

## *Gospels Study and Discussion Questions*

### *Lesson Three: Jesus' Public Ministry – Matthew 8-9, Luke 4-5, John 2-4*

Read John 2:1-11.

- 1) These verses describe Jesus' first miracle. What was the setting and why is this meaningful? **Jesus performed his first miracle at a wedding celebration. He was concerned about the embarrassment of a newly married couple that would have to live under the stigma of not providing what was socially required (adequate wine at a wedding [these celebrations sometimes lasted 7 days]). It is encouraging to know that Jesus participated in human celebrations, cared about it being joyful, and showed concern for an important detail. He cares about what is important to us.**
- 2) John calls Jesus' miracles "signs." In what sense might Jesus' first miracle be a sign (a sign of what)? **Jesus' first miracle was a sign of His power over the elements as Creator God, but also His ability to transform the ordinary into something spectacular. His first miracle showed the transformational nature of His work in the world. Finally, it was a sign that Jesus came to bring joy!**
- 3) Which part of your life would you like to see Jesus transform from water (ordinary) to wine (spiritually dynamic)? **Personal sharing**

Read John 2:12-25 and 3:1-21.

- 4) Those who witnessed Jesus' "cleansing" of the Temple responded to His righteous indignation with their own indignation.
  - a) In contemporary language, what did the Jews say to Him? **In essence, the Jews asked Jesus, "Who are you to tell us what to do?"**
  - b) How was Jesus' reply confusing and brilliant at the same time? **Jesus responded by saying that He would prove His authority by raising the Temple they destroyed within three days. This response was confusing, since the Jews naturally assumed He was speaking of a construction miracle with regard to the Temple building. However, Jesus was actually referring to His power over sin and death. His own bodily resurrection would be proof that He had divine authority. Jesus' answer was entirely truthful and the supreme explanation for the authority they challenged. By giving a veiled response, Jesus brilliantly shifted their focus from their frustration over His Temple cleansing to consideration of the meaning of His response.**
- 5) Apparently, not long after this Temple cleansing, Jesus met privately with Nicodemus.
  - a) What do you learn about Nicodemus from John 3:1-2, 7:43-51 and 19:38-40? **Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a 70-member board of religious leaders who had authority under the Roman law to make religious decisions and oversee civil law in Israel. Nicodemus came secretly to Jesus at night with sincere questions. Later, he rebuked the Pharisees for not hearing what Jesus had to say before condemning Him. He also assisted Joseph of Arimathea in burying Jesus.**
  - b) According to John 3:8, how is blowing wind an apt representation of the Spirit's work in regenerating us (so that we are "born again")? **The word translated "wind" is the same Greek word as "Spirit." We cannot control or fully explain either. Both are invisible and mysterious, yet we clearly witness the *results*.**
  - c) Why might John have included Jesus' meeting with Nicodemus in His gospel? **Certainly in part, because of the content of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, which spells out the necessity of new, spiritual birth and the need to "come into the light." (Coming into the light allows our sin to be exposed for what it is, seeing our sin as the offense it is to God. This is an essential part of our salvation.) Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus also highlighted the clear choice of each individual between condemnation or salvation, Jesus' prediction of his own death (that He must be "lifted**

up”), and belief in Him as the means of salvation. Although perhaps a lesser reason, the account reveals Jesus’ personal concern for individuals. He was always demanded upon, but he was never unwilling to take time to answer the honest questions of one man. The story also shows the confusion of religious people of Jesus’ day about the meaning of His life and ministry. His inexplicable miracles seemed to validate Him as “from God” (3:2).

- 6) Jesus’ actions (for example, His Temple cleansing) provoked or evoked a response from every individual who encountered Him (for example, Nicodemus’ questions). Are there events in your life about which you would like to question or have questioned Jesus? Are your questions motivated by a sincere desire for understanding or by a secret (or even subconscious) questioning of His authority and goodness in “scattering” or “overturning” (John 2:15) your own ideas and plans? **Personal sharing**

Read John 4:1-26 and 4:39-42. Jesus returned to Galilee through Samaria. It was the more direct route but one that most Jews normally circumvented, because they despised the “half-breed” Samaritans (2 Kings 17 gives this history).

- 7) Compare Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus to His encounter with the Samaritan woman. **Nicodemus was a highly respected, male, Jewish religious leader. By contrast, the unnamed Samaritan woman was a known sinner and social outcast. Nicodemus politely called Jesus “Rabbi,” while the Samaritan woman was initially hostile. The woman responded in faith to Jesus’ claim to be Messiah, while Nicodemus’ response can only be inferred from his subsequent actions.**
- 8) In what sense does Jesus’ life well up to become a “spring of water” in His followers (4:14)? **The Holy Spirit works through us to offer life to others.**
- 9) Carefully reread and personalize John 4:7 and 10, as though Jesus is asking *you* for a drink (a request that you offer Him an area of your life in which you are presently dissatisfied). How do Jesus’ words to the Samaritan woman in verse 10 apply to you? In what ways have you learned to drink deeply from Jesus, the source of this satisfying “living water”? **We drink deeply of Jesus’ life through scripture reading, meditation, and memorization; through focused prayer (especially prayer and reading focused on God’s character); through singing; and by trusting Him for satisfaction. We drink deeply by practicing His presence throughout each day, inviting Him in to every conversation and circumstance. Personal sharing**

Read Matthew 4:23-25 with Luke 4:14-5:11. From the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry, even while He was calling His disciples, others were rejecting Him.

- 10) According to Matthew 4:23 and Luke 4:15 and 44, what was one venue for Jesus’ teaching and preaching? **Jesus taught and preached in the local synagogues.**
- 11) Considering human nature, explain why the thinking of the people in Jesus’ hometown changed (see Luke 4:22-30, 32). **While those in Jesus’ hometown were initially in awe of him, eventually, they began to resent that the son of a local boy thought He had authority to be their teacher.**
- 12) How did the manner of Jesus’ call in Luke 5:1-11 cause Peter, James and John to willingly leave and follow Him? Has Jesus ever called you to follow Him in some unique way that deeply resonated with you? If so, plan to share this testimony with your discussion group. **Jesus offered to give Peter, James, and John a significant life purpose (they would “catch” men), and He did so in a manner they well understood (fishing). The miraculous, large catch of fish proved Jesus’ worthiness to be followed and worshipped, and it affirmed Jesus’ ability to provide for the needs of the men and their families. Personal sharing**

Read Matthew 8 and 9.

- 13) Over what evils and forces did Jesus demonstrate His power and authority in Matthew 8 and 9? **Jesus’ power is demonstrated over disease and darkness (8:1-17 & 9:27-37), over nature (8:18-27), over Satan (8:28-34), over sin (9:1-17), and over death (9:18-26).**

- 14) Read Psalm 146:8a, Isaiah 29:18 and 35:5-6 with Matthew 9:6, 35-36 and 15:30-31. What was the significance of Jesus' ministry of miraculous healing and signs? **Jesus' miracles and signs fulfilled Old Testament Messianic prophecies and authenticated His message as from God. They also showed God's compassion for the human condition.**
- 15) What evidence do you find in Matthew 9:1-7 that God sees physical wellness as secondary in importance to spiritual wellness? Of what kind of healing are you in need? Will you ask your discussion group to pray with you about this? **Jesus first forgave the sins of the paralytic (Mat 9:2). He stated that He healed his legs only to show His authority to forgive sins (9:6).**