

LESSON 3

**January 10-16*

Something Better



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 2:1-22.*

Memory Text: “And Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days’ ” (*John 2:19, NIV*).

Key Thought: No matter where we choose to look in order to find life, Jesus offers something better: better wine, a better temple, even a better birth!

In John 1:1-18 we saw that Jesus was the best revelation of God possible. He was there with God from the beginning (*vss. 1, 2*). He created the whole universe, placed life in it, and keeps it going (*vss. 3-5*). In His flesh He embodied the very glory of God (*vs. 14*). He came to us direct from face-to-face intimacy with God (*vs. 18*).

The passages in this week's lesson are a natural extension of the prologue to John's Gospel. If Jesus is the best, He is naturally better than all substitutes. Thus, it's unfortunate that people have developed many substitutes for Jesus. They seek to find life by accumulating an abundance of possessions. Others seek life in performance and worldly success. Still others seek life in the esteem of the rich, the brilliant, the beautiful, or the famous. Many, despairing in the failure of these, drown life in drugs, alcohol, and addictive games and habits. Some pursue various mystical religions. But no matter which path people may choose, Jesus offers something better than what they possibly could have apart from Him.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 17.*

Living Parables *(John 2:1-22).*

At first glance there seems to be little spiritual food in this section of the Gospel. There is a simple story about a wedding, during which the drink runs out before the end of the feast. Jesus rescues a couple and their caterer from embarrassment. Then Jesus drives some animals and money changers out of the temple. The stories are well known and offer no surprises. There are few “quotable quotes” that cry out for memorization. Are these stories a digression from the spiritual theology of the Gospel, or is there something deeper going on?

Also, an interesting feature of the beloved Gospel is the absence of parables (see Friday’s section). Because parables were a major basis for Jesus’ teaching, their absence is remarkable. Instead, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, John took actual events from Jesus’ ministry and portrayed them as living parables. Beneath the surface of each historical account, the Lord has placed a deeper meaning that teaches us something special about Jesus.

And, as the first miracle in the Gospel, the wedding-of-Cana story is the first of these living parables.

Read through the story of the wedding feast (*vss. 1-11*). **What do you think the importance of this account is?**

How would you characterize the interaction between Jesus and His mother? *John 2:4, 5.*

While ancient parallels suggest that Jesus was not speaking disrespectfully to His mother, He clearly differed with her on this occasion. “There was danger that Mary would regard her relationship to Jesus as giving her a special claim upon Him, and the right, in some degree, to direct Him in His mission. . . . As Son of the Most High, and Saviour of the world, no earthly ties must hold Him from His mission, or influence His conduct. He must stand free to do the will of God. . . . The claims of God are paramount even to the ties of human relationship.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 147.

As believers, how do we balance out the commandment to honor our parents when it conflicts with our duty to God?

MONDAY *January 12*

From Water to Wine (*John 2:1-11*).

With what activity was the water that Jesus used associated?
John 2:6.

An interesting point lies just below the surface of this brief Bible study. Changing water into wine symbolized something bigger than a mere physical miracle. The water was not just any water; it was water set aside by the Jews for ceremonial washings. The wine was not just any wine, it was “the best.”

John uses this story as a gentle criticism of a major alternative to the faith of Jesus. Religious people of Jesus’ day were obsessed with washing rituals (*see also Matt. 15:1, 2*). Washing is good. On a practical level, it is sanitary. As a religious expression, it can remind you to think about God. Water is necessary for life; without it, we could not exist, just as, without God, we could not exist, either.

But Jesus replaces the water of ceremonial washings with something better, the tasty juice of the grape.

According to these texts, what does wine symbolize? *Matt. 26:27-29, Mark 14:23-25, Luke 22:17-20.*

What do these texts tell us about how important blood is to the whole plan of salvation?

Lev. 17:11

Col. 1:14

Heb. 10:19

The first miracle Jesus does, then, is to turn water into wine, and wine is a symbol of His shed blood, the blood that would be poured out for the sins of the world, the only means of salvation. Though inspiration does not tell us why this was the first miracle recorded, perhaps it was because the Lord wanted right away to present the idea of Christ’s blood. What we see here, then, however faintly, are symbols and an image of what is to come.

If someone were to ask you to explain the meaning of Christ’s shed blood and what it meant to you, what would you say?

TUESDAY January 13

Foretaste of the Cross

When Jesus says “‘My time has not yet come’” (*John 2:4, NIV*), what does He mean by “my time”? *John 7:30, 8:20.*

The Greek word translated “time” in all these texts is actually the word for “hour.” “Mine hour is not yet come.” This hour, of course, was the “hour” of His arrest and crucifixion.

What does Jesus reveal by His first miracle? *John 2:11.*

What is meant by the “glory” of Jesus in the Gospel of John? *John 12:23-25, 32, 33.*

The glory of Jesus and the “hour” of Jesus point to the same thing in the Gospel of John. The hour of His suffering and death is the very occasion in which Jesus is glorified. The Cross is the ultimate manifestation of Jesus’ self-sacrificing divine character. The Cross is the place where the character of God is most clearly revealed. Here we see the glory of God in its fullest manifestation.

The wedding story, therefore, contains a number of indirect references to Jesus’ death and resurrection. The wedding took place “on the third day,” a reference to Jesus’ resurrection (*see Matt. 16:21; Luke 24:7, 21, 46; Acts 10:40; 1 Cor. 15:4*). Jesus turns water into wine, a symbol of His blood (*Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25, 26*). References to both Jesus’ “time” and His “glory” are pointers to the Cross. And the only two times in the Gospel that Jesus is described as speaking to His mother, He calls her “woman”: in the wedding story here (*John 2:4*) and later at the cross (*John 19:25-27*).

In a special way, therefore, this charming wedding story is a “living parable” of the Cross and of the glory of God’s character that would be manifested there. The sign Jesus performs at the wedding feast of Cana is a foretaste of the ultimate sign He performs in submitting to suffering and death. In John 2:11 the disciples’ response to that sign foreshadowed not only their future response to the Cross (*John 20:8, 24-29*) but also the response of all who would come to believe in Jesus through their word (*John 17:20; 20:30, 31*).

How would you explain to a nonbeliever how God’s glory was revealed by the Cross?

WEDNESDAY January 14

Cleansing the Temple *(John 2:13-22)*.

Read over the account of Jesus in the temple as expressed by John in **John 2:13-22**. Then answer these questions:

● **When does Jesus go to the temple? What is the meaning of that special time?** *See Exod. 12:24-27.*

● **How does Jesus respond to those who challenge His authority *(John 2:19)*, and how does that answer fit in with the true meaning of the Passover service?** *See 1 Cor. 5:7.*

● **Read John 2:21. Why is Christ's body compared to the temple?** *See Exod. 25:8, 9; vss. 17-22; John 1:14.*

The animals being sold in the temple courts were available for sacrifices, making the "marketplace" a genuine and needed service to long-distance travelers. The money exchanging was necessary, because the temple did business only in a unique temple currency.

While other sources suggest that there was a lot of deception and corruption involved in the temple-court sales, that doesn't seem to be the issue here in John. The problem here is that the activity, though meeting a legitimate need, was located in a place that should have been devoted exclusively to teaching, worship, and prayer.

Thus, what we see here, in this companion story of the wedding at Cana, is the twin theme of "something better," as well as a foretaste of the Cross. The temple was good, it was ordained by God; yet, Jesus is here offering something even better than the temple: His body. The meaning of the Cross transcends all other expressions of religion.

Think again about the selling of the animals for sacrifice. Though itself not bad, it was the context in which it was happening that made it bad. In what ways can things in our own life, not bad in and of themselves, nevertheless be harmful because of the context in which they appear?

THURSDAY *January 15*

The Meaning of the Cross (*John 2:21, 22; Gal. 6:14*).

In John's account of the cleansing of the temple, he uses the story, as he did with the wedding of Cana, as a parable of the Cross. Not only is the Cross superior to the waters of religious ritual, it is superior even to the temple in Jerusalem, which, outside of Christ Himself in the flesh, was the greatest manifestation of true religion.

Where does Paul, like John, find “glory”? *Gal. 6:14*. **What is Paul saying in that verse? In what ways should we have the same experience as he did?**

In John 2:1-22, we see good things getting in the way of the best. It is no different today. Everyone seeks meaning and a sense of value out of life, but few seek it in Jesus. Instead, people try to find “life” by accumulating things, by performing in ways, including religious performance, that bring praise, and by developing relationships with admired people.

Possessions, performance, and people are good things. They are part of the spice of life, but they are not life itself. No matter how many possessions you may have, they are never enough. And those you have rust, rot, break, crash, or become hopelessly scratched up. Athletes become broken and frail, beauty queens grow old and wrinkled, and teachers become mindless and forgetful. Loved ones sometimes leave you, disrespect you, divorce you, and/or die when you are least prepared. Life is frightfully insecure if based on such good things as possessions, performance, and relationships with other people.

To those jaded by a desperate search for life, John offers something better: the Cross. The Cross tells us there is a God who knows everything we have ever done yet loves and values us so much that He gave His life for us. “At the foot of the cross, remembering that for one sinner Christ would have laid down His life, you may estimate the value of a soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 196. “The hand that sustains the worlds in space . . . is the hand that was nailed to the cross for me.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 472. This insight is the source for an incomparable sense of personal worth and satisfaction, no matter the circumstances of daily life.

Though, as Christians, we know these truths, why do we still allow ourselves to become caught up in earthly things that cannot ultimately satisfy our needs? See *Rom. 3:10-20*. What is the only way out of that trap? See *Gal. 6:14*.

FRIDAY *January 16*

Further Study: For those who have not made an in-depth study of the Gospel of John, the absence of parables in the Gospel comes as quite a surprise. There are only two sayings of Jesus that even come close to being classified as parables: the account of the Good Shepherd (*John 10:1-21*) and the description of the vine and the branches (*John 15:1-8*). But neither of these sayings is called a parable, and they differ from the pattern of Jesus' parables found in the other three Gospels. Rather than telling a specific story, they are general illustrations of a point. It is interesting to compare these two sayings with the many parables found in Matthew 13 or Mark 4.

“The gift of Christ to the marriage feast was a symbol. The water represented baptism into His death; the wine, the shedding of His blood for the sins of the world. The water to fill the jars was brought by human hands, but the word of Christ alone could impart to it life-giving virtue. So with the rites which point to the Saviour's death. It is only by the power of Christ, working through faith, that they have efficacy to nourish the soul.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 148, 149.

Discussion Question:

No matter who we are, how much money we have, how great our health, how high our status, death is the inevitable end. Anything that doesn't answer the problem of death is, ultimately, unsatisfactory. Why, then, can Christ alone be the only satisfactory answer to this, the greatest of all human problems?

Summary: The beloved disciple tells two stories about Jesus in such a way that they become living parables that teach deep insights about Jesus. The main point is that Jesus is better than all human substitutes for what He offers. Jesus replaces the beautiful rituals of a religiosity that leave people short of the fullness of life that He offers. At the heart of what Jesus offers is the Cross. If I am that valuable to God, then it doesn't matter whether I'm rich or poor, great or small, famous or ordinary, and it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks of me. I am worth the whole universe to Christ.

Behind Every Door— Part 1

TARS MASYUK

While studying at Zaoksky Theological Seminary in Russia, Tars Masyuk discovered the blessings of literature evangelism. He joined other students who spent a summer selling books in a Siberian city.

Alcohol and drugs are major health issues there, and one-third of the residents are addicts. Again and again women cried, “Help me. My son is a drug addict; my husband is an alcoholic.”

Tars was tired and wanted to quit for the day. But a storm raged outside, so he knocked on the next door. A woman opened the door, and Tars introduced himself and his purpose. The woman invited him into the kitchen. Tars learned that she was a nurse in a hospital detox unit. She believed in God but did not attend church.

The woman’s husband came in, and Tars showed them several books on health and the Bible. The set cost \$15, three weeks’ pay, and Tars was sure they could not afford it. But the couple said if he would bring the books in three weeks, they would have the money.

Three weeks later Tars returned with the books. When they finally answered the door, it was apparent the couple had been drinking. His heart fell, thinking that these people had spent on alcohol the money for the books.

“I’ve brought your books,” he said as cheerfully as he could. The couple sat down at the table and scanned the books. Then the wife went to the cupboard and pulled out the money. “We wish you would stay and tell us more about what you believe,” they requested. Tars stayed, and the three talked for a long time.

Later Tars gave the couple’s name to the local elder of the tiny church in that city. The church had only eight members, and the pastor had 10 churches, all 35 to 200 miles (50 to 300 km) from one another. In a follow-up evangelistic series, 21 people were baptized in spite of opposition from the dominant church. Many others are studying with the church members. Tars prays that many will find Christ through the ministry of the students at Zaoksky.



TARS MASYUK (left) has recently completed his studies at Zaoksky Theological Seminary in Russia.