

John's Gospel : a study for fellowship groups

Further copies from: Adrian H Reed - Email: ahr@blueyonder.co.uk

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(3a) The First Recorded Miracle (John 2:1-11)

Q 1 Have members of the group ever felt trapped into saying something that they would prefer not say, or into doing something they would prefer not to be doing, because of the circumstances in which they find themselves?

Read the passage

Q 2 Jesus appears to be taken off-guard and put on the spot by the approach of his mother. Do you think that he was persuaded to perform a miracle at a time or in a place that he would not have chosen for his first one? Discuss this.

A teacher once asked her third year pupils (now year 9) how they understood this miracle. One lad surprised the teacher by the depth of understanding shown, especially for a third year, as he suggested: "Water saw its creator and blushed". The lad was to become the famous romantic poet, Lord Byron. There was a romantic setting for this miracle but we learn a lot from the way we find Jesus caught up here in family and community life.

Q 3 Jesus says in verse 4 (to translate more literally): "What's that got to do with you and me, woman, my hour has not yet arrived?" How many of us miss an opportunity to do something for God because the opportunity to do so comes at an inconvenient time, or because we don't feel prepared or adequately gifted for it?

Notice that Mary intervenes to establish Jesus' authority. She is clearly held in high regard by those catering for the wedding, which is of course as it should be. Perhaps we need sometimes to be more forthright about the authority of Jesus to be involved in people's lives.

(3b) The First Confrontation with Jewish Leaders (John 2:12-25)

Read the passage

In some ways it is surprising that Jesus was not immediately apprehended as he disrupted preparations for the Passover. There were a lot of vested interests which were pushed aside. Matthew (Mt 21:18) and Mark (Mk 11:17) tell us that Jesus described the temple as a 'den of robbers' and he did so because of the complex profit-orientated activities. The direct action of Jesus invited response.

Jesus was asked to show his authority for what he did by performing a miracle. Although he had already done so (see above) in another setting, and was starting to do so widely in Jerusalem at this time (Jn 2:23), he only promised to his challengers, the future miracle of his own resurrection, and he did so in a way which most did not understand.

Jesus stopped business people coming in because the Jewish regulations forbade entry into the Temple wearing sandals, carrying a stick or holding a purse. It was also not to be used as a short-cut, which it had indeed become between the eastern quarter and the Mount of Olives. He told the sellers of doves to get them out because the poor (for whom they were intended as inexpensive sacrificial animals) were being exploited. They could buy one for 3 or 4 pence outside but invariably the priests found that they were not the perfect specimens that they needed to be. Instead pilgrims were encouraged to buy the approved doves inside at a cost of 75 pence.

Q 4 How business-like is it permissible to become in church life?

Q 5 Do we make a stand, wherever we find it, against exploitation?