



SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY

Discipleship Plan

Gospel of John
Part 2

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Lesson 5: Messianic Immunity in the Temple

Primary Verses: “And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, ‘Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.’” His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’” (John 2:15-17 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 2:13-25

Supporting Texts: Psalm 69:1-18, Jeremiah 7:1-15, Mark 11:17, 13:1-2, and 14:55-59

On the heels of the Cana wedding, a sign signifying the surprise and celebration of God’s coming kingdom, we are sobered up with a violent confrontation in a most sacred space. Under the Holy Spirit, the Apostle John has organized these signs back-to-back to remind us of God’s balanced nature. Both grace *and* wrath are rooted in the goodness of God to show mercy to the undeserving and justice to the impenitent law-breaker. Despite the shortness of the passage, we see several aspects of Jesus’ person and teaching.

Audacity: There is no getting around the bold and fearless claims made by our Lord in this passage. After disrupting the business and trade permitted by Israel’s religious leadership, Jesus could have corrected them using the traditional prophetic formula of “Thus saith the LORD...” Instead, Jesus refers to the temple as “my Father’s house.” Though we are comfortable using such language, remember that Jews in Jesus’ day did not regularly refer to God as their Father. Additionally, Jesus’ claim to have the power to raise “this temple” in three days fell on unbelieving ears. In due time, however, Jesus would prove He was not merely One with audacity, but a Man of *inherent* authority.

Admonishment: Jesus’ claims and motivations are one thing, but His method and doctrine are also instructive. The public rebuke of the money changers brings grave implications of wrong against those responsible for the temple. In both his actions and address, Jesus joins Jeremiah in a jarring critique of the distractions and lack of reverence displayed by the Jews in God’s house.

Anticipation: John’s account of this event clearly announces Jesus’ self-identification as the temple. Speaking directly to the Jews, yet indirectly about Himself, His use of the phrase “this temple” went over every head that heard Him that day. We can imagine John, now so much older, almost chuckling while shaking his head at the honest but enigmatic way Jesus spoke of His coming resurrection while providing a picture of the judgment coming to Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Questions to Consider: What indirect clue do we have about the size of the crowd potentially in the temple? How can we explain Jesus’ use of physical force to those accusing Him of a temper-tantrum? What is the source/motivation for Jesus’ actions according to verse 17? Is there a distinction between anger and your answer to the previous question? If so, what is it? Why did the Jews ask for a sign in response to witnessing Jesus’ actions? Was it right to ask for a sign? What indication do you have from the teaching text for your answer?

Challenging the Class: John 2 gives virtually equal time to illustrate two very different sides of the same Savior. Are you zealous enough to talk about Jesus in a balanced way as done in Scripture? Do you care enough about your neighbors, family, and friends to speak of Him as both Savior **and** Judge?

Lesson 6: Teaching the Teacher of Israel

Primary Verses: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” (John 3:16-18 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 3:1-21

Supporting Texts: Numbers 21:4-9, Ezekiel 36:16-27, John 1:10-13, Titus 3:3-7, James 1:18

The conversation Jesus has with Nicodemus is epic on many levels. Besides yielding arguably the most iconic verse of scripture, John 3:16, it continues to amaze, confuse, and confound the literal billions of persons who have read it over the centuries. Some have depicted Nicodemus as being condescending, causing Jesus to rebuke and humiliate him with His responses. Others see the exchange as being between an eager, but slow learner, and a new emerging sage. For all the questions, however, this conversation sheds more light than shadows.

Spirit-Enablement. The tension between Jesus and Nicodemus is due primarily to a contest between ability and imperatives. Simply, Jesus is often sharing what must be done. Because the bar is set so high, Nicodemus essentially questions whether what Jesus says is even possible. Jesus insists on the necessity of regeneration—being born again. Nicodemus queries how one can accomplish this. Jesus’ answer may appear cryptic, but points to the *necessity* of the Holy Spirit for transformed living.

Love’s Mission. Reminding Nicodemus of the Bronze Serpent on Moses’ pole, Jesus illustrates the mission He has undertaken from the Father. The passage known as “the heart of the gospel” is a definitive—but not exhaustive—statement on the purpose of Christ’s coming. If anyone is confused about John 3:16, it is only because they have not read John 3:17. As Christians, we rejoice in the exaltation of God’s love-filled intent displayed in the self-sacrificial gift of the Son for the salvation of all who believe. But we do a disservice to the heart of God when we isolate this verse from its context.

Impending Judgment. When a person turns on a light in a dark room, his/her purpose is for sight and safety. Rats and roaches, however, knowing light exposes them, flee. In the same way, Jesus’ arrival on the earth, though done in pure and divine love, is also associated with condemnation. Jesus did not come to condemn, but when the **unrepentant** see His light, they instinctively hide because though they are enslaved by darkness, they also love their enslavement.

Questions to Consider: How does the analogy of (new) birth teach us to understand the source and nature of life in the Kingdom? Was Jesus trying to be “coy,” or did He expect Nicodemus to understand the phrase “born again?” Can you defend your answer? How is condemnation connected to love in this passage? How does the world’s condemnation accentuate God’s love in this mission? Why might unbelievers misunderstand John 3:16 when it is not explained considering John 3:17-21?

Challenging the Class: Think of all the people who have heard John 3:16 but don’t understand it. Now think of all those who have *never* heard that verse at all. Are you directly helping persons in either group at all? Despite past failures, is anything stopping you now from acting today?

Lesson 7: The Groom and the Groom's Friend

Primary Verses: “John answered, ‘A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:27-30)

Teaching Text: John 3:22-36

Supporting Texts: Isaiah 11:1-2, 53:1, 54:1, and John 1:6-8 and 19-37

No one likes a *prima donna*. Rendered as “first lady” in Italian, the term *prima donna* was initially used to describe the leading female role in an opera. Over time, however, a person who has over-estimated his/her significance, talent, or position, while making overbearing demands, has come to be called a *prima donna*. In the more modern vernacular, the type of person we are describing has trouble “staying in his/her lane.” While they may play their parts well, problems arise when they demand more attention than they are due or are not satisfied with their roles as prescribed for them.

John the Baptist is not a perfect man, but he displayed the ideal disposition for the task assigned to him. At a traditional wedding, the “Best Man” makes remarks congratulating the newlyweds, leading those attending in well-wishes for their new union. John doesn’t act as if the whole affair rises or falls on his speech. He isn’t out to impress the guests with his fashionable, imported camel-hair suit. John is perfectly content that Jesus should increase while he decreases and he proves it in profound ways.

What is the great honor of the groom on his wedding day? The glory of every groom is in his bride, but also what his bride represents. Marriage is an honorable and blessed estate, whether children are produced or not. However, one of the most common reasons to marry is the pursuit of children. Through their covenant, both the bride and groom are principally positioned to increase, extend, and preserve their lineage. John the Baptist did not know Jesus’ entire mission, but he understood this much: the bride was not his, but Christ’s.

Questions to Consider: How is John’s confidence in God’s sovereignty displayed in this lesson’s text? Describe how John’s consistency prepared him for the question in John 3:26. According to John, what sets Jesus apart from all others who ministered to God’s people (there may be more than one answer)? In what way is Jesus just like those prophets who came before Him (according to the flesh)? According to this passage, how does God the Father display His love for the Son? Is it a sin to disbelieve Jesus as the Christ and Son of God? How should John 3:36 inform our understanding?

Challenging the Class: While properly esteeming himself and others, John’s joy was to glorify and exalt Jesus. John did not see a division between his ministry assignment and the promotion of Christ’s name and teaching. He did not mistake a territorial mindset for faithfulness to God. Are you able to spot such tendencies in yourself? Do you have trustworthy friends who have permission to keep you accountable for this tendency and related temptations? How can we protect ourselves and one another from an unhealthy attachment to a self-focused and not Christ-focused ministry?

Lesson 8: Salvation in Samaria

Primary Verses: “Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself as did his sons and his livestock.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.’ Jesus said to her, ‘God, call your husband, and come here.’” (John 4:12-16)

Teaching Text: John 4:1-42

Supporting Texts: Gen. 24:1-28 and 29:1-14, Ex. 2:15-22, 2nd Kings 17:24-41, Ps. 42:1-2, Jer. 2:12-13

The human condition is such that, like other biological creatures, we are often dominated by physical needs. However, being unlike plants and animals, God made men and women in His image. In His wisdom and mercy, He has repeatedly taught us in His word our physical weaknesses point to and alert us of our spiritual needs. One biblical image which occurs repeatedly is water. This lesson’s supporting texts are a small sample of how human thirst and places where it is quenched are used to describe, create, or introduce us to more significant spiritual themes.

The Well: Just as men and women congregate at restaurants to share life over food today, men and women, in biblical times, typically met at wells to do the same over water. When we remember the arid land and scorching sun marking the desert environments in the Middle East, it is no surprise wells were ideal for this kind of meeting. Interestingly, just before this story, the gospel writer casually and cleverly drops a line or two about weddings (3:28-29). In this account, Jesus Himself presses the issue of marital status.

The Woman: Judging by the hour at which she is found drawing water, we surmise she is a loner at best and likely a social outcast. Jesus’ encounter with her reveals why she has probably fallen into disfavor with the inhabitants of Sychar. Though she had apparently demonstrated little regard for certain moral standards, she partially identified Jesus as a prophet. Still, she proved slow to cross the social and religious barriers that divided Jews from Samaritans.

The Witness: There are several shocking turns this conversation takes. Arguably, the most surprising is that a reluctant recluse is transformed into a shameless witness of Jesus’ messiahship. The Scandalous Evangelist joins the ranks of John the Baptist, Philip, and Andrew as faithful proclaimers of Jesus and His mission. Jesus’ disciples are treated to a first-class lesson in missiology and evangelism by examining the fruit of God’s work through the words of this nameless woman.

Questions to Consider: Can you think of another divine encounter a woman had around a source of water (hint: in Genesis)? In what way(s) is that earlier encounter like the one in today’s lesson? How does the title “Savior of the World” (v. 42) take on special significance because of this story? How are the creaturely needs of food and drink used in this passage? Is knowing Jesus and serving Him your food and drink?

Challenging the Class: Authentic worship is depicted as a calling which unifies despite space constraints and ethnic divisions (v. 20-24). Does this ideal reflect your experience of worship? Considering Jesus’ mission into Samaria—with all the deep hostility of history—how might God be calling you to follow in His steps?

New Life

by *Keith Mathison*

I distinctly remember the birth of both of my children. Although they were born six years apart, I remember the preparation for each trip to the hospital. The drive there. Escorting my wife to the elevator. The rooms, the monitors, the nurses, doctors, and family members. The anticipation and waiting. Most of all I remember seeing my children for the first time and seeing the look on my wife's face when the nurses handed her this tightly bundled little person. I look up now and see a photograph taken of me holding my newborn daughter twelve and a half years ago. The birth of a child is truly an amazing and unforgettable experience.

As amazing as the birth of a child is, it pales in comparison to the miracle of spiritual birth. You see, my children were born physically healthy, and for that I thank God. But they, like every descendant of Adam, were spiritually stillborn. They were born spiritually dead, and they are not alone. You and I and every other person were born dead — dead in sin (see Eph. 2:1). We were born dead because of the sin of our representative head, Adam. The Apostle Paul teaches us that “sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12). And spiritual death is not the end of it. Even if we are born physically healthy, our spiritual death will be followed at some point by our physical death: “For you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19).

It is for this reason that Jesus told Nicodemus, “You must be born again” (John 3:7). The spiritually dead cannot enter God's holy presence. “Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). In order to see God's kingdom, then, the spiritually stillborn must be brought to life. There must be spiritual resurrection.

There must be new life, eternal life. “You must be born again.” Jesus' words befuddled Nicodemus. He said to Jesus, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” (John 3:4). Here Nicodemus gives us a textbook example of missing the point.

Nicodemus is not alone. There are a large number of professing Christians who miss the point. To hear some tell it, you would think Jesus merely said, “You must be well again.” According to many, we are not spiritually dead but are simply sick. We are on our death beds, and Jesus offers us the cure. All we have to do is reach out and take it. Or we are drowning and Jesus offers us a life buoy, and all we have to do is grab it to save our lives. The picture painted by Jesus and the apostles, however, is much more bleak. In our natural Adamic state, we are not on our sick beds. We are in the grave. We are not flailing about on the surface of the sea. We are lifeless at the bottom of the ocean. We are dead.

This is the point that Nicodemus and we must understand. When Jesus tells Nicodemus he must be born again, He is indicating that this is not something Nicodemus can do himself. Just as we had no control over our physical birth, we do not control our spiritual birth. It is the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. Those who say that we are only spiritually wounded will say that we can be regenerated, born again, by placing our faith in Christ. This, however, puts everything precisely backwards. We do not believe in order to be regenerated; we must be regenerated in order that we might believe. Regeneration precedes faith.

Our spiritual situation is similar in some ways to that of Lazarus in the grave (see John 11). Lazarus was dead. He could do nothing in and of himself to gain new life. Jesus commanded Lazarus to come forth from the grave, but Lazarus could not respond unless God first gave him life. In the same way, we are spiritually dead and can do nothing to gain spiritual life. Jesus commands us to believe in Him, but we cannot respond unless God first gives us spiritual life. Jesus gives us this new life because he has overcome death, once and for all. As Peter explains, “According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

If you are a Christian, consider what God has done for you. Consider the fact that you were born dead in sin. Jesus came to your grave. He commanded you to come forth and gave you spiritual life and faith. Now you have been born again and are an adopted child of God (John 1:12). You are a co-heir with Christ. And although your physical body will still die, you can rest secure in the hope of the resurrection. Those in Christ will be made alive (1 Cor. 15:22). Our present body is perishable, but it will be raised imperishable, never to die again. When God raises us, death will finally be swallowed up in victory.

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Meeting Jesus

by *Eric Watkins*

Where were you when Jesus found you? In John 4, Jesus meets a woman at a well who will soon become a part of the church—the bride of Christ. There are other instances of men in the Bible who find their wives at wells. In Genesis 24, Abraham’s servant prays to God that he might find Isaac’s future wife at a well. Jacob meets Rachel at a well in Genesis 29 just after his encounter with God at Bethel. Last, Moses meets his wife, Zipporah, at a well in Exodus 2 immediately after his flight from Egypt. What do these encounters have to do with John 4?

In John 4, we see Jesus seeking His bride—the church. Wedding imagery has already been introduced in the book of John. Jesus’ first miracle was at the wedding in Cana (John 2). In John 3, John the Baptist makes it explicit that he himself is only the friend of the groom, but that Jesus is the groom. Thus, John the Baptist rejoices in seeing the bride and groom together, and for this reason, John must decrease but Jesus must increase. Last, the legacy of Jacob is in view in John 4 as Jesus and the Samaritan woman meet at the well that Jacob left to his children. If this woman is to become a part of the church—the bride of Christ—what kind of woman is she?

First, she is a Samaritan, a “mixed-breed” result of Israel’s exile. Samaritans were disdained by the Jews. Their worship was out of accord with what God commanded.

Even worse is the story of this woman’s immorality. She is presented to us as a broken, nameless sinner. She comes to the well in the heat of day, when most others would seek to escape to the shade. She is happy to be left alone. Jesus will eventually tell her to go and call her husband. But she has no husband; rather, she has had five, and the man she now lives with is not her husband.

When Jesus points this out, she immediately changes the subject to worship. But Jesus redirects her: “God is seeking true worshipers.” Jesus is seeking her. She may be a Samaritan woman, a serial adulteress, ravaged by sin and its consequences, but the one who sits before her is the “I AM” of Israel, and His mission is not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. Though her sins are like scarlet, He will make them white as snow. She has had six broken relationships, but before her is the seventh, the consummate groom who will lay down His life to redeem her soul.

Where were you when Jesus found you? Was it not when you were dead in your sins and battered by sin’s consequences? May we always marvel at God’s “amazing grace—how sweet the sound—that saved a wretch like me” and count it all joy to be part of the redeemed and cleansed bride of Christ—His church.

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