

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church,
10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS LESSON 4 THE LIFE OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

Our Lord Jesus Christ had fulfilled His righteousness — through His baptism by John the Baptist and overcoming the threefold temptation by Satan in the wilderness of Judaea. Jesus would soon begin His ministry. The first task was to gather a group of personal followers. There was also the need to authenticate His deity and authority to the people as Christ (Messiah), the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus is indeed providential. Jesus spoke the words of life to him and for all people.

Jesus travelled a lot. John was baptizing in Bethabara, which was beyond Jordan (John 1:28). The Lord Jesus came to him again after He was tempted. Two of John's disciples followed Jesus (John 1:36, 37). The following day Jesus went up to Galilee where he found two more disciples (John 1:43). On the third day Jesus attended a wedding in Cana (John 2:1). After that Jesus went to Capernaum, which was by the Sea of Galilee. Leaving His mother and brethren there,

Jesus went to Jerusalem to observe the Passover feast (John 2:12, 13).

This lesson looks into the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Whereas the other gospel writers focused straightaway on Jesus' ministry in Galilee after His baptism and temptation, John gave an account of the first week of Jesus' ministry.

OUTLINE

1. The Disciples of John Followed Jesus (John 1:35-51)
2. The First Miracle in Cana (John 2:1-12)
3. First Passover & First Cleansing of the Temple (John 2:13-22)
4. Sermon on the Spiritual Birth to Nicodemus (John 2:23-3:21)

COMMENTARY

The Disciples of John Followed Jesus

John was still baptizing in Bethabara beyond Jordan, and two of his disciples were with him. Jesus came to him again after He was tempted by Satan. As John saw Jesus approaching, he declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God" (John 1:36). The Jewish hearers were familiar with the offering of lambs as sacrifices for sins. However, none of them would have thought that a man would be sacrificed to atone for the sins of the world. John's declaration of

Jesus as the Lamb of God summarizes very well the ministry of Jesus and why He came into this world. Jesus is the Lamb that would be offered as the sacrifice for our sins.

Two of John's disciples heard him speak of Jesus, and they followed Jesus. One of the two disciples was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. Andrew went to look for Simon and told him that they had found the Messiah (the Christ, the Anointed One). And when Andrew brought his brother Simon to Jesus, Jesus gave him another name "Cephas" (Aramaic) or "Petros" (Greek) or "Peter" (English) – which means a stone. Our Lord's giving of a new name to Simon shows His insight into a person's potential and ability. Later when Jesus called both of them to leave their family and occupation to follow Him to be fishers of men, the call was not like "a bolt out of the blue." They had already spent some time with Jesus and had known Him.

John the Baptist left the scene. The next time we hear of him was when he sent his disciples to ask Jesus whether He was the Christ (Matthew 11:2, 3).¹ Later John was beheaded by King Herod because he preached against Herod's sin of adultery (Matthew 14:3, 10).² We should not write him off

¹ Matthew 11:2 Now when **John** had heard in the **prison** the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, 3 And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

² Matthew 14:3 For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put *him* in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife. . . .10 And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.

without commending him for his exemplary character and conduct. Our Lord Jesus Himself praised John – there was no one born of women that had risen, who was greater than John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11).³ John displayed humility and willingly accepted his subordinate role as the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ. His preaching was powerful and convicting. He had a big following. He pointed people to Jesus and not to himself. When he was asked by the priests and Levites whether he was the Messiah or that he was Elijah, or he was that promised prophet mentioned by Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18), he unhesitatingly denied each one. He did not for a moment succumb to the temptation to be what he was not.⁴ He knew his mission and his ministry. He himself openly declared pointing to Jesus, "He must increase but I must decrease" (John 3:27-30).⁵ He gave Jesus the glory and the honour.

³ Matthew 11:11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

⁴ Deuteronomy 18:15 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; . . . 18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

⁵ John 3:27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. 28 Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. 29 He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice:

The following day, Jesus travelled north to Galilee. Andrew and Peter must have followed Him too, for they were Galileans. Jesus found Philip and called him to follow Him. Philip was probably a friend of Andrew and Peter for they lived in the same city Bethsaida, which was on the north eastern shore of the sea of Galilee. Philip then looked for his friend Nathanael. He introduced Jesus of Nazareth to him as the prophet whom Moses wrote of in the Law. Nathanael at first was skeptical for he did not think that any good thing could come from Nazareth. This suggests to us that the little town of Nazareth was a notorious town. When Jesus met Nathanael, He expressed His evaluation of him as a true Israelite, "in whom there is no guile." Nathanael responded in astonishment. Jesus went on to tell him that before Philip called him, Jesus mentioned that He saw him under the fig tree. Nathanael immediately answered and said, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel" (John 1:40). These are the first disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The First Miracle in Cana

There was a marriage in Cana. Mary the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and His four disciples were invited. A Jewish wedding was a big, happy and important occasion. It was also an experience of a lifetime. The married couple would either remember the wedding celebration with fondness

this my joy therefore is fulfilled. 30 He must increase, but I *must* decrease.

and joy or with much disappointment and disgrace for the rest of their life. The celebration usually lasted a few days. As the wedding procession made its way to the couple's new home, they would gather other guests along the way. And as it would be dark when they made their way to the couple's new home, the guests would carry torches above their heads to light the way through the streets. Wine was usually served, and it would be a terrible humiliation for the couple if they should run out of wine at this time.⁶

It happened in this case. The newly wed couple had run out of wine. Embarrassment and humiliation was unavoidable. Mary told Jesus that they had run out of wine. Jesus' answer was abrupt and seemingly rude. But before we jump into any conclusion, we must understand that Jesus loved and understood His mother very well. Addressing Mary as "woman" has nothing to do with rudeness or disrespect. Jesus used the same word when He committed Mary to the care of the Apostle John (John 19:26-27).⁷ Next, Jesus' remarks that "mine hour" had not yet come strongly suggests that Mary desired that Jesus should take this opportunity to demonstrate who He really was — the Christ, the Lord,

⁶ Ian Barclay *Discovering John's Gospel*, pp. 45-46.

⁷ John 19:26 When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! 27 Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own *home*.

Saviour of the world. Mary was interfering in her son's mission and ministry. Jesus told her that His mission and ministry were determined by His "hour." Mary must no longer attach herself to Jesus. It is therefore wrong for any church to assert that Mary could intervene and intercede in her own name and Jesus will obey. This was what Jesus denied her.

Jesus was told of the need of the couple. He realized the terrible embarrassment they would be in. He asked for six water jars to be filled with water. Then He told the servants to draw the water from the six jars, and behold the water had been turned into wine, the best wine! This miraculous act was witnessed by the servants. The word "miracle" is actually the Greek word "*semeion*" which means "sign." The basic meaning of "*semeion*" emphasizes the authenticating aspect of the miraculous act. It illustrates that supernatural power is involved. Jesus' changing of the water into wine in Cana was a sign-miracle. It was to authenticate His deity and authority — that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, that He had supernatural power, and that whoever believe in Him might have life (John 20:31).⁸

Ministry in Jerusalem: First Passover & First Cleansing of the Temple

Before setting off for Jerusalem, Jesus went to Capernaum with His

mother, brothers and His disciples. However, nothing else was recorded. We learn later that Jesus made Capernaum as the beachhead for His Galilean ministry. The city was on the great Roman road to Damascus, about 18 miles northeast of Cana. There was a Roman garrison and custom house, and a synagogue. Andrew, Peter, and Philip lived near the city. It would be better for Mary and His brothers to live there as well. Jesus did consider and care for His mother and brothers.

He then left for Jerusalem because the Passover feast was near. During the Passover season, there were many pilgrims in Jerusalem. Many of them came from the neighbouring areas. The Passover was an important festival. Once a year, the Jews converged at Jerusalem to observe this feast. So Jesus' decision to attend the festival was not surprising. When He entered the Temple and saw what was inside, He was very angry. He made a whip of small cords, and began thrashing the traders and chasing them out of the Temple, and turning over the tables of the money changers. His anger was directed against the unscrupulous traders and money changers. The traders had taken advantage of the pilgrims and charged five or six times more for the sacrificial offerings — dove or lamb. The money changers charged about 12% more for the half shekel Temple-tribute. A system of fleecing the pilgrims had been established. Jesus displayed that all these were detestable to God. He rebuked them for making His

⁸ John 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

Father's house, a "den of thieves." This was the first cleansing of the Temple. Three years later towards the end of His ministry, Jesus once again cleansed the temple of these merchants and money changers who had obviously resumed their lucrative trade (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46).⁹ Jesus was burning with jealousy for the holiness of His Father's house. His disciples remembered that it was written, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (Psalm 69:9).

Interestingly, the people who were affected did not put up a resistance. They had never witnessed such a display of indignation. Then the Jews asked Jesus for His authority for doing what He did. Jesus replied, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). The verb "destroy" is a command (Greek: imperative). The Jews were astounded. They did not understand what Jesus meant. Jesus' disciples too did not understand but they remembered what Jesus said. After His resurrection, they recalled His words and understood what Jesus had meant — the destruction of the temple refers to His death and His subsequent resurrection from the dead in three days. So right from the beginning, Jesus was conscious and

prepared for His mission and the purpose of His coming into the world — to give His life a ransom for sinners.

Sermon on the Spiritual Birth to Nicodemus

Jesus did many sign-miracles. Many saw the sign-miracles and they believed in His name. But Jesus did not "commit Himself unto them" (John 2:24). The word "commit" is the Greek word "believe" (*pisteuo*) – Jesus knew their hearts. He knew that they believed in His name because of the miracles they saw. They were miracle-expecting believers — no miracles no belief. But Jesus did those sign-miracles to authenticate who He was. They were not done to please, amaze or astound the people. Many of these people did not see beyond the sign-miracles to understand who Jesus was.

But Nicodemus was different. He was an earnest and serious man. He was a Pharisee, the finest example, and probably a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest religious body of the Jews. Jesus did not condemn him as He did the other Pharisees. Nicodemus sought out Jesus because he wanted to know more about Jesus' teaching. He saw beyond the sign-miracles. He acknowledged to Jesus that "no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Nicodemus was very near the truth, for God was not only with Jesus – Jesus was God. Jesus could see that Nicodemus was seeking and took the initiative to teach him. Jesus said to him (John 3:3), "Except a

⁹ Matthew 21:13 And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves. Mark 11:17 And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves. Luke 19:46 Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves.

man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” In order for a person to enter into the kingdom of God, one must be born into it. It is not by doing any good works, or by keeping the Law, or by any human parentage. A person must be born of the Spirit. This second birth is the work and power of the Holy Spirit. It is not by the will or the power of man.

When Nicodemus could not understand the second birth, Jesus reiterated and said, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). One view interprets “born of water” to mean the natural birth because Jesus in the next verse said, “that which is born of the flesh is flesh (a clear reference to the natural birth); and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” The other view interprets “water” as a cleansing agent, which is none other than the Word of God (Ephesian 5:16).¹⁰ The Word of God plays an essential part in one’s deliverance. The preferred view is the latter one. How can the natural birth be a part of what is necessary for salvation? The word of God is necessary as Romans 10:13-15 clearly teaches. The most important thing that Jesus was emphasizing is that a person must be spiritually born again to enter into the kingdom of God. There is no other way.

Nicodemus asked, “How can these things be?” Jesus explained by

using an illustration from the history of Israel in the Old Testament. Nicodemus was familiar with the illustration. Moses lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, and if any Israelite, bitten by the snake, were to look at the brazen serpent by faith, he would be instantly healed from the fatal bites (Numbers 21:9).¹¹ Even so, the Son of man would be lifted up, and whosoever looks to Him in faith will not perish but shall have everlasting life. Subsequently, Jesus declared one of the greatest verses ever spoken (John 3:16): “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Jesus was not sent into the world to condemn sinners. John 3:17, “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” The reason is that all mankind is already under condemnation. John 3:18, “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” We are all in a state of condemnation. By rejecting the only Saviour, we remain in our state of condemnation. But he who loves truth will come to the light.

¹⁰ Ephesians 5:26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

¹¹ Numbers 21:9 And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

SUMMARY

Jesus is the God-man sent by God to save the world. John the Baptist served as the link between the Old Testament and the New Testament. This ensures continuity of the plan and purpose of God that Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb prophesied by God to save the world from sin. Jesus was conscious of His mission and the purpose of His coming. In order to authenticate His mission, He performed many sign-miracles. Our faith in His name is therefore not without good reasons and proof.

John the Baptist is an example to every Christian. He is a witness of the Lord Jesus Christ to others. He humbly accepted his subordinate role and served God commendably. John did not claim to be what he was not. He sought the glory of Jesus and not his own. Jesus must increase and he must decrease. He gave Jesus all the glory and honour He deserved. So did Andrew and Philip. When they knew Jesus, one of them went to look for his brother and introduced Jesus to him; the other sought his friend.

The Bible teaches that Jesus did not perform miracles to please the people nor did He do the miracles merely to meet the needs of the people. They were sign-miracles. Jesus performed the miracles for a greater and more fundamental purpose. It was to authenticate His deity and authority. Jesus did not sensationalize His power to perform miracles everywhere He went

nor did He heal everyone, although all who were brought to Him were healed. There were hundreds of people who were sick. Jesus did not call them to Him to be healed by Him. That was not His purpose for coming. His purpose is to save the people from their sins. Men are condemned for all eternity because of sin, but deliverance can only be obtained through believing in Him. There were many who looked only to the miracles of Jesus but who did not sincerely believe and commit themselves to Him. These are people who expect something miraculous from Jesus and if Jesus does not perform as they expect, they reject Him. Jesus does not commit Himself to such people.

Another important teaching is that a person cannot become a born-again child of God by his own will. This re-birth is spiritual and it can only be wrought by the Spirit of God. Unless a person hears the Word, he cannot exercise faith, for the exercise of faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. When a person hears the Word and believes, the Spirit performs the miraculous work of his re-birth. He becomes a born-again believer and is entitled to enter the kingdom of God.

PRACTICAL VALUE

Knowing the truth is not enough. It must be translated into life experiences. We need to ask ourselves whether we have been faithfully witnessing the Lord Jesus Christ to others. More importantly, we must be

sure that we are truly born again ourselves. We must not be like the sign-miracles believers. Sometimes the Lord does not give us the desire of our hearts. Do we stop trusting and serving Him? Do we love Him less? May the Lord keep us faithful and true. AMEN

**DAILY READING & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

MONDAY: John 1:19-51; Isaiah 53:6

TUESDAY: John 2:1-12

WEDNESDAY: John 2:13-25

THURSDAY: John 3:1-21

FRIDAY: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Discussion Questions

1. How does John and his ministry serve as an example to us?

2. How would a Jew understand John's testimony of Jesus as the Lamb of God?

3. John describes Jesus' turning of the water into wine in Cana as a sign. Why did Jesus perform this sign?

4. Why did the mother of Jesus try to get Him to do something at the wedding? What was the significance of Jesus' answer to her?

5. "Jesus could have been more magnanimous and tactful in His dealing with the traders and money changers in the Temple." What do you think?

6. How many people believed in Jesus? Why did they believe in Jesus? Why was Jesus not satisfied with their faith? What was wrong with their faith?

7. What is the doctrine in John 3:3-8?

8. What is the cost of redemption? What are the terms on which salvation is offered? What is the result of rejecting it? Why do so many reject it?

9. What is the significance of Jesus' miracles, and what place should they have in our witness to others about Jesus?

10. What stage of your spiritual life are you in – searching, committed, growing?
