



SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY

Discipleship Plan

Gospel of John
Part 2

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Lesson 9: At the Pool of Bethesda

Primary Verses: “One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, He said to him, ‘Do you want to be healed?’ The sick man answered him, ‘Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Get up, take up your bed, and walk.’ And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the sabbath.” (John 5:6-9 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 5:1-18

Supporting Texts: Deuteronomy 5:12-15, Numbers 28:9, Nehemiah 13:15-22, Isaiah 35:1-8, Matthew 12:1-12

The earthly ministry of Jesus is fascinating for many reasons. Sometimes, there is a tendency to categorize Jesus’ work. Perhaps, some see His discipleship of the Twelve is as separate from His teaching to the crowds. Then again, some will group His teaching ministry altogether in one category and put miracles in another. Still, some will not group all miracles together; insisting that miracles over the natural realm (calming a storm, for example) should be enumerated in one pile while healing miracles are counted elsewhere.

These debates have their merit in some respect. However, it is essential to know the difference between making *distinctions* and making *separations*. In a distinction, we recognize nuances without necessarily making separations. A separation, by definition, denies the unity of two or more things under the same banner. The miracle under consideration in this lesson has one obvious, miraculous, physical healing, but a more in-depth look helps us to distinguish more than one prescribed cure from Christ.

Jesus’ question enables the lame man to confront and articulate his understanding of why he has been in such a miserable state for so long. By providing healing physically, isn’t Jesus also healing this man’s perspective? Could it be that this man’s hope was in the healing virtues of the water but not in God? We are not given details that affirm this man’s view of why he suffered so long. In fact, Jesus’ final admonition to him may imply quite the opposite (John 5:14). In proximity to the physical healing, Jesus’ warning about sin shows a spiritual dimension is in view. We are wise to distinguish between the two, but it does not appear that Jesus separated them. We should not separate what Jesus saw as unified.

Questions to Consider: Does this lame man approach Jesus, or does Jesus come him? Is this man’s answer to Jesus in 5:7 addressing His inquiry from 5:6? Why or why not? Put yourself in the shoes of those who saw the healed man carrying his bed. Given Israel’s history and the Torah’s role (Genesis to Deuteronomy) in Jewish society, would you have been concerned about his “working” on the Sabbath? Was Jesus intentionally provocative by healing on the Sabbath? Couldn’t He have waited one more day to heal the man? What purpose(s) could He have had for healing on this particular day? How does this story help us understand how the Jews of Jesus’ day understood His words/teaching?

Challenging the Class: Is it a coincidence that Bethesda, Maryland is home to the National Institutes of Health, the Walter Reed Medical Center, and the University of Health Sciences? How can Christians use this fact, as the occasion allows, to bear witness to Christ?

Lesson 10: Like Father, Like Son—The Astounding Claims of Christ

Primary Verses: “For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. For the Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life.” (John 5:21-24 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 5:19-47

Supporting Texts: Job 14:7-15 and 19:23-29, Psalm 50:1-6, Isaiah 26 and 42:8, Ephesians 2:4-8

In all our efforts to communicate the gospel clearly, we take great pains to be understood because “God is not the author of confusion” (1 Corinthians 14:33). There can be nothing worse than clutter where clarity is an absolute necessity. And what could be more important than a coherent, unambiguous certainty on the person and nature of God Himself?

If this principle guides us in this passage, it should help us recognize the approach, method, and rationale for Jesus’ words and wording in the remainder of this chapter. What we know is that Jesus claimed the earlier part of this chapter, “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (John 5:17). The Apostle John tells us the dilemma: Jesus’ life is now threatened because by calling God “his own Father,” the Jews understood him to be claiming deity, equality with God.

Since God is not the author of confusion, His agents (those who speak for Him) should communicate such that they are not guilty of the charge of disorder either. This does not mean persons will not claim to be confused or that they will not confuse *themselves* due to unbelief or intentional ignorance. But it does mean that those who speak for God must aim to tell the truth in reasonable and logical ways. Consider the allegations against Jesus and the assertions He makes considering those charges.

Questions to Consider: Based on verse 19, what is Jesus claiming about His relationship with God? According to verses 19-24, what things does Jesus say He can do (Hint: you should be able to find no less than four abilities). What do verses 24 and 28 say about the means or way that life is restored to the dead? How is this means related to Jesus, or what is His role in the raising of the dead? How many “hours” does Jesus describe in verse 25? How many witnesses does Jesus say He has in this passage? What *explicit* test does Jesus give that proves whether someone has God’s word living within them or not (Hint: it is the same test for knowing whether God’s love is within a person)? What relationship does Jesus say He has with Moses (or at least his writings)? According to the teaching text, what two things can hinder someone from believing what Jesus teaches? What is the cumulative effect of Jesus’ statements about Himself?

Challenging the Class: Some of our friends or family claim to believe in Jesus but deny He is fully divine. Sometimes, to “keep the peace,” we will not engage Muslim, Mormon, or Jehovah’s Witness persons around this topic because we do not want to be divisive but prefer to be respectful. Some even say, “as long as they have some kind of god/spirituality in their life,” non-believers are ok. But remember, a person’s failure to believe Jesus is evidence that God’s love is not within them (John 5:42-43), and whoever does not have Jesus does not have the Father either (1 John 2:23). Sometimes love requires difficult and uncomfortable conversations. How much do you love the non-Christians in your life?

Lesson 11: Old Signs—Revealed, Revisited, and Renewed

Primary Verses: “After this, Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.” (John 6:1-4 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 6:1-21

Supporting Texts: Numbers 11:21-22, Deut. 18:15-18, 2nd Kings 4:42-44, Job 9:1-8, Psalm 77, Habakkuk 3:12-15

Given the most recent years of national leadership, 2017-2020 A.D., many Americans, especially African Americans, long for the days of the Obama administration. However, it was not long ago that President Obama was a little-known figure. And certainly, at the turn of the century, very few persons would have recognized his relatively unusual name. Even when Obama was only weeks after being sworn in as the new junior senator from Illinois, most Americans, even of the ebony hue, did not take his candidacy for the presidency seriously.

But the new senator was very serious about his candidacy. So much so, even the day of his announcement was filled with historic significance. Do you remember the date? It was Saturday, February 10th, 2007. Why was this day important? While Tavis Smiley’s “State of the Black Union” symposium was going on in Hampton Roads, VA, promoting awareness about the 400th anniversary of Jamestown and slavery, on the same day (Lincoln’s birthday weekend), the future president was in Lincoln’s hometown of Springfield Illinois, declaring that Lincoln’s work was still in need of fulfillment which he, as president, intended to bring to more excellent completion.

This lesson, however, is not about the promise or performance of President Obama. The example of his presidential announcement illustrates how details surrounding dates and events should not be viewed as merely *descriptive* of the times in which they occur, but *interpretive* of the purpose and meaning behind such events. When the Bible gives us specifics on locations and seasons/feasts, we ought never to see them as merely incidental. While particulars on place and time are rarely the essence of the story, they are not **unimportant**. In fact, there are no trivial matters in God’s word at all, though the unregenerated may perceive some details to be so. But by grace, through faith, we can not only know better, but do better.

Questions to Consider: How would the two miracles in our teaching text be understood differently if they occurred with a smaller crowd, at a different time, and with an exclusively Gentile audience? How does the timing of Passover, a wilderness setting, and the background of relevant OT scriptures (see supporting texts) establish an interpretive lens with which we can understand the intent behind the miracles? How does this week’s passage add to our understanding of Jesus’ claim that Moses wrote of Him (John 5:46)?

Challenging the Class: The wall of separation between the Old and New Testaments, for some, is too high and for others, too low. Pray for wisdom from the Lord and eagerly seek His Spirit for counsel so that you see the glorious truth so many in Jesus day missed: He is the fulfillment of all God’s promises to all of God’s people—both Jew and Gentile—who are of the faith of Abraham (2 Corinthians 1:20, Romans 4:1-12). It is one thing to be told He is the fulfillment; it is quite another to see this truth for oneself!

Lesson 12: A Duty to Divide—The Bread of Life Discourse

Primary Verses: “Truly, truly I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’” (John 6:47-51 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 6:22-71

Supporting Texts: Exodus 16, Psalm 78:1-32, Jeremiah 31:1-3, Matthew 10:32-38, John 4

John 6:15 explains that some sought to make Jesus king by force due to seeing Jesus’ miraculous act with the loaves. While the Caesars of Rome were famous for providing “bread and circuses” as a way of distracting the people and keeping them under their rule, Jesus had no such interest, then or now. If He was interested in using His miracles to gather a crowd, Jesus’ sermon after one of the most famous miracles certainly did not help keep the multitudes.

Despite telling his readers that the crowds came “seeking Jesus,” John goes on to reveal that seeking Jesus is not commendable when our search has wrong motives. The miraculous feeding of the 5000 exposed the crass, earthly appetites that ruled over so many and the absence of authentic spiritual desire for the things of God. Jesus did not display a fear of rejection. Instead, motivated by love, He challenged His hearers to see the truth about their spiritual condition. Additionally, He corrected their false perceptions about Moses’s importance and the centrality of faith in Him.

Questions to Consider: How does Jesus teach the importance of faith in this passage? According to Jesus, how are persons enabled to come to Him in faith? Is John 6:44 a statement about an individual’s desire or ability? Look closely at John 6:65. How does that verse confirm or deny your conclusions about John 6:44? What assurances does Jesus provide for those who do come to Him in faith? What was the function of manna for the nation of Israel in the desert? How long did they eat manna (not just the number of years, but until what time/era)? Based on the OT record of how God used manna, how should we understand Jesus’ claim to be “the Bread which came down from heaven”? What was the net-effect (bottom-line result) of this sermon/discourse?

Challenging the Class: It is possible to be both sincere and sincerely wrong at the same time. Case in point: if you are serving a God Who never disturbs or challenges you but always agrees with you, you have mistaken your will and your truth for His. As we can see in this passage, the Master Preacher was not well-received by every audience in His day—even among those called His disciples! However, there is a bright spot: if others disbelieve Christ, pray that your faith stand in sharp contrast. Like Peter’s confession, seek God’s grace that your profession of true faith shines like a star, pointing toward the path of life for those lost on the dark waters of death.

Jesus the Bread of Life

Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst’” (v. 35).

- John 6:22–51

God told Moses to have the table for the bread of the Presence built for the tabernacle and stacked with twelve loaves as a way to remind Israel of His gracious provision for all their needs (Ex. 25:23–30; Lev. 24:5–9). For the most part, only the priests could eat this bread, though in exceptional circumstances it could be given to those in dire straits (1 Sam. 21:1–9). Yet whoever ate this bread found that while it could sustain life for a time, it could not make anyone live forever. Israel needed a different type of food to find eternal life.

This bread, we see in today’s passage, is Christ Jesus Himself. The Lord has just fed the 5,000 with only five barley loaves and two fish (John 6:1–15), prompting the crowd to seek Him out that they might receive more food (vv. 22–26). Jesus responds that the people ought not to look for temporary food like bread that perishes but for the food that lasts forever, the food that God has commissioned the Son of Man to give to His people (v. 27). At this point the crowd asks what works they must do to get this bread (v. 28), which reflects the Jewish belief that the Law is the bread that God gives. They are asking about the works of the Mosaic law they must do to find eternal life.

Christ does not disagree that something must be done to receive this life-giving food, only that what is to be done is not works of the Law as traditionally conceived; rather, they must put their trust in Him (v. 29). In this, Jesus is implicitly claiming to be the one who ushers in the Messianic age, which is seen in the reference of the crowd to manna in verses 30–31. Jews in that day believed the Messiah would miraculously bring manna when He came, and Jesus does not dispute this assumption; He only says that their idea of life-giving manna is woefully inadequate. He is the real manna — the bread of God who satisfies the true hunger of the soul (vv. 32–35).

The phrase “bread of God” was another name for the bread of the Presence (Lev. 21:6, 8), so Jesus is saying in today’s passage that He is the fulfillment of the bread of the Presence under the old covenant. Christ is far better than the former bread, for anyone, priest or not, can dine on Him by faith; that is, all who are willing may trust in Him alone for eternal sustenance and receive life that can never be taken away. And Jesus will never cast out any who truly put their faith in Him (John 6:36–51).

Coram Deo

The old English proverb that “bread is the staff of life” is never truer than when it is used to refer to Jesus. His flesh — His life — given for the sins of the world is the staff that upholds us, and only those who trust in Him alone can find eternal salvation. We are to feed on Him by faith daily that we might be sustained by Him and persevere. Have you partaken of the Bread of Life who alone can satisfy all your hunger?

Passages for Further Study

Ruth 2

Proverbs 9:1–6

Isaiah 51:12–23

Matthew 15:32–39

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The Sovereign Regenerating Spirit

“God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved” (vv. 4–5).

- Ephesians 2:1–10

God the Holy Spirit does many things in the life of the believer. We have seen that He is present among us and within us to give us the courage and strength to do the Lord’s will (John 14). He also gifts God’s people to create beauty (Ex. 35:30–35). And as we will see in the days ahead, He also gives believers many other spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12). Before He does any of these things, however, the Spirit makes us Christians.

In today’s passage, we see Paul referring to the Ephesian believers as formerly dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). This, we know, is the condition that all descendants of Adam—except Jesus Christ—are born into (Rom. 5:12–21). In our natural state, we hate the things of God and want nothing to do with Him. In short, we are in a state of spiritual death and we can do nothing to make ourselves spiritually alive. We must first be born again before we can exercise the faith that alone saves us, for we cannot even see the kingdom of God, let alone have the desire to enter it, before we are reborn spiritually (John 3:3). A simpler way of stating this is to say that regeneration precedes faith.

Who is the agent of regeneration who brings us from spiritual death to spiritual life? John 3:5–6 explains that the Holy Spirit does this work, but this does not mean that the Holy Spirit acts all by Himself in regeneration. The external acts of God—that which He does in and for creation—are undivided, so the Father and the Son are active in the regeneration of sinners as well. John 6:44, for example, tells us that the Father draws people to Christ and that no one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him. Ephesians 2:10 explains that we are “created in Christ Jesus.” Paul is clearly talking about the re-creating work of God in that text, so we see that regeneration happens “in” the Son of God as the Father draws us and the Holy Spirit breathes new life into us.

All three members of the Trinity are active in our regeneration, but it is worth noting that regeneration is another one of God’s external works that especially reveals the Holy Spirit. Father, Son, and Spirit are all active, but the Spirit stands out in regenerating dead sinners. This is because Scripture ties the giving of life particularly to the Spirit of God (Job 33:4; John 6:63). He acts sovereignly and apart from our efforts to change the hearts of those whom the Father has chosen for salvation.

Coram Deo

To believe that regeneration precedes faith is to believe that salvation is ours apart from any of our works. We believe only because God the Holy Spirit enables us to believe and guarantees that we believe. If we want to truly understand the grace of God, we must understand that regeneration is a sovereign act of God alone and is not the result of anything we do, even our exercise of faith.

Passages for Further Study

Deuteronomy 30:6

Ezekiel 36:26

2 Corinthians 3:5–6

1 Peter 1:3–6

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The Witness of Moses and the Scriptures

“If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?” (vv. 46–47).

- John 5:38–47

Jesus made the incredible claim that He was equal to God Himself (John 5:1–29). Such an assertion could be verified only through additional witnesses, so our Lord presented several witnesses to His claims including the Father, John the Baptist, and Jesus’ own miracles (vv. 30–36). However, these were not the only witnesses to Jesus, as we learn in today’s passage.

These witnesses—particularly the witness of the Father—should have sufficed for the Jewish leaders who opposed our Savior.

Ironically, however, the Jewish religious authorities who prized their ability to discern the witness of God actually missed His witness regarding Christ. In fact, these leaders did not hear God’s voice or perceive His form in Jesus, nor did they receive the testimony God gave through the One He sent to reveal Himself most fully to His people (vv. 37–38). But their failure to recognize the Father’s testimony was not due to a lack of study. They searched the Scriptures to find eternal life, but they missed it because they refused to come to Jesus (vv. 39–40).

First-century Jews, particularly the religious leaders, were devoted to the Scriptures. They pored over the text diligently, and Jesus never castigated them for laziness in study. The problem was in how they studied the Bible. Many Jews thought the mere study of Scripture would be rewarded with eternal life, but the study of Scripture cannot produce eternal life when study is pursued as its own end. We can find eternal life in the Scriptures only when we allow the Scriptures to direct us to Christ, the font of life (14:6). If we refuse to be guided in such a way, we will be handed over to error. This is similar to what Paul describes in Romans 1:18–32. When we suppress the truth, the Lord keeps us from finding it and even gives us over to falsehood.

Jesus did not say these things about His opponents because He was seeking honor from them and they refused it. He said them in order to point out that His opponents falsely claimed to love the glory of God and to be searching for His will. In fact, they had all the testimony to Christ that they needed in the Scriptures, including the writings of Moses (Genesis–Deuteronomy). If they would have read the Scriptures looking for God and His truth, they would have seen that the whole scope of the old covenant revelation reveals

the person and work of the Messiah (vv. 41–46). But if Moses, whom they claimed to love, could not convince them because of their unwillingness to believe, nothing could.

Coram Deo

Christ is the goal of the entire Old Testament. The various themes, people, events, and so forth of the Old Testament Scriptures point us finally to Christ, who fulfills them and grants us eternal salvation. All our study, therefore, should lead us to glorify Christ and praise Him for His great salvation. If our Bible study is not doing that, then something is off.

Passages for Further Study

Genesis 49:10

Leviticus 16

Matthew 5:17–20

Luke 24:44–49

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