

The Gospel According to John

Women Studying Scripture

a ministry of the Calimesa Seventh-day Adventist Church

Lesson 4

Preparing To Listen

Some of the richest descriptions of how God feels about us come to us through the prophet Isaiah. Chapter 43 is one of those places where this comes powerfully into focus. If you can, take the time to slowly and reflectively read the whole chapter through and allow the passion that God expresses to give shape to the picture of God that is revealed there. One section in particular that we will focus on as we prepare for this lesson is this one:

¹⁸Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. ¹⁹See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. ²⁰The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, ²¹the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise. Isaiah 43:19-21 NIV

As you reflect upon these verses, and perhaps the entire chapter, do you sense some things that God is inviting you to forget, let go of, or cease dwelling upon?

- What kinds of new things do you sense may be springing up in your life that God is inviting you to become sensitive to?
- What kind of a feel do you get for what God wants that experience to be like from the descriptive language used in verses 19-20?
- What does God hope for us, in terms of what our walk with Him will be like, when we begin to experience what He would like to share with us.
- Take a few moments to allow these verses to sink in. As you do, enjoy being in His presence, ask Him to be with you. Linger a few moments and let Him bring to mind people and/or things that you need to pray about. As that time draws to a close, thank Him for what you see of Him in this passage.

FROM WATER TO WINE

The story of the wedding feast at Cana is a very significant one for a number of reasons. First, it finishes up the train of thought that John began in chapter one where he describes the experience of the first followers of Jesus. Secondly, it also launches a new section and a new train of thought which ends at the end of chapter four. It is a key story that not only serves to transition from one idea to another, but is rich in meaning in its own right as well. But before we get into the story itself, let's take just a moment to get a picture of how this works.

- Section One

- I. John the Baptist points the disciples to Jesus 1:35
 - II. Jesus invites them to "Come and See" 1:39
& He shows He knows all about Simon 1:42
 - III. The first disciples invite others to "Come and See" 1:46
 - A. He shows He knows all about Nathanael 1:47-49
 - B. Nathanael believes, and Jesus says that he will see greater things. 1:50
 - IV. Jesus performs His first miracle, and the disciples all believe. "This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him." 2:11
- Section Two

- A. First miracle at Cana (2:11)
 - B. Jesus goes home - Temple in Jerusalem (2:12-25)
 - C. Conversation with Nicodemus (3:1-21)
 - D. The Baptist (3:22-30)
 - D' Jesus (3:30-31)
 - C' Conversation with Samaritan Woman
 - B' Jesus goes home - Galilee (4:43-45)
 - A' Second miracle at Cana (4:54)

1. John 2:1 begins by telling us that the wedding took place on the "third day." Just for fun try this:

- a. How many days were mentioned in chapter 1?
- b. Add the 3 days here to those from chapter 1. How many days in total do we have?
- c. Since, according to tradition, the wedding of a virgin was supposed to happen on a Wednesday, assign weekdays to the events of each day in the first week of Jesus' ministry.

Sketching the Characters

2. In order to get a feel for what is going on in the story, let's take a few moments to identify who the characters are, and see if we can begin to tune into what they were experiencing. Use the charts that follow as a tool to help you do that. Remember not to list Jesus as one of the characters at this point - we will look at Him separately afterwards, (although you may very well want to take note of how the characters respond to His involvement in the passage). Remember to use a pencil in case you decide to return to the charts and change some things as you work through the lesson.

CHARACTER	WHAT THEY WERE THINKING WHAT THEY MAY HAVE SAID	WHAT THEY WERE FEELING HOW THEY EXPRESSED IT	CHANGES OBSERVED
Jesus' Mother			
The Disciples			
The Servants			

CHARACTER	WHAT THEY WERE THINKING WHAT THEY MAY HAVE SAID	WHAT THEY WERE FEELING HOW THEY EXPRESSED IT	CHANGES OBSERVED
The Master of the Banquet			
The Bridegroom			
The Guests			

3. One of the key elements of this story is the wine that Jesus produced. In order to appreciate the full significance of what is going on here, it is helpful to know what kinds of things this miracle would have brought to people's minds. Each of the passages that follow would have contributed a positive image associated with what Jesus did. Look up each one, and jot down the sort of feeling or experience the passage is expressing:

a. Isaiah 25:6

b. Jeremiah 31:12

c. Amos 9:13-14

As you reflect upon these texts, and the miracle that Jesus performed here, what do you think the meaning of it would have been for Jesus ministry, and what John is trying to share with us here?

The Main Character in the Story

4.. Having charted out who the main characters in the story are, and some general things about what is happening to them and within them, use the chart below to indicate particular things you notice about Jesus, and how He interacts with the various characters / groups.

CHARACTER	HOW JESUS INTERACTED WITH THEM. WHAT JESUS WAS THINKING / FEELING & WHAT HE SAID / DID
His Mother	
Servants	
Guests	
The People in Charge	
Disciples	
Picture of God that emerges here:	

Questions to Consider

5. When John describes the water jars that were present, he notes several things about them. (Note what he says)

- a. Their size
- b. Their purpose
- c. Their present state

Do you see anything significant about these characteristics, (especially in light of the fact that this is the miracle that introduces the ministry of Jesus)? (NOTE: The water pots held between 20-30 gallons, which were quite large for that day and age)

6. Mary seems to have some degree of responsibility for the wedding festivities. She also seems to have some expectations in regard to Jesus and what He might do that may have influenced her actions. What can you detect here about her expectations and what they were:

- a. on a personal level?
- b. on a religious level?

7. How does Jesus' response to her address those expectations:

a: on a personal level

b. on a spiritual/religious level (as regards His ministry)?

8. What useful insights can you pick up on here in regard to family relationships?

9. Listen carefully to the comments of the master of the banquet about the wine (vss. 9-10). Considering that the turning of the water into wine is the first recorded miracle of Jesus, and the one that introduces His ministry, what larger significance do you think John wants us to see in these comments?

10. Compare your answer to question 8 with Matt 9:14-17; Mark 2:18-22; and Luke 5:33-39. What additional insights do these texts give you into the significance of this passage?

11. As you think about your answer to question 9, compare and contrast the approach to spiritual life that characterized the pharisees (and disciples of John the Baptist), and that which Jesus seemed to be describing.

Established Approach

Jesus' Approach

12. At only one other time in the Gospel of John does the mother of Jesus appear (19:26). When you compare this passage, with 12:23-24, and what Jesus said to His mother about His time having not yet come here in verse 4, do you find any additional insights into the significance of this miracle ?

Emerging Themes

Replacement

One of the themes that we find developing in this passage, and which is prominent in this section, (which ends with chapter 4), is that of replacement. Jesus supersedes and replaces the system of Judaism. Take a few moments to review the prologue, and notice how that theme is introduced there - and how it comes out in this story.

Jesus' Hour

This passage gives us the first occurrence of an idea that reoccurs frequently in John's gospel - that Jesus' "hour" had not yet come." Notice 7:30; 8:20; 13:1; 17:1. What do you discover from these reference about what His "hour" is and when it comes?

Jesus Reveals His Glory

In what way does Jesus reveal His glory in this passage? Refer back to the Prologue for clues.

Endorsement of Wine?

One interesting question that is sometimes raised in regard to this story is whether or not this miracle of Jesus has any bearing upon the use of alcohol. Some see it as "permission giving" for the moderate use of alcohol. Others insist that the "wine" Jesus created was new unfermented wine. The Greek word (oinos) is itself a bit ambiguous, and could refer either to fermented or unfermented wine.

It is worth noting that if the wedding took place in the fall, it would still be within the time of grape harvest, so fresh juice could have been available for the first part of the wedding festivities. There were also methods of preservation that did not result in fermentation in which a kind of grape juice concentrate was made to which water could be added at a later date. But when all is said and done, this particular passage simply does not give us enough information to make a definite statement one way or the other - which should not be too surprising, since it was probably not one of the points John was trying to make.

How To Take This With Me / How To Let Him Change Me

13. As we look at the story of the Wedding Feast at Cana there are a number of things that emerge, just a few of which are listed below. Highlight one (or more) that have been especially meaningful to you. (If there are some you don't see listed, write them in and highlight them) Be sure to give special attention to items with an "*".

- a. The ministry of Jesus is characterized as something that was fresh, joyful and new, replacing something that was draining, empty and burdensome.
- b. Jesus is pictured as attending, participating in, and adding to the joy of a wedding celebration.
- c. The miraculousness of Jesus turning water into wine; empty water jars representing a system in which people strove to be good enough, were changed into containers full of wine, representing the celebration of God's goodness and grace.
- d. The subtlety of how family expectations and relationships can help or hinder our ability to stay focused on what God is calling us to do, and who He is calling us to be.
- e. The opportunity to contemplate my own relationship with God, and whether it is characterized more by large ceremonial water jars, or joyfully living in the presence of the bridegroom.

*f. The character(s) that I most identify with in this story is(are): _____ *

g. _____

h. _____

i. _____

In Response to God, based on what I highlighted above:

14. Take a few moments to express your response to God. (Use additional paper if you wish)

a. What picture of God seems to be emerging from what you are seeing and hearing in this lesson?

b. Write out a prayer, jot down some things you would like to say, compose a song, play some music, create a poem, record a few thoughts you would like to share with Him, or whatever you would like to do to express yourself. (This is between you and God, you don't need to share it with anyone unless you would like to).

As I talk with you, based on what I highlighted above:

(Things to share with your study group).

15. The areas in my life where I am the most challenged/excited are:

16. How other members in this group can pray for me as I allow what I have studied to become more real:

As I leave here, based on what I highlighted above:

(How your life will be different now that you have studied and shared together)

17. Specific Plans / Ideas:

18. People I will be praying for:

Who: _____ What to Pray About: