

JOHN — WEEK 6

THE SECRET MISSION



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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

While the woman at the well is back in town telling everyone about Jesus, His disciples return and wonder if He has eaten. He changes the subject and wants them to see that the fields are white for harvest. Notably, this is about evangelizing the Samaritans, not the Jews. When the townsfolk show up, the woman's testimony is confirmed, and their faith grows.

Two miracles later (the healing of the nobleman's son and the healing of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda) and the Pharisees are already seeking to kill him. This is as planned, and Jesus plays along.

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John, Week 6 — The Secret Mission
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1 John 4:31–38

In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.”

But He said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.”

Therefore the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?”

Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.”

His disciples are worried about food. Jesus couldn't care less. Why? Because He was sent. For Jesus, it's always about why He was sent. *“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.”*

The rest of this passage sounds like He's changing the subject, but He's not. The *work* Jesus is *to finish* is all about harvesting. If his disciples would just *lift up* their *eyes*, they would see that the fields *are already white for harvest!*

Jesus is not talking about agriculture here; He's talking about people and harvesting is bringing them into the kingdom of heaven. That's pretty familiar stuff.

But we often don't think about the fact that Jesus and the disciples aren't in Israel when He says this. They're in Samaria. The fields He wants His disciples to *“lift up their eyes and look at”* are gentile fields.

The spread of the gospel to all the earth begins in this passage.

“Lift up your eyes and look,” (or *“and see”*) is a common phrase in Aramaic (sah-nah eye-neh-kha oo-ri-ay), which is the language Jesus was speaking here. God says this to Jacob in Genesis 31:12.

And he said, “Lift up your eyes and see, all the goats that mate with the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled, for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.”

This phrase has an “open your eyes and see what's right in from of you” feel to it. In other words, “Stop being blind.”

Of course, at this point, Jesus's disciples aren't thinking about saving the Samaritans. They're just trying to get Him to Galilee before He starves to death. So Jesus is telling them to stop being blind in more ways than one. The idea that going through Samaria is anything more than a shortcut is completely strange to them.

By now they surely know that Jesus is sent; they just have a small vision of why.

2 John 4:39–42

And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all that I ever did.” So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His own word.

Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.”

The Samaritans get it. Jesus isn't just the Jewish messiah; He's *the Savior of the world*. How did they figure that out?

It was a two-step process. First, *many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all that I ever did.”*

Second, they ask Him to stay a while, which He does, *and many more believed because of His own word.*

There's a great lesson in this. While the woman had already figured out that Jesus was the messiah, she left that unsaid. Instead, she focused on giving eyewitness testimony for what she saw. That lets everyone draw their own conclusions. This is a modern briefing trick used by technical analysts. I've used it when briefing generals.

The idea is to brief all the information without stating the obvious conclusion. Then the general states the obvious, I say, “Great idea, sir.” and hit the next slide, which says the same thing. Everyone is happy to play along with my little ruse, and the right actions get taken.

This Samaritan outcast is two-thousand years ahead of her time.

We do well to emulate her technique. People like to reach their own conclusions. That gives them a kind of “pride of ownership” over the idea.

The way this plays out in sharing the gospel is to just tell stories about what has happened to you. That's a subject you're guaranteed to be an expert on. Don't call something a miracle, even if that's obvious (especially if it's obvious); leave that conclusion to the audience. This avoids the natural human tendency to push back against other people's ideas.

This too is similar to something common in the world of technical briefings—NIH syndrome. NIH stands for Not Invented Here. People tend to like their own ideas (or their company's ideas) and dislike everybody else's. So, even when someone knows you're a believer and knows you would like them to believe too, it helps to soft-peddle everything and let them reach their own conclusions.

We don't play smart with evangelism because we forget that we're part of a team.

We're not supposed to be in a hurry.

3 John 4:43–54

Now after the two days He departed from there and went to Galilee. For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they also had gone to the feast.

So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.”

The nobleman said to Him, “Sir, come down before my child dies!”

Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your son lives.” So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, “Your son lives!”

Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, “Your son lives.” And he himself believed, and his whole household.

This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.

A prophet may have *no honor in his own country*, but Jesus seems to have plenty. He must be more than just a prophet. So, *the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast.*

Then the nobleman shows up. While “nobleman” could refer to almost any kind of official, it definitely means a Roman official. Once again, Jesus is ministering to gentiles—and this gentile is an interesting case. It looks like he believes that Jesus can cure his child. He’s obviously desperate and counting on Jesus to save his kid. Yet Jesus says he needs to see a miracle to believe.

He’s right. When the nobleman saw the “*sign*” that Jesus had cured his son, *he himself believed.*

This kind of “multi-level” faith is normal, if not universal. That’s the point of Mark 9:24.

Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”

The child’s father believes, but it’s a normal finite belief, not some infinite, rock solid, super faith.

We all need *signs and wonders*. Faith doesn’t normally go from zero to 100% in an instant. It did for the eyewitnesses to the resurrection, but that makes my point—the resurrection was the ultimate *sign*.

We need to be more honest about our faith. We’re so afraid to talk frankly about our beliefs that we delude ourselves into thinking our faith is perfect. That freezes all progress.

Nowadays, the *signs* that strengthen our faith spring from prayer. You want more faith? Pray more.

4 John 5:1–15 (ESV)

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

Now that day was the Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’” They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’” Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.

Like the nobleman, this guy has faith—but it’s faith in a pool. Jesus cures him anyway. The nobleman isn’t getting rewarded for anything. It’s all grace.

But there’s a problem. “*It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.*” There’s a rule against carrying beds on the Sabbath? Imagine the attention to detail it takes to write a bunch of rules like that—not to mention memorizing all of them. Do they have a separate rule for each piece of furniture?

Still, the most amazing thing isn’t their obsession with all these rules; it’s that they totally shift gears when the healed man says, “*The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’*” Suddenly, the “criminal” who was carrying his bed on the Sabbath is off the hook.

Now they’re on a manhunt to find that dastardly villain who told him to take up his bed.

We laugh at their antics, which are plenty comical, but do we laugh at our own? We’re just as sinful.

The point of all those rules was to honor God and to obey His commands. These Jews were more serious about their faith than we are. They’d memorized countless rules and were trying their darndest to follow them—plus trying to get everyone else to do the same. God had punished the whole nation of Israel when the people ignored Him; so making sure everyone obeys God’s law did make sense. Still, somehow, this all went off the rails. So, where did they go wrong? How can we avoid making the same mistakes?

They made the mistake of seeing the law as the essence of worship. It’s not. The law provides relevant boundaries for behavior, but worship comes from the heart. The greatest commandment is to love God.

5 John 5:16–23

For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.”

Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”

This is all unfolding according to plan. Jesus is always on the path to the cross. He works many great wonders, which reveal that He’s the Son of God. Yet, at the same time, He’s setting things up so that He gets crucified for the blasphemy of claiming to be the Son of God.

Jesus threading the needle in this intricate plan is the principle story line of the gospels.

So, what’s the point? Why do it this way?

Obviously, it’s to implement the plan of salvation—to have Jesus pay the price for our sin.

But that’s not all. That doesn’t explain all the details we’re seeing here. The plan also includes providing the evidence that it’s true. This part of the plan will unfold over a much longer time—through much of the first century. For now, Jesus is revealing His true nature to just a few folks.

But notice that He’s talking about being the Son of God to a completely different group of people. They didn’t see the healing at the pool of Bethesda. They saw the result, which should have given them pause, but that didn’t penetrate their closed minds. The actual miracle, which would have shocked their minds open, they didn’t see.

Conversely, the man Jesus healed only knows His name.

Jesus is keeping His deity a secret. He’s making sure that most people don’t figure out who He really is until later. By being two different Jesuses for two different groups of people, He hides the complete truth.

This sets up the resurrection to be the ultimate plot twist. Jesus’s death on the cross seemed to disprove all His claims. His believers’ faith was crushed.

Then He showed up alive, and they remembered Him predicting all this. Then all the dots connected.

The proof of his deity joined His claim to deity. That’s how His followers turned the world upside down.

