



SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY

Discipleship Plan

Gospel of John
Part 1

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Lesson 1: A Fisherman's Memoirs as Inspired Theology

Primary Verses: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor the will of the flesh nor the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1, 10-14 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 1:1-18

Supporting Texts: Genesis 1:1-5, Exodus 34:1-9, Psalm 33:1-9, Proverbs 8 (esp. v. 22-31)

When the inevitable death of our closest loved ones take place, many of us are suddenly confronted with a series of challenging questions: How can I summarize the life of a person so dear to me in a few moments? Can I explain the impact of this individual's profound influence on me? How do I help someone who never met my spouse/parent/etc. know how precious they were to me and the kind of person they were? As hard as it is for us to answer these questions for loved ones we knew, who has faced a more significant challenge than those who knew Christ face-to-face?

Can you see John, now with a head full of silver, reflecting on how to capture with mere words his experience of knowing *the Word of God Who became flesh*? Is it even possible for us who believe today, to comprehend the degree of wonderment in the Apostles who must have looked back on all that happened with bewildered joy? God's Son was every bit as human as they were. They experienced Him as a normal man, but He performed miracles that were anything *but* ordinary. And then His teaching!

For the purposes of our lesson, consider John, as one of Jesus' first students (and perhaps among the last still living), in deep, Spirit-led reflection on the ministry of Christ. One of his goals is to overcome the lie that Jesus was bringing something new and contradictory to the earlier revelation of God in Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Consequently, his writing begins to trace the themes of the Old Testament and demonstrate how they always pointed to and were ultimately fulfilled by Jesus.

Questions to Consider: How does John 1:1 automatically prepare the ground for any discussion on the doctrine of the Trinity? How difficult would it have been for a Jew in Jesus' day to accept the idea that Jesus could be both *with God* as well as *be God*? How does John 1:3 "double down" and emphasize the deity of Christ beyond what 1:1 says? How many verses in our teaching text allude to the coming conflict in the rest of the book? How do John 1:12-13 explicitly teach and correct human expectations on how one might become part of God's family? Deuteronomy 34:10-12 sets a high bar for prophets coming after Moses. How does the Apostle John compare Jesus with Moses (think beyond verse 17!)?

Challenging the Class: It is not a coincidence that John uses the word dwell/dwelt in close connection with the word "glory." In the Old Testament, the glory of the LORD is closely associated with both the Temple in Solomon's day and with the Tabernacle Moses built in Exodus. John's image of Jesus as the Tabernacle is a profound statement about the presence of God in the person of Christ. Is God's glory something you long to see? If so, are you longing to see the face of Jesus? He is the visible glory and greatness of God in the flesh!

Lesson 2: John the Baptist as Witness #1

Primary Verses: "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of Whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because He was before me.' I myself did not know Him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water that He might be revealed to Israel." (John 1:29-31 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 1:19-34

Supporting Texts: John 1:6-8, Deuteronomy 18:15-19, Malachi 4:5-6, Isaiah 40:1-11

You know that friend who gives you unnecessary details before answering your question? You ask, "What did you have for lunch?" They proceed to inform you of frustrating errands, problems with their supervisor, a new dent in their car, and low paint supply at the hardware store. Yet, they never told you what they had for lunch. While many of us have friends like that, the Holy Spirit isn't one of them. He only says what is needed to know at the precise time His message should be communicated.

When the Bible seems to be providing superfluous and pointless information, we do well to pause and consider the Author. Knowing His wisdom, we should ponder this question, "Is it likely the perfect and infinitely wise Holy Spirit would burden me with information which doesn't glorify Christ nor is useful for my spiritual growth?" Since we know the answer is negative on both counts, we should persevere in our reading of the Bible.

Odd sentence grammar, seemingly unnecessary Q&A sessions, mentioning geographical spaces which don't make much of a difference in our world—the Bible contains all of these and at times, all at once. Though such occurrences in the Scriptures are confusing or even appear irrelevant, if we consider the Author first, then we have hope. The One Who *sent* the Word and the One Who *is* the Word made flesh, partner with the Spirit *through* Whom words are given to create the infallible, inspired Word of God. No message from these Three will ever fail us with unnecessary words.

Questions to Consider: Why is the first comment from John the Baptist a negative confession? Though the wording of his answer to Jerusalem's religious leadership appears clumsy, what do his words clarify? What is the significance of the questions asked in John 1:19-24? How are those questions an explanation? How is John's wilderness location a continuation of Old Testament themes? Why is this ideal important and how does it support our appreciation that, while there are many human authors, there is only one Divine Author for each book of scripture? How strange would it have been to hear someone called "Lamb of God?" How does John explain he was able to recognize the Son of God? How might the answer to the previous question help explain John saying, "I myself did not know Him..."?

Challenging the Class: John the Baptist made quite an impression on the society of his day. Though he was beyond the Jordan River, even the religious leadership in Jerusalem could not ignore him. Yet, for all the attention he received, take note of how careful he was to refuse any glory due to the Lord. Despite being celebrated all over Judea and beyond, John knew his role and was determined to honor Jesus above himself. Whatever else others may say about us, may we never be found failing to redirect and render praise to the Lord—all the glory belongs to Him.

Lesson 3: Planting the Seed of Discipleship

Primary Verses: "One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas' (which means Peter). The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." (John 1:40-43 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 1:35-51

Supporting Texts: Genesis 28:10-22, Daniel 7:1-14, Micah 4:1-5

It is essential to note the locations in the gospel of John. John the Baptist is described in the opening scene as baptizing "across the Jordan." That famous river is a natural boundary separating the most common border of Israel from nations to the east. Historically, just as the 40-year period of wilderness wandering was coming to an end, we will recall that Joshua led God's people into Canaan by way of the Jordan, just as Moses had led the nation through the Red Sea on dry ground (Joshua 3).

The proclamation of Jesus as "the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world," therefore, has powerful implications for the scope of God's work, which seems to be expanding dramatically by such an announcement. Similarly, the calling of early Apostles in this very region and in "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Matthew 4:14-16 and Isaiah 9:1-7) will ultimately point towards the enlargement of worship and knowledge of Israel's God, well beyond Israel's borders.

However, at this early stage in Jesus' mission, much clarity is given when we consider how He describes Himself and how the first disciples understand the Law and Prophets pointing to the Messiah (1:41). Consider these words from Dr. Michael J. Kruger,

"John presents Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel's history. In a remarkable [interpretive] maneuver, John's makes it clear that even historical events within the nation of Israel, and not just explicit prophecies, pointed toward the coming Messiah. John tells the skeptical Nathanael, "You will see heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (1:51), a vivid allusion to Jacob's dream of a "ladder" reaching up to heaven (Gen. 28:12). Jesus is the ultimate ladder, or connection between heaven and earth, to which Jacob's dream pointed." (from "The Gospel Realized," edited by Dr. Kruger, pg. 131)

Questions to Consider: What does John present to us as Jesus' first words? What does the reply of Andrew and his friend say about their desire concerning Jesus? Simon is a prevalent Jewish name, but Philip is a name with Greek origin. Is it significant, at all, that Jesus has at least one disciple with a Greek-based name? Why or why not? Compare 1:41 and 1:45. Is this mere redundancy or is there value in similar statements being made so close together? What is the connection between the man named "Jacob" and the nation called "Israel?" What is the contrast between "Jacob" and the words Jesus uses to describe Nathanael?

Challenging the Class: Are you interested in people or in what people do for you? Of course, what people do is important, but see the priority of relationship and valuing individuals. John's disciples were seeking *Jesus*—not what He could do, and Jesus spoke of *Nathanael* under the fig tree, not what Nathanael was doing. Do you care enough about people to **connect** them to Jesus?

Lesson 4: The Wonder of Water Made Wine at Cana

Primary Verses: "When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.'" (John 2:8-10 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 2:1-12

Supporting Texts: Exodus 7, Isaiah 62:1-5, Hosea 2:14-23, John 21:2

It is hard to get past a first impression. The first flash of our initial encounter with a thought, place, idea, or person generally holds sway over how we analyze and organize our thoughts as we continue to engage that particular entity. What are we meant to understand about Jesus' first public sign? How is His work at the wedding in Cana meant to help us frame His overall ministry?

One way we can begin to think through this idea is by comparison. In John 1:17, John has already made a comparison between Jesus and Moses. It can be argued (quite convincingly) that God never gives more signs, in quantity *and* quality, to any other pairing. Consider the first sign by Moses in Egypt that set him apart and when God truly began to manifest His glory. Interestingly, that first sign involved a change in water, too—the Nile and multiple other bodies of water in Egypt were turned to blood. It was an act of glorious power on God's part and a quite literal blood bath of horror for the Egyptians.

In contrast, Jesus turns water into wine at a social event involving family and friends. The gospel of John is rich with imagery, but it doesn't contain any teachings that are directly called "parables." Still, we know in other gospel accounts, Jesus often refers to weddings or wedding preparations as a symbol of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 22:1-14, Matthew 25:1-15, Luke 14:7-14). The wedding metaphor is one of extravagant generosity, life-changing union, and undying covenant love. When we see the ministry of Christ considering these themes (though not limited to these themes), it is clear why the wedding party makes for a picture-perfect place to stage His first miracle. As a secondary effect, Jesus' willingness to participate, enjoy, and even serve at a wedding sheds additional insight on the wedding imagery in the prophets that is associated with the coming reign of God and His ultimate, eternal union with His people.

Questions to Consider: Does it matter that Cana is Nathanael's hometown? Why or why not? We are told that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Besides the miracle, why does it matter that Jesus attended a typical wedding feast of His day? At times we encounter persons who grossly misunderstand the exchange between Jesus and His mother, Mary, during the wedding. How can we answer persons who would make Mary the manipulator by essentially forcing Jesus into a miracle He doesn't want to do? What do we know about His character and by the story's normal flow that Jesus was not dishonoring His mother? What was the original intent of the water Jesus used for His first miracle? How might Jesus' use of that water show a more significant change than mere water into wine?

Challenging the Class: Cana of Galilee is not a very significant town, yet, Jesus chose to "reveal His glory" in that place. When the Lord has given you an assignment, are you pressed for a bigger platform, or are you focused on obedience from the heart that pleases Him? Jesus was free to be a humble servant because He trusted God would exalt Him at the right time. Is the same true of you?

The Lamb of God

FROM DEREK THOMAS APR 15, 2016 CATEGORY: ARTICLES

“And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son” (Gen. 22:13). Like an old-fashioned grammar text, the Bible is a book in which many of the answers to questions posed early on are to be found in the back of the book. Take the idea that Jesus died for me. We sing Cecil Frances Alexander’s words:

*We may not know, we cannot tell
What pains he had to bear;
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.*

And we sing these words because they reflect something we find to be deeply embedded within Scripture. *Substitution* is the word we have come to employ for this even though, like *Trinity*, it is not a biblical word. But it is a word that summarizes what we find in the Bible from the very start: that sin is atoned for by the sacrifice of another. Sinners in the Old Testament came and offered sacrifices, symbolically laying their hands on the victim’s head before killing it (see Lev. 1:4; 4:4). Plainly, what is in view is a symbolic transference of guilt from the sinner to the victim.

The annual ritual of the scapegoat taught this, too. Leviticus 16 spells it out for us: on the day when the sins of the people for the previous year is to be atoned for, the High Priest is to make atonement for himself. Taking two goats, he puts his hands on the head of one and having confessed the sins of the people, the goat is taken into the wilderness picturing the removal of sin. The other goat is sacrificed showing the cost that such removal of sin entails. Nothing could illustrate substitution clearer. The laying on of hands effected the identification of the sinner with the guiltless and the transference of sin and guilt from the one

to the other. When Abraham was shown the ram caught in the thicket on Mount Moriah, he had no need of divine instruction as to what to do with it. Even though the meaning of the sacrifice was given fuller exposure in Leviticus 16, there was already the idea in Abraham's time of the ritual of sacrifice in the place of sin.

The principle of substitution starts here in Genesis 22:13. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his only son Isaac is total but, in the last minute when his obedience is without doubt, God provides a ram "instead of his son." From this point onwards, the way of atonement is heading towards a definite goal—the death of Jesus on our behalf. If we are in doubt as to the course, Isaiah 53 spells it out. God is making His servant's life an offering for sin. And what does that mean, exactly?

This: "He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:4–6). Paul and Peter will employ precise language, using specific prepositions, to underline this concept: "For our sake he made him to be sin" (2 Cor. 5:21); "the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20); "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13); "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous" (1 Peter 3:18).

Substitution brings with it a guarantee: that sin, my sin, can never be revisited. It is atoned for—completely! All the punishment that my sin deserves has been fully met in the punishment of the substitute. Isaac was spared. It is interesting to note that when Paul says in Romans 8 that God "did not spare his only Son" (Rom. 8:32) he may well have been thinking of the passage in Genesis 22:16 in

which God speaks of Abraham as having not “withheld” Isaac. The Greek translation of Genesis (the version that Paul would have known best, perhaps), the exact same word is employed. Abraham was willing not to spare his own son, but God spared him.

By contrast, God’s own Son, the son he loved, was not spared.

It is even more poignant to consider that the Gospels record Jesus’ prayer of dereliction on the cross: “My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). Jesus deserved to be spared! He had cried earlier in Gethsemane: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matt. 26:39). As a son to a father he had cried for an answer. *But Jesus was not spared.*

All this highlights the way in which the Old Testament story prepares the way for the coming of Jesus as the promised Savior. The Scottish preacher “Rabbi” Duncan in a famous outburst in one of his classes, summarized it for us: “Dy’e know what Calvary was?” And with tears in his eyes went on to say, “It was *damnation*; and he took it *lovingly*.”

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The Wedding at Cana

“Jesus said to [Mary], ‘Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you’” (vv. 4–5).

- John 2:1–5

One only needs a basic familiarity with the life of Jesus to know that His earthly ministry was characterized by two key things: preaching/teaching and miracles. Thus far in our study of John’s gospel, we have seen a little bit of our Lord’s teaching in His revelation of Himself as the way to salvation (John 1:51). In today’s passage, we begin to study the first of Jesus’ miracles, His turning the water to wine at Cana.

The setting was a wedding attended by Jesus, His disciples, and Mary His mother (2:1–2). Because both Jesus and His mother were invited to the celebration, the marriage was probably a family affair; one of their relatives likely was getting married. We should also note that in the first century, weddings lasted longer than they do today. The celebration could go for as long as a week, and the guests would stay for days. That Jesus would attend such a lavish party says something about the goodness of such events. Certainly, Jesus calls us to a life of self-denial (Matt. 16:24), but this does not require an austere lifestyle that has no place for fun or festivities.

In the course of the celebration at Cana, the wine ran out, as we see in John 2:3. This prompted Mary to come to Jesus for a solution to the problem (vv. 4–5). What Mary expected Jesus to do is not entirely clear. Given that His earthly father, Joseph, likely had been dead for some time and that Mary therefore had to rely on Jesus for support, it could just be that she expected Him to procure wine by ordinary means, or perhaps she was looking for a miracle. In any case, what we do know is that this story does not offer support for the idea that we should go to Mary and ask her to intercede for us, as the story is sometimes read in Roman Catholicism. There is no evidence that the hosts of the wedding celebration asked Mary to talk to Jesus for them, and the story is only about an episode while Mary was still alive. It says nothing about her role, if any, after her death.

What the episode does tell us, however, is that it would be Jesus who would determine when to perform miracles and what miracles He would do. We see this in John 2:4, where we see that Jesus told Mary that His time had “not yet come.” While Jesus would actually intervene to solve the lack of wine, He did not finally do so merely because His mother asked but because He made the ultimate determination as to when to begin His public miracles. As our Sovereign, Jesus determines when and how to answer every prayer.

Coram Deo

Jesus is our Lord and Teacher, and His willingness to celebrate at a wedding and even to receive extravagant gifts (John 12:1–8) shows us that Christian discipleship is not incompatible with enjoying nice things in life. We are called to be generous and to be willing to give our all for Jesus, but we may also enjoy all of the good gifts He has made.

Passages for Further Study

Song of Solomon 3:6–11

Mark 2:18–22

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