

JOHN — WEEK 10

MISSION FROM ABOVE



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The cover image is *Ecce Homo* (Behold the Man) by Caravaggio

Jesus kicks up His claim to be the source of living water. Believers are a source too. But in saying this, He notes something essential—that it's actually all about His glory.

This heavenly perspective pervades everything.

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John, Week 10 — Mission From Above
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1 John 7:37–39

On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

The last day of the feast is the climax of the Jewish celebration of God’s provision in the Sinai desert. There, the hunger and thirst of Israel were satisfied supernaturally. It’s the perfect time for Jesus to talk about the new supernatural provision.

But this time, He adds a new twist. Not only will your thirst be slaked, but you can slake the thirst of others. “*He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.*”

That is an incredible benefit, if somewhat hard to comprehend. It needs some explaining, and John provides it. Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit, which will come after He’s glorified.

But that one word—glorified—begins a lesson that may be the most important lesson in all of scripture—that Jesus’s crucifixion and resurrection are primarily about God’s glory, not our salvation.

That concept permeates John’s gospel, culminating in Chapter 17, which begins with:

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You.” — John 17:1

Shocking. It’s not all about us.

Humans are going to have a human perspective. We see things through human eyes and will pay more attention to the things that affect us. Jesus’s crucifixion is the key to our justification and, thus, to our salvation. This is the aspect of the gospel we think about most.

But the whole truth is that God’s glory is the central purpose of Jesus’s death and resurrection, and even of our salvation. We should be consumed by gratefulness that we make out so well in God’s magnificent plan.

It didn’t have to be that way.

And part of that plan is that we do more than just receive living water; we can be a source of it for others.

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. — Revelation 22:1

The gospel gives life just like water does, and regular folks like us are God’s chosen method for delivering life to others.

2 John 7:40–52

Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, “Truly this is the Prophet.” Others said, “This is the Christ.”

But some said, “Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?” So there was a division among the people because of Him. Now some of them wanted to take Him, but no one laid hands on Him.

Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, “Why have you not brought Him?”

The officers answered, “No man ever spoke like this Man!”

Then the Pharisees answered them, “Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.”

Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, “Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?”

They answered and said to him, “Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.”

The Pharisees based their closed-mindedness entirely on which town Jesus is from. They don't care what He said. They don't care what He's done. They only care that He's from “the boondocks.”

They even turn “Galilee” into an insult. Nicodemus raises a perfectly reasonable point and they shoot back, “Are you also from Galilee?”

Ouch.

Notice that John doesn't mention that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. In fact, verse 42 is the only time John ever uses the word “Bethlehem” anywhere (including in his epistles and in Revelation). Matthew and Luke mention it repeatedly in their accounts of Jesus's birth, but John doesn't.

Of course, by the time John wrote this, the gospels of Matthew and Luke were already widely known. John's readers are familiar with their accounts.

So, John can leave the joke unsaid. That makes the Pharisees look all the more foolish.

But there's a deeper point coming. Jesus isn't really “from” Bethlehem either.

He's from above.

3 John 7:53–8:11

And everyone went to his own house. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?” This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear.

So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, “Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?”

She said, “No one, Lord.”

And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.”

Two questions jump out from this passage. Since adultery involves two people, where’s the guy? And what is Jesus writing on the ground?

The first question has no answer, which shows that the whole situation is fishy. The second question is somewhat answered by the Greek word used in 8:6 for Him writing—*kata-graph-en*. In Greek, *graph-o* is the root word for *write* and we get many English words from it, such as phonograph and telegraph.

But *kata* can mean *against*, and *katagrapho* (particularly in John 8:6) means to write an accusation. Jesus isn’t just doodling in the dirt. The words He’s writing on the ground are important, especially to the people in the crowd. Remember, Jesus has His prophetic powers. He’s turning the tables on the accusers.

It’s actually a bit comical. People can see what He’s writing. Yikes! They’re hoping that He stops before it gets any more embarrassing. So, He stops. Then He says, “*He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.*”

And He starts writing again! Hey, where’d everybody go? “*Woman, where are those accusers of yours?*”

This lesson is like the Hans Christian Anderson fairy tale, *The Emperor’s New Clothes*. The lesson of that tale is that everyone in the town knew they were “*unqualified for their position or impossibly dull.*”

In today’s passage, we learn that everyone in this town knew that they were guilty of serious sin.

Both are universal lessons.

4 John 8:12–20

Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”

The Pharisees therefore said to Him, “You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true.”

Jesus answered and said to them, “Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going. You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me. It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me.”

Then they said to Him, “Where is Your Father?”

Jesus answered, “You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.”

These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come.

The Pharisees are scrambling to find a counter-argument to Jesus and His claims. Their first argument in this passage appears reasonable. “*You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true.*” They’re not saying He’s lying; they’re saying that you can’t be your own witness. In a sense, they’re right. You can’t.

But their point is flawed because Jesus isn’t bearing witness to a claim; He’s making a claim. Of course, you make your own claims. Words aren’t what bear witness to His claims anyway; actions are.

So, Jesus just plays with them. They think Jesus is from Galilee. In fact, they’re sure about this; they know His father and He’s a Galilean. They also think this somehow disproves all of Jesus’s claims.

Jesus just riffs on this. Jesus isn’t from Galilee and Joseph isn’t Jesus’s dad.

Everything Jesus says is true, and these guys can’t understand a word of it.

You’d expect this to infuriate the Pharisees. It does, though we get confirmation of that in a curious way.

These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come.

So, someone must have wanted to *lay hands on him*. That confirms their reaction.

As always, this fits perfectly into Jesus’s plan to get crucified. He’s ticking off the Pharisees more and more, all the while broadcasting the essential truths that will make perfect sense after He’s risen.

5 John 8:21–30

Then Jesus said to them again, “I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come.”

So the Jews said, “Will He kill Himself, because He says, ‘Where I go you cannot come’?”

And He said to them, “You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”

Then they said to Him, “Who are You?”

And Jesus said to them, “Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning. I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him.”

They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father.

Then Jesus said to them, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.” As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.

Today’s passage reminds me of Paul’s epistle to the Romans. There, Paul repeatedly asks extreme questions and then answers them with an emphatic, “No!” (*May Gen-oi-taw* in Greek) Even though each question poses a wild exaggeration of Paul’s point, it confirms that the question is fair. If that question is on your mind, then you’re on the right track; you understood Paul’s point. That’s useful.

The question by the Jews—“*Will He kill Himself, because He says, ‘Where I go you cannot come’?*”—serves a similar role. Their reaction reflects an honest interpretation of what Jesus said. It shows that Jesus wasn’t merely talking about a place they’re not allowed into; He’s talking about a place outside of their realm. That’s why they’re wondering if going there involves dying.

Jesus confirms this when He says, “*You are of this world; I am not of this world.*”

He **is** talking about a place outside of their realm.

So they ask, “*Who are You?*”

Jesus’s reply is about “*He who sent Me,*” but *they did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father.*

So, He mentions *the Father* explicitly, even calling Him *My Father*. It may not sound winsome, but it is.

As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Do you feel responsible for delivering the gospel?

2. Are you ever impressed or unimpressed by where someone is from?

3. How would you have reacted?

4. When can you bear witness of yourself?

5. What convinced you of the truth of His claims?

Items for prayer: