



Jesus' ministry is so...unique!
A study on John 1-3

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The Gospel of John: Lesson plan

- Lesson 1 — Apr 15 — Jesus' ministry is so...unique! (John 1-3)
- Lesson 2 — Apr 22 — A deep-deep understanding about faith! (John 4-7)
- Lesson 3 — Apr 29 — Jesus IS God! (John 8:1-12:11)
- Lesson 4 — May 6 — Serving like this is unheard of! (John 12:12-14:31)
- Lesson 5 — May 13 — Living a powerful life (John 15-17)
- Lesson 6 — May 20 — The tomb is empty! (John 18-21)

John 1:1-5, The Word, the Life and Light of “men”

Many things have been shared on John 1:1 about Jesus being the “Word”. One of the most important meanings would be that Jesus is the One who reveals the Father to us. Just as the “Word” reveals, Jesus also reveals...and the One who reveals/make known, is also God Himself as He was there from the beginning when all things were created (vv. 1-3)! It would be safe to say that of all the Gospels, the Gospel of John probably helps us the best in understanding that Jesus is truly also God. Without this being true, the entire Gospel of the Good News falls apart.

That Jesus is God, is the reason why it is possible to have Life in Jesus (v. 4a). In Him people can be delivered from the powers of darkness, and receive Life in Him (see also John 8:12). He is the One who gives life, eternal life, so that you now have the grace to live in compliance with who God is, and what is divinely expected of us. This life becomes the Light to/for the world (v. 4b). It can therefore only be present where Jesus is at. Staying with Jesus means staying in the light, while being apart from Him means to be stumbling around in darkness (v. 5). In relation with Jesus we find an alternative way of living, a renewed existence, in constant exposure to the Light, and reflecting the Life we have in Christ.

John 1:6-9, A Light to “all men”, to “every man”

God Himself ensures that the world doesn’t miss the great news that the Light is coming to all. John is created/born, and sent to be a witness to this Light who is coming (vv. 6-7). A Light who will give light to everyone/every man. Jesus’ revealing presence will be there for all (vv. 8-9). This might be obvious, yet powerful to understand: Jesus, being the Light, cannot hide His presence in this world, and therefore, neither could those who are walking in this circle of Light! As ambassadors of the Light, as reflectors of the Light, wherever we go, “all men” should be able to see the Light!

John 1:10-13, Who are all the “children of God”?

Jesus reveals the Kingdom of God, and people then react—some with acceptance, and some through rejection (vv. 10-11). It is important to realize that only those who accepts the Light, and therefore comes to life, receives by grace the right to become “children of God” (v. 12). There is no other way! Everybody is thus created by God, yet everybody is not children of God (v. 13). This has striking implications for how we look at those who are still lost, especially our loved ones...

John 1:14-18, God’s dwelling among us!

John presents to us the incarnate presence of Jesus in this world. Just as the tabernacle and the temple once signified the presence of God amongst His people, Jesus now becomes the “tent that was pitched” in our midst (v. 14a)! In Jesus we can “see” God, and there is no One better to show us God (v. 14b), than the One and Only (the Unique One), who was laying at the Father’s chest (v. 18)! In the background here is the ancient way of sitting/laying around a “table” / meal, with the ear of the guest of honor being the closest to the mouth of the host.

John 1:19-51, Look, the Lamb of God!

Who Jesus is, is so important that nobody should miss it! In fact one could also say that missing this News is like missing Life itself! Missing this news is equal to failing at everything, it is a mistake of epic proportions, and has eternal consequences.

For this reason it makes absolute sense that God would send John the baptist to testify to this most important event in the history of mankind—the coming of Jesus Christ, "...the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (v. 29). John is the one bringing an amazing Message of Hope: As the prophets from before announced that deliverance will come for God's people in Babylonian exile (Is. 40:3), people can know now that the Lord Christ is coming to bring salvation, and we should make a way for Him (v. 23).

So...don't miss it! "LOOK...the Lamb of God" (v. 29b)! SEE! Some words that we will notice repeatedly through the Gospel of John are words like "look" and "see" in contrast to "blind" for example. These become in the Gospel of John synonymous with "to believe", "to put your faith in". In other words when you don't see what God has put, with great intentionality, right in front of you, guaranteed with a testimony that you could witness straight from heaven ("I SAW the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Him" (v. 32)...if you don't see this, miss this, then you also don't believe, and are lost! One could even translate in Gospel of John language, "Believe the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!". Also look at v. 34, "I have *seen* and I *testify* that this is the Son of God"—I *see*, (*therefore I believe*), and *thus I can now also testify* with all my heart, and with all my life (John died as a martyr), that this is the Son of God!

This theme of "seeing" continues through the end of chapter 1 when we are introduced to Jesus' disciples. It is a fun exercise to count the words "see, saw" from vv. 35-51!

Another theological theme is introduced into this latter part of chapter 1: Finding and following Jesus. It doesn't help that we only FIND Jesus...we also need to have the sacrificial and committed obedience to FOLLOW Jesus - see vv. 37, 40-41, 43, and 45.

A note on v. 46, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?". Is there something bad about the place where Jesus grew up? What an odd question... However, this makes totally sense within the Hebrew mindset of mapping places according to their distance from the temple in Jerusalem, of which the Holy of Holies would be the most holiest point on earth, then would come Jerusalem, from there Judea, and far from there in the north of the country would finally comes Galilee, where Nazareth is located! The spiritual leaders would argue: How can the Messiah come from such a place, so far removed from what is holy?!

John 2:1-11, You're invited to a wedding!

Is this truly about Jesus simply making a lot of wine, just to avoid shame on the host? Does that seem to be in line with the rest of the Gospel message? Probably not, right? Well, Jesus obviously did make a lot of wine (v. 6), and avoided shame coming upon the host, however, it was also about so much more! Just like with all (not only some) of the miracles in the Gospel of John they point to something more than just the miracle by itself. We will see that clearly as we continue through this discussion, but don't miss John 2:11, pointing us in this direction right from the start!

So, let's zoom in on this day in Cana, Galilee. To begin with, there is a couple of peculiar things happening here: It is a wedding (v. 1), Jesus reminds His mother that He is working on "another" time line (vv. 4-5), and finally, is it simply by coincidence that the jars He uses to perform the miracle just by chance happens to be designated for "ceremonial washing"? It seems clear enough that this line-up must have pointed to something more than just a multiplying of wine, so that folks could have a great party...

Jesus is probably trying to help people understand, right from the start of His ministry, which is running on God's schedule, that to become His bride, you need to be cleansed by Him, and the great news is that He cannot run out of "wine" to accomplish exactly that! And of course, this cleansing is now available to all, not only Jews who own the correct kind of ceremonial washing jars!

Perhaps we should also mention shortly: Wine in the ancient world were extremely diluted. It was mostly about one third to one tenth the strength of modern wine—probably weaker than the average American beer! Undiluted wine would have been considered the "strong drinks", or so-called "hard liquor" of today, which was far more disapproved of in Jesus' time.

John 2:12-25, Nothing between us and God

As with the misuse of the “water into wine” miracle, the “clearing of the temple” has often been misinterpreted, and struggled with as if it is dealing with an “angry” Jesus, or Jesus trying to tell us that it would be sinful to sell things on church grounds. Sadly this would again miss the beautiful message of this special passage!

It is important to recognize that John specifically mentions the “money changers” (v. 15) and the “doves” (v. 16). Often these money changers would make it very difficult, and sometimes even almost impossible, for believers to bring their sacrifices. Especially during Passover (v. 13) people would travel from far away, and would need to either pay temple taxes, or purchase animals for sacrifices there at the temple. However, only Jewish shekels would be accepted at the temple, and of course the tax collectors at the temple controlled the exchange rate between for instance, Roman, and Jewish coins. As this was a busy time, profit had to be made, driving up the prices of the animals to a point where people could sometimes barely afford a dove—the cheapest sacrifice, usually made by the poor...

Jesus couldn't bare to see that anyone would walk for miles to honor, worship, make atonement to His Father, and then end up not being able to do as their intentions were, or perhaps even be shown away completely. Such a barrier between God and His people is totally unacceptable—Jesus therefore engages, and literally “fight” for you and me to be able to connect with God! How precious is that?

This Jesus does more so for the Jewish believers, however, this is only a foreshadow of Him getting ready to become the ultimate Sacrifice Himself, so that all people can have any barrier of sin removed, for people to be able to connect with God—look carefully at the futuristic time of v. 17! This “miracle” will also become the proof of His authority to do at the temple, what was so badly needed to get done (vv. 18-19, as well as vv. 20-22)! See also here the purpose of the miracles in v. 23.

Through a missions lens: How can we play a part in removing obstacles for people so that they can see the Kingdom of God has come near to them?

John 3:1-15, Be born again or you will never see, nor enter the kingdom of God!

The theme of “seeing” continues, but now we learn something crucial: You cannot “see” if you are not “born again” (v. 3). Something that Nicodemus simply cannot understand - “How can a man be born when he is old?” (v. 4). A misunderstanding...of which the Gospel of John has plenty of! Why? Because of what is known as “dualism”, which we encounter throughout John’s Gospel. Dualism refers to a contrast on several levels that we find all throughout the Gospel. There is a contrast between the above, where Jesus came from, and the below, where we exist and where Jesus came into. With the above we find certain characteristics like *life, truth, light*, all in contrast with what we find as part of the below *death, lies, darkness*. However, now we have the possibility to actually enter the above, and gain access to these incredible eternal values and truths, because they are all attached to Jesus (v. 13), and entered into the below (into our reach) when He “became flesh and made His dwelling among us” (John 1:14a)! Jesus shares an important teaching moment though: If you do not enter the above, you cannot see the things from the above, and therefore you will stay forever lost/stuck in the things that the below stands for (vv. 19-20)!

When Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the “night” (v. 2a), he is ironically and sadly so actually also stuck in the “night” (darkness of the below) - see also John 9:4, 11:10 and 13:30! This is why he cannot understand the things that he hears about the above (vv. 4, 9-12). But this can all change, as all who allow the Spirit to perform heart surgery on them, to renew their hearts by washing them clean as with water (v. 5), will be born into the above. Thus they will see that spiritual healing comes from the Son of Man, and “looking” at Him (just as the Israelites did to the copper snake in the desert, Numbers 21:4-9), “believing” in Him (v 14a) opens the door to the Kingdom of God so that you can now clearly see it (vv. 3, 5), and have “eternal life” (v. 15). Therefore an important note: In John’s Gospel the Kingdom of God/Jesus (see John 18:28-40), could just as well be replaced with “eternal life”!

Even though this is a somewhat mysterious process like the wind blowing (v. 8a), it truly makes sense too: If you stay a part of the below then all that life can bring forth are things from this world (flesh), but if you enter the door into the above, then suddenly all of the great wonders of God's world can start to show up in your life (v. 6). This work of the Spirit is just like the wind, Jesus says, you can hear it, but not tell exactly what is happening - yet, you can be sure that even though you cannot detect it, it's effects are undeniable and unmistakable (v. 8)! In Hebrew the meaning of "ruah" (wind) can also be "breath", that which gives true life! Thus, without the work of the Spirit there is truly no true life...we're stuck in the below! See also Ezekiel 36:25-27 and chapter 37.

John 3:16-21, Look, the Unique Son of God!

Jesus becomes the sacrifice for our sin, just like a lamb would have been sacrificed for the sins of the people of God. This is how much God loves us, that He would give His unique ("one and only") Son to replace a sacrificial system of animals with a once and for all, unique Sacrifice—that of His one and only Son (v. 16a)! And what is required of us? Nothing but faith in Him (v. 16b), faith that without any doubt gives access to eternal life (v. 16c)! The Greek literally means "life of the age to come", and the access in the *now* to this kind of life, also becomes the reason why suffering in this world cannot slow it down or rob it from its meaning, nor can the grave stop it altogether! Already *now* one can therefore see the Kingdom of God, and experience its power, its type of existence, its nature of the Above...that never ends.

God has a heart to save, not to condemn (v. 17). In fact you actually simply condemn yourself by not putting your faith in God's Son (v. 18)! If you don't want to walk into the light, it is because you love the darkness with its evil deeds more (v. 19), deeds that you don't wish to expose (v. 20). The light is available and accessible to all, and one who seeks to live by what is true will see this, and come to it (v. 21).

John 3:22-36, Look, the Unique Son of God!

We find many times in the Gospel of John efforts to help us to identify who Jesus truly is. The Gospel helps us to look, and to see the truth (to have faith) that He is truly the Son of God! As John was baptizing, Jesus did so too, and people noticed that more and more people went to Jesus to get baptized (vv. 22-26).

When challenged about this John responds that this should actually help the people to see clearer that Jesus is connected to the Above (v. 27), and reminded them that he already proclaimed that he is “not the Christ, but sent ahead of Him” (v. 28). One way to explain this is to think of a wedding: The friend of the groom simply helps! When he hears the voice of the groom it pleases him and brings him joy (v. 29a). In the same way, after sharing for so long that the wedding is coming, the friend of the groom’s joy is now fulfilled, just as the friend of the groom should be on the wedding day (v. 29b)! Of course, what friend would you be when you make yourself great on the groom’s day, rather than pointing others at the groom...this is the entire point of a wedding, to make the groom greater, and yourself less (v. 30)!

Look therefore carefully and you will see: Jesus is above all (v. 31). Listen carefully to what He speaks of and of the things that He has heard of, and you will know, this is different from what you hear from those in the below (from this earth)—this should tell you: He is above all (vv. 31-32). Do not be like those who don’t want to accept Jesus’ testimony about the Above. Accept it, and thereby you will also not discredit what God had given Jesus (v. 33)! God sent Jesus from the Above to bring His Message to us, and the Son can do this because God’s Spirit is fully with Him without limit (v. 34). The Father loves the Son, and gave Him everything, so that He has control over all (v. 35). There should be no doubt that the Son has the power over everything, and can therefore affect lasting change, starting in the below and extending forever (v. 36a).

Why would one not want to put one's faith into the Son of God...and understandably so, one should also not be surprised if rejection of Jesus brings about not eternal Friendship, but the wrath of God (v. 36b).

Want to dig deeper, or just stay connected?

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