

JOHN — WEEK 3

GROWTH



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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

Through the wedding at Cana and Jesus's clearing of the temple in Jerusalem, we see growth as a continuing theme—both for Jesus and for His disciples.

Everything is focused on the cross.

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

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Thank you.

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1 John 2:1–8

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “They have no wine.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.”

His mother said to the servants, “Whatever He says to you, do it.”

Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, “Fill the waterpots with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, “Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.” And they took it.

This is hilarious. It’s the only time in all of scripture that Jesus gets owned. Mary doesn’t even ask Jesus to do anything; she just points out a problem. Jesus brushes her off with the words, “*Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.*”

This sounds blunt, but His addressing her as “woman” only sounds impersonal in English; it’s normal in the original tongue. Jesus is only wondering what this has to do with Him. I would be similarly puzzled if I was at a wedding and someone pointed out the host’s problem to me as if I was expected to fix it.

But Mary responds brilliantly. Again, she doesn’t tell Jesus to do anything; her command is to the servants-- “*Whatever He says to you, do it.*” Jesus immediately acts—no further discussion at all.

Mom is always one step ahead, no?

This story seems at first glance to be an unimportant aside, but it’s a critical lesson in how people grow spiritually. Even the Lord had a normal, sometimes amusing, relationship with His mother. He was a fully human, though incredibly precocious, son. Scripture consistently presents Him as a normal kid.

And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it; but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day’s journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances. So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. — Luke 2:42-46

Jesus’s humanity is emphasized in scripture to preclude many heresies. It’s why the resurrected Lord made sure that everyone saw Him eat like a normal person (and made sure it got recorded in scripture.)

When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, “Have you any food here?” So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence. — Luke 24:40–43

2 John 2:6–11

Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, “Fill the waterpots with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, “Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.” And they took it. When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, “Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!”

This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

This sounds strangely familiar. Ever had a prayer request granted beyond what you asked for? It doesn't happen often, but it's not super rare either.

And when it does occur, there's little doubting of God's amazing grace.

That's what's going on here. Jesus doesn't just turn the water into wine; He turns it into wine that blows away the sommelier. Why would Jesus do that?

The answer is in the last sentence. *This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.*

We already saw how Jesus started early in preparing His disciples for martyrdom.

This is part of that plan.

Faith is the foundation of salvation. We all know that.

But do we think of faith as a goal? Here we see Jesus performing what almost looks like a “cheap trick” miracle. But He's not selling snake oil, so what's He selling?

True faith. His disciples are going to need a lot of it. Their faith will be assaulted from every angle. Jesus needs to get them to the point where they will walk through fire without flinching.

And He's only got three years to do it.

Meanwhile, our journey of faith doesn't have forever either. This is where God's unique style of answering prayer comes in. Yes, He loves us. Yes, He wants us to be happy.

But when you look at the details of how God answers prayer, building our faith starts to jump out as one of the most obvious objectives.

God's plans for the disciples have a lot in common with God's plans for us.

3 John 2:12–17 (ESV)

After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. 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.”

The Bible never describes Jesus as physically large or strong. He is strong mentally and spiritually, but physically, He’s no Samson. So how come He manages to pull off this Samson-like stunt of single-handedly clearing the entire temple?

First of all, we need to be clear about where this happened. Jesus and his disciples weren’t inside the temple proper, but in the courtyard in front known as the court of the Gentiles. The transactions the worshippers made in the courtyard were to “qualify” them to enter the temple.

Except that no transactions should be needed. The worshippers were supposed to bring a firstborn without defect as a sacrifice (zev-akh in Hebrew). They had to know this, or they wouldn’t have come in the first place. So, the courtyard activity is nothing more than a racket, where you could buy a “certified” blemish-free zev-akh. This is an outrage, but most folks aren’t bold enough to make a stink about it.

Enter Jesus. Notice that today’s passage doesn’t say that anything supernatural happened. Jesus just throws a big temper-tantrum. He’s not being Jesus the God; He’s Jesus the Lionhearted.

And He’s up against a bunch of petty thieves who haven’t got an ounce of “courage of their conviction.” As soon as they’re challenged, they scatter like cockroaches. So, we learn two things from, “*Zeal for your house will consume me.*”

It explains why Jesus cleared the temple, and it also explains how.

With “courage of their conviction” first century Christians turned the world upside down. Now we cower in the face of people who deny even the most obvious science about gender. These people may be nasty, but they’re not Nero. He couldn’t dominate Christianity; why can they? How did we get to this point?

It’s courage of their conviction. The left may be obviously wrong, but they act like they’re sure they’re right. They’re so sure, they think it’s okay to use totally intolerant tactics like forcibly suppressing debate.

Our problem isn’t that we’re too nice; it’s that we’re not so sure we’re right. We need a martyr’s faith.

4 John 2:18–22

So the Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?”

Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?”

But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

The Jews’ question here is curiously mild. Jesus has just caused a mini-riot. The temple courtyard looks like it was hit by a tornado. Jesus announced why He was trashing the place and it’s obvious that He’s right. So, no one stops Him. But now some folks have a question.

“What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?”

They don’t think that what Jesus did is wrong; it’s just that He’s acting like a prophet or messiah or something. Folks are expected to “know their place.” They’re genuinely interested in seeing a sign that He really is someone special.

Then Jesus gives them an answer that they don’t understand. Even His disciples don’t understand it. It’ll be cryptic until after His resurrection. Okay, but why be so coy?

Remember, anything that keeps Him from getting crucified wrecks the whole plan. Jesus can drop hints all day long, but if He really convinces the crowd of who He is, then they won’t call for His death later. Without the crucifixion, the plan of salvation collapses and there’s no Messiah.

So, to be the Messiah, Jesus must make sure the people don’t know that He’s the Messiah. If they know He’s the Messiah, then He’s not the Messiah. If they don’t, then He is.

What a glorious irony.

This is a perfect example of how God’s perspective is different from ours. Not everything He does is going to make sense to us—not immediately anyway—so we need to just be patient and trusting.

This applies especially with prayer. God’s answers often don’t conform to our requests. That’s because we ask for the wrong thing. Praise God that He still commands us to bring our requests before Him.

Often, we don’t even get to see what God is up to in this life. There’s not even a guarantee that in Heaven we’ll be so smart that we’ll finally understand everything.

But we’ll finally be okay with that.

5 John 2:23–25

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

The testimony of man is the last thing Jesus needs. It's likely to be corrupted; that's the point of, "*He knew what was in man.*" As we'll soon see, there will be no lack of false testimony about Jesus (and, later, about His disciples).

But if the testimony is not corrupted, that's even worse. Remember, part of His plan to get crucified is concealing His identity. That's why He silences demons when they blurt out who He is. That's why He, "*had no need that anyone should testify of man.*"

But it's also the other side of, "*He knew what was in man.*" Knowing how people will react is the key to His amazing "bank-shot" plan to be crucified.

The people have to like Him enough to produce the Palm Sunday crowds singing "Hosanna," but still be unsure and fickle enough to turn into the Good Friday crowds screaming, "Crucify!"

If only we knew *what was in man!* Despite our training, despite the teaching on things like sin and depravity, we understand little. The result is often miscalculation leading to frustration and failure.

The best-laid plans of mice and men go oft awry. — Robert Burns

And our ignorance of ourselves pales in comparison to our ignorance of most everything else, especially our spiritual opponents. We are out of our depth in a battle of wits with the forces of darkness. When it comes to spiritual things, bank-shots are above our pay grade.

Thus, the key to serving the Lord is depending on Him. Praying for the Lord's leading is absolutely essential to useful service. That's the key to understanding this troubling, even frightening, passage:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" — Matthew 7:21–23

They make what sounds like a good counter-argument, "*Have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?*" So, what did they do wrong?

Remember, he who *shall enter the kingdom of heaven* is *he who does the will of My Father in heaven*. They don't claim to have done that. They claim a whole bunch of things that they **assume** are His will.

But they didn't actually check in with the Boss. Their "non-prayers" are the problem.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What happened that made you grow in unexpected ways?
2. Has your faith been bolstered by an answered prayer?
3. When have we cowered when we should have stood firm?
4. Has a stored clue ever "popped" for you? (You suddenly realized what it meant.)
5. When have you worked hard on the wrong thing?

Items for prayer: