

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: *John 2:19*

Teachers Aims:

1. To emphasize the futility of seeking substitutes for Jesus.
2. To explore the spiritual meanings of Jesus' miracles and other acts in John's Gospel.
3. To demonstrate the Cross's centrality in Jesus' and John's messages.

Lesson Outline:

I. Looking in All the Wrong Places (*Ps. 118:22*).

- A. Many of the things people strive for are poor substitutes for what Jesus has to offer.
- B. Even "good" things are transitory.
- C. Jesus gives meaning to the good things of life.

II. Miracle and Message (*John 5:17*).

- A. Jesus' miracles in John's Gospel often subtly satirized things that people of the time regarded as important.
- B. Most of these miracles can be seen to directly reference the Cross and Christ's shed blood.
- C. Christ was fully conscious of His mission.

III. Things to Come (*Heb. 10:1, 2*).

- A. The religious rituals and observances of Jesus' time met their fulfillment in the Cross.
- B. In His participation in, and comments on, these observances, Christ attempted to guide His contemporaries to the true meaning of the rituals.
- C. Life's meaning is found in the Cross and its revelation of God.

Summary: The true meaning of Jesus' mission is found in the Cross. Without it, we would have remained helpless and hopeless. By dying for us, Jesus enabled us to repair our broken relationship with the Creator of the universe.

COMMENTARY.

Writing some fifty to sixty years after the ascension of his Lord, John had had ample time to think, reflect, and meditate on the great events in Jesus' ministry. Bent with age but burning with zeal, the apostle knew that Jesus was not just a great teacher, a prophet, or a miracle worker. Every memory of Him was a fresh reminder that Jesus was God in human flesh. So, even behind the miracles and events he recorded, we see great meaning and application.

This week's lesson teaches us three things about the religion of Jesus: It is happy. It is reverent. It is newness of life.



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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

I. The Religion of Jesus Is Happy.

Jesus was on the most important mission in the universe: to reveal His Father and to prepare for Golgotha's war against the evil one. Yet, He took time to attend a simple wedding in Cana, a little-known village near Nazareth. His presence at the wedding feast shows that the religion of Jesus is not a call for social isolation but for wholesome participation in society, whereby a shortage may be corrected, an embarrassment may be averted, or a testimony to the goodness of God may be shared.

The miracle at Cana has other important lessons, as well. First, Jesus functioned according to a divine mandate and schedule. His work on earth could not be tied to any human urging (*for example, observe Jesus' response to Mary's command in John 2:4*), nor could it know haste or delay. "My hour has not yet come," said Jesus (*vs. 4; compare John 7:6, 8; 12:23; 17:1*). "Every act of Christ's life on earth was in fulfillment of the plan that had existed from the days of eternity. Before He came to earth, the plan lay out before Him, perfect in all its details. But as He walked among men, He was guided, step by step, by the Father's will."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 147.

Second, where Jesus is, there is a better and more abundant sufficiency. At Cana, Jesus not only turned water into wine but a better wine. No one can offer anything that equals or betters what Jesus has to offer—in life, hope, or destiny. And Jesus is all-sufficient. He commanded six jars to be filled to the brim with water—approximately one hundred and twenty gallons (see *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 922) that turned into the best possible wine. A small-village, wedding party, through its midpoint, hardly needed that much wine. That is the point, however. The grace of Jesus is more than we ever need to meet our deficiencies. All in all, the way of Jesus is happy, fulfilling, all-sufficient. "He is able" (*Heb. 7:25*).

II. The Religion of Jesus Calls for Reverence.

The temple was to be a place of praise and worship, and the Passover was to be a reminder of God's redemptive activity. Instead, the priests and the merchants turned the temple and its precincts into a camp of exploitation and the Passover celebration as an occasion to fill their greed. Reverence was out. Greed was in. And in the process, the anger of Jesus turned against those responsible for turning His "Father's house [into] a house of merchandise" (*John 2:16, NKJV*). The Bible never views the wrath of God in opposition to His love but rather as an outgrowth of it. Holiness and reverence can never be set aside to support selfish greed or materialistic gain, even for a good cause.

In an age that equates entertainment with worship, pandering with praise, a comfortable pew with fervent fellowship, lottery with

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

stewardship, and a zealous message with a soothing message, Christ's action in the temple is a call to stand up for the way of Jesus—a way in which God is exalted in reverence and praise, and His place of worship is held high as a light set upon the hills.

III. The Religion of Jesus Assures Newness.

The third part of this week's lesson begins with the typical response of nominal religious leaders to a major event—the cleans-

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:12-19; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:11, 12-22; 7:18; 1 Corinthians 1:23*

- 1 Every religion or belief system has its founders, prophets, or saints who attempt to validate their divinity through miracles, incredible predictions, etc. John 2:1-22 appears to be just such a case. Why, however, is it different?
- 2 The story of Jesus cleansing the temple appears in all the Gospels. However, the narrative that appears in John is different from the other accounts in many ways. What are these differences, and how are they significant?
- 3 People today continue to debate the significance of the biblical temple, its architecture, its role in future events, etc. Does the fact that Jesus refers to Himself as the temple help us in our understanding of these issues?
- 4 How would you characterize Jesus' attitude toward the temple? How would it have been different from that of the average person living in that time and place?
- 5 In condemning the wrong practices taking place in the courtyard of the temple, Jesus taught us that it is proper to speak and act against wrongdoing and injustices. What wrongdoing and injustices is it proper for a Christian to speak and act against today? What are some suitable ways of doing so? How can a Christian lifestyle be one of those ways?
- 6 It seems obvious that Jesus' coming sacrifice on the cross is central to most or all of the events and teachings recorded in John's Gospel in a way that it is not in the other three Gospels. Why, then, do you think its importance eluded people then and continues to do so today?

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

ing of the temple. Instead of turning the event into self-examination and correction, they demanded to know on what authority Jesus sought to rid the temple of what He considered to be pollution and corruption. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,” said Jesus (*vs. 19*). The Jewish leaders jumped to scorn. How could a structure that had taken 46 years to build be rebuilt in three days? Such scorn is what happens when religion is stripped of its mystery only to be loaded with routines and when prophecy is stripped of its divine urgency only to be filled with convenience and compromise. Such scorn is what happens when Jesus does not become our eternal contemporary and perpetual context of worship, prayer, study, work, and hope.

Jesus promised a new temple, built not of human hands but of His own death and resurrection—a prophecy in whose fulfillment lay the hope of all ages. Only through faith can one grasp that new hope and become a part, however small or significant, of that new temple. Without the crucified and risen Jesus, there is no newness.

Witnessing

When Tina married Kenny, a podiatrist, she had no idea how different life would be from what she was expecting. They lived in a quiet community just outside a busy metropolis. Kenny worked at a podiatric clinic in the city, while Tina stayed home with their first child. One evening Kenny sat down with Tina to discuss how things had been going at the office. He began to tell his wife, who was expecting their second child, about the many patients who came to the clinic but did not have adequate health insurance or money for the care they needed. Tina listened intently, waiting to hear how many people had been turned away. Instead, Kenny went on to explain that he had decided to open his own practice right in the heart of the city. He wanted to help the patients who needed care but could not pay. Tina was uncertain as to how they would survive, but she trustingly followed her husband’s lead in relocating the young family to be closer to the business. Over the years, Kenny took on many needy patients who showed their gratitude in various ways, including giving Kenny food and clothing for his young family. Tina looks back with a thankful heart that God led her husband to sacrifice for the needs of others. She now says that life has been better than she ever thought it would be.

The things of this earth may seem good to some: material wealth, successful careers, fame, and financial security. People need to know, however, that what Christ offers is so much better than anything this world offers. We must teach them to seek first the kingdom of heaven and the righteousness of Christ (*Matt. 6:33*) in order to have a better, more rewarding life.

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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: When his flustered mother informed him that the wine had run out, Jesus responded, “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” “The phrase, ‘What have I to do with thee?’ was a common conversational phrase. When it was uttered angrily and sharply it did indicate complete disagreement and reproach, but when it was spoken gently it indicated not so much reproach but misunderstanding. It means: ‘Don’t worry; you don’t quite understand what is going on; leave things to me, and I will settle them in my own way.’ Jesus was simply telling Mary to leave things to him, that he would have his own way of dealing with the situation.” —William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: John 1*, pp. 97, 98.

Thought Questions:

① Jesus’ response to Mary was so reassuring that she left Him to care for the problem. She did not stay to ask Him for details. She simply trusted Him to solve the problem, even when there seemed to be no logical solution in sight. How should the church be like Mary? Why is it difficult to trust when there are no logical solutions in sight?

② Weddings in Bible times were joyous events that continued for days. Farming and trading halted, and everyone enjoyed fellowship, laughter, and good food. Jesus was no killjoy. The fact that He attended the wedding feast in Cana attests to this. What does this characteristic tell you about Jesus’ philosophy of balance in life? What does it tell you about being God-centered in all situations?

Application Questions:

① Compare Jesus’ response to His mother concerning the wine shortage with that of a parent’s response to a child’s anxiousness. Note the similarities. What are the differences? Why do you suppose the Bible repeatedly refers to our relationship to God as that of a child to a parent? What are the added advantages of being a child of God?

② Jesus came to save the world yet performed His first miracle at a common village wedding. This miracle passed unnoticed by the world at the time. Nor did it make international headlines. Why? What does this tell you of Jesus’ interest in your personal life?

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.