sarah 00:07
Me too. And this one is full of surprises. Today's deep dive takes us to ancient Philadelphia, walking alongside Jesus during his final year. We're going to be looking at paper 167 in the Urantia Book, the visit to Philadelphia. Yeah, this

 John 00:21
paper is packed with insightful stories. It really

 Sarah 00:24
is. And trust me, this isn't your average Sunday school lesson. No, not at all. Get ready for unexpected encounters, social dynamics that'll make your head spin, and spiritual insights that still resonate 1000s of years later. Absolutely,



J John 00:36

you see. What's fascinating here is the context. Jesus and his apostles have just wrapped up a really intense preaching tour, relying mostly on just the power of the spoken word rather than miracles. So

S Sarah 00:49

different from some of the periods we've looked at before. Yes, very different, less about the spectacle and more about the message, I guess, right? And

J John 00:56

now they arrive in Philadelphia seeking a little bit of rest, you know, just kicking back, relaxing, yeah, but well, you know, as we'll see, even quiet moments with Jesus, they tend to turn extraordinary. That's

S Sarah 01:09

an understatement. Okay, so let's unpack this. Okay, imagine a Sabbath breakfast, okay, hosted by a wealthy Pharisee, someone who supports Jesus's teachings. Now, this isn't just any breakfast gathering. It's a room buzzing with the who's who of religious scholars, influential figures, many of whom traveled all the way from Jerusalem just to be in Jesus's presence, like the place to be. Oh, yeah, everyone wants a piece of Jesus, right? Exactly.

J John 01:34

And you can practically feel this tension crackling in the air. You've got this on one hand, this undercurrent of excitement, this curiosity about this teacher who just speaks with such authority. They've

S Sarah 01:46

heard the rumors, they've seen maybe a few miracles, yeah. But

J John 01:50

at the same time, on the other hand, you've got this skepticism, right? This watchful eye, folks ready to pounce on any little perceived misstep, like they're waiting for him to slip up, exactly, and that's where things get really, really interesting. Oh, this

S Sarah 02:03

is where the drama unfolds. Wait, this is it, a high ranking Pharisee from Jerusalem arrives

is where the drama unfolds. Wait, this is it a high ranking Pharisee from Jerusalem arrives, okay, expecting, of course, to be given the seat of honor. You know, the place reserved for the most esteemed guests, of course, makes sense. But guess what? That seat is already occupied by Jesus Himself. Oh,

J John 02:21

boy, now we're talking, I know, right. So now you might think, okay, a seating arrangement really, is that a big deal? I'd be mortified

S Sarah 02:29

if I did that today, but maybe not surprised if it was like a really important gathering. Well,

J John 02:34

yeah, and in this context, it speaks volumes. Seating arrangements weren't just about comfort, they were a powerful symbol of social hierarchy. So this seemingly small snub, well, was actually a major breach of protocol, okay, it highlighted this growing tension between the established religious order and well, the revolutionary message that Jesus embodies. It's like

S Sarah 02:56

That awkward moment when you accidentally sit in the boss's chair at a meeting, only amplified like 1000 times over, exactly

J John 03:02

1000 times over. But you know Jesus being the master teacher that he is. He seizes this opportunity.

S Sarah 03:09

Of course, he does. He never lets a good teaching moment slip by, never, never.

J John 03:14

He notices a man with Dropsy in the crowd desperate for healing, this poor guy I know, and he poses a question that just cuts right to the heart of the matter, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? Silence? Oh, you could hear a pin drop in that room. Everyone knew the strict interpretations of Sabbath law that some factions, you know, really clung to. Oh, yeah, but I

mean, they also sense that Jesus wasn't asking a simple yes or no question. There's always a deeper meaning with him. Always he was challenging their priorities, their very understanding of compassion. And

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Sarah 03:47

in a true mic drop moment, what does Jesus do? He ignores the glares and the whispers and just heals the man right then and there. Classic

J

John 03:55

Jesus, actions speak louder than words, right? Yeah. But

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Sarah 03:58

he's not done shaking things up. Oh no, he launches into the parable of the great supper. And let me tell you, this story would hit a little too close to home for some of those listening. Oh, for sure,

J

John 04:07

this parable is not just a charming story about a dinner party gone wrong, right? It's a scathing critique of the religious elite who were just so focused on their own status and their rigid interpretations of the law that they were missing the entire point of faith, which is love, compassion and radical inclusivity. Think about who might have been drawn to Jesus's message, the poor, the sick, the outcasts, those who had been rejected by the very people claiming to represent God. Wow.

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Sarah 04:38

It's like Jesus was saying, my table is open to everyone, regardless of your social standing or how perfectly you follow the rules. Come as you are beautiful, isn't it? It really is. And so I have to ask, how does this parable resonate with you today? Are there ways in which we, even with the best of intentions, might be excluding others, you know, prioritizing things over Gen. And connection.

J

John 05:00

It's so easy to get caught up in the do in the busyness of life, that we forget about the real heart of it all. It

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Sarah 05:07

really is. It's a question worth pondering. But before we get too comfy with our reflections, things take another unexpected turn. Remember how I mentioned those social dynamics? Oh yeah. Well, Jesus isn't done challenging the status quo just yet. So the very next day, Jesus is in the synagogue, and like we've come to expect, things don't stay quiet for long. Oh

J John 05:25

no, not at all. Picture this. You've got this woman bent over, unable to even stand up straight, and she's been like this for 18

S Sarah 05:34

years, 18 years. That's awful. What's wrong with her? Well, the

J John 05:38

text says she's suffering from a spirit of infirmity, which I'll admit, sounds a bit mysterious.

S Sarah 05:43

It does sound a little like something out of like a ghost story, right?

J John 05:47

But here's where the Urantia book's perspective is so helpful. It explains that this spirit of infirmity, it wasn't just physical. It was this deep emotional and mental anguish, what they call a depression of mind, even a bondage of fear. So we're really talking about mental health here. Yeah. And it reminds us that even back then, people struggled with these invisible illnesses, right? They kind of don't always have outward signs, but could be just incredibly debilitating

S Sarah 06:14

and probably so misunderstood back then. Oh,

J John 06:16

absolutely. And you know, this story becomes even more powerful when you think about how Jesus responds. He sees this woman, he recognizes her suffering, and he immediately offers her healing.

S Sarah 06:27

But of course, not everyone's thrilled about this. Of course, not

J John 06:30

right on cue. You've got this synagogue ruler ready to enforce the letter of the law, even if it means denying someone compassion. It's like pick your battles, right? Well, and Jesus never won. To back down from a teaching moment, he points out this hypocrisy, caring for animals on the Sabbath, but denying a woman relief from her suffering. It's

S Sarah 06:52

almost funny, if it weren't so sad. But okay, so we've got healing on the Sabbath. What comes next? Well,

J John 06:57

then Jesus dives head first into another controversial topic marriage and divorce.

S Sarah 07:03

Oh, boy, that's a subject that probably had everyone in the room squirming a little. Oh, I'm

J John 07:07

sure. But it's important to remember that Jesus wasn't calling for a complete abolishment of all divorce laws at that time, Jewish law already allowed for divorce in certain circumstances, which actually was more progressive than some surrounding cultures where women had very few rights at all.

S Sarah 07:21

So if it wasn't about like totally overturning the law, what was he getting at? Well,

J John 07:27

he was addressing the spirit of the law, or rather the lack thereof. I see, you see, Jesus was condemning the way divorce laws were being twisted, manipulated to really disadvantaged women, often leaving them destitute and with very few options, awful it is. And the Urantia Book emphasizes Jesus's stance on the equality of men and women in marriage, which, you know, for that time period, it was a radical concept, still pretty

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Sarah 07:53

radical on a lot of places, sadly, but in the middle of these, you know, kind of heavy discussions, we also get these glimpses of pure tenderness and love. Oh, absolutely. The Urantia Book tells this beautiful story about Jesus stopping to bless some children, welcoming them into His presence without any hesitation. Oh, it's

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John 08:12

such a beautiful image. It

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Sarah 08:13

really is. Children,

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John 08:13

you know, with their open hearts and that innocent trust, they really embodied the kind of faith that Jesus valued most. It's

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Sarah 08:22

a good reminder for all of us, really it is. So picture this, Jesus and his followers are back on the road, making their way from Jericho to Bethany, quite a height it was. And I imagine the mood was probably this mix of like, you know, exhaustion from all the travel, but also this anticipation, right for this warm welcome that was waiting for them in Bethany.

J

John 08:44

Oh, Bethany was like their home away from home, exactly, a place of true friendship and refuge. Remember, they had dear friends there, a whole family that opened up their home, their hearts to them,

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Sarah 08:54

which makes the news that arrives well even more unsettling. And this isn't good so a messenger suddenly appears breathless, you know, totally filled with urgency, arrives straight from Bethany with news about Lazarus, their good friend, being deathly ill.

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John 09:11

And it's really clear, I think, even just from the messenger's tone, like the urgency in their voice, that this is way more serious than just a simple cold or flu. This is serious stuff, yeah. And

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Sarah 09:21

you can almost feel the disciples concern in this moment, their love for Lazarus, you know, mixing with this growing anxiety. They turn to Jesus, expecting him, you know, to drop everything and rush to Lazarus aside. But then Jesus does something completely unexpected, totally throws him for a loop. He pauses, yeah. And in that pause, you get the sense that he's listening to something far, far beyond what any of us with just our human ears could ever pick up on. And then really quietly, almost cryptically, he says, this illness isn't unto death, but for the glory of God,

J

John 09:52

oh man. And now the disciples are really confused. Talk about an understatement. I know I would be absolutely it's like you're. Friend is on his deathbed, and Jesus seems, I don't know, almost unconcerned, even hinting that there's this much bigger picture that they're totally missing out on,

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Sarah 10:08

right? And it's such a pivotal moment in the story, because it highlights this really stark difference between, you know, like our very human understanding of illness and death, and this much larger, you know, divine perspective, a plan that encompasses so much more than we can even grasp, a much bigger perspective, so much bigger now, before we get too far, I do want to circle back to that conversation about angels that we briefly touched on earlier. How does that fit into all of this?

J

John 10:35

Wow, that's a great point, and it's actually one of the things I love about this section in the Urantia Book, the way it ties together these seemingly random threads into this really cohesive picture.

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Sarah 10:44

It's really masterfully written when you think about it. Oh yeah, absolutely.

J

John 10:48

So remember, this whole discussion about angels is sparked by a question from one of the Sadducees traveling with Jesus, which, you know this is significant, because the Sadducees, unlike the Pharisees, they didn't believe in angels at all.



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Sarah 11:01

They were kind of the skeptics of their day,

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John 11:03

I guess, big time skeptics and Jesus ever the patient. Teacher uses this as, like, the perfect opportunity to clarify some common misunderstandings about, you know, the angelic realm.

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Sarah 11:16

And what does he say? Like, what do angels actually do? So he really

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John 11:19

emphasizes that angels aren't simply humans who have died or these like all knowing, all powerful beings. That's interesting. I've always wondered about that. Yeah, and the Urantia Book paints this picture of angels as this distinct order of beings created by God to serve, specifically as messengers, guardians and guides, especially during that crucial transition between life and the afterlife.

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Sarah 11:44

So they're kind of like our companions on the journey to the next life, in

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John 11:47

a sense, yeah, it's as if Jesus is giving us this little peek behind the curtain, you know, revealing this vast and intricate spiritual world that operates in ways we may not fully get, but that's definitely as real as the physical world around us. Definitely gives

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Sarah 12:02

you chills just thinking about it, for sure. But coming back to that urgent message about Lazarus, while Jesus, you know, is operating from this expanded awareness, this bigger picture, the disciples are understandably terrified. Remember they had been warning Jesus about the danger lurking in Judea, especially in Jerusalem, where the religious authorities were actively seeking to silence him.

J

John 12:24

And it wasn't an exaggeration. You know, this was a legitimately dangerous time for anyone challenging the status quo, especially someone like Jesus, who was rocking their world, shaking the very foundations of their beliefs right? So

the very foundations of their beliefs, right? So

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Sarah 12:38

when Jesus announces his decision to return to Judea to go straight into the heart of danger. It's not just this act of compassion for a friend. It's an act of defiance, like he's deliberately walking straight into the lion's den.

J

John 12:48

Talk about a power move. And I think it's in this context, amidst all the fear and uncertainty, that the true weight of Jesus's words about Lazarus illness not being unto death starts to really sink in. Oh,

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Sarah 13:01

wow. Yeah. It wasn't just about a physical healing, right? It went way beyond

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John 13:05

that. He was hinting at something far more profound, this incredible demonstration of divine power that would just shatter their entire understanding of life and death. It's

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Sarah 13:14

mind blowing when you think about it. And on that note, we've reached the end of our deep dive. We've explored themes of compassion, social justice, delved into the often misunderstood realm of angels and witnessed Jesus challenging not only societal norms, but also the very limits of human understanding. It's a lot to ponder, and we hope this journey sparks your own reflections on faith, courage and the boundless possibilities that exist beyond our limited human perspective. Until next time.