

Adult Teaching Resources

March 7, 2021



Season of Lent

John 2:13-22—“Jesus, the Activist”

John 3:14-21—“Jesus, the Savior”

John 12:20-33—“Jesus, the Lover”

Mark 15:1-47—“Jesus, the Sufferer”

www.nurturingfaith.net

Subscribe to *Nurturing Faith* to access the core Bible content for this lesson.
Find links and videos related to this lesson.

“Jesus, the Activist”

John 2:13-22

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Key Verse

John 2:19—“Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

Opening

After everyone arrives, keep the group together. On the board or large sheet of paper, write the following images of Jesus:

Infant Jesus in the manger
With John at the Jordan River
Teaching and preaching
Healing
Sitting with children in his lap
Casting out demons
Turning over tables and cleansing the temple
On the cross

Ask everyone to picture Jesus in each situation. Then, ask them to share their thoughts about how Jesus acted, his words, his actions, his demeanor, and his overall presence.

Record a few key elements for each scenario, then spend some time discussing how different Jesus was in each situation.

Finally, ask the group to answer this question: When you think of Jesus, what is the first image that comes to mind?

Reading the Bible

What holiday was near? (Passover) Where did Jesus go? (up to Jerusalem)

What did Jesus find in the Temple? (people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables)

What did Jesus make? (a whip of cords) What did he do with it? (he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle)

What did he do with the money changers? (poured out their coins and overturned their tables)

Reading the Bible *continued*

What did he say to those selling doves? (“Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!”)

What did the disciples remember what was written? (“Zeal for your house will consume me.”)

What did Jesus say to the Jews? (“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”)

What did the Jews say to Jesus? (“This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?”)

What was Jesus talking about? (the temple of his body)

When did the disciples remember he said all this? (after he was raised from the dead)

Making Connections

What does it mean to you to “clean” something? What does it mean to you to “cleanse” something? What, if anything, is the difference between the two? How often do you clean? How often do you cleanse?

This story appears at a different place in John’s telling of Jesus’ story. Does this difference influence your understanding or interpretation of Jesus’ ministry? If so, how? If not, why not?

What are the important religious holidays you observe? What do you expect to happen around those holidays?

What is the purpose of the church sanctuary? How often is it used for that purpose? How often is it used for something else? Have you ever been offended by something that took place in the sanctuary? What was it? How did you react?

What do you expect to find when you enter a church facility and especially the sanctuary? What have you found in churches or sanctuaries that have caused you to wonder why that “thing” is there?

Our Lesson Writer explains, “Jews were required to pay a half-shekel temple tax each year (Exod. 30:11-16), but doing so was not straightforward. The Romans forbade the Jews from minting their own coins, while the Jews refused to accept Roman coins for the temple tax. They considered the coins’ image of the emperor to be a violation of the commandment against graven images.” If you were in charge of the temple tax situation, what would you do to ensure that temple remained pure in its purpose but also was able to accept the temple tax?

What has caused you to get angry at church? Have you ever been so angry at church that you wanted to make a whip and start swinging it? What made you angry? How did you ultimately react and act?

Our Lesson Writer says, “Signs’ are a central element in John’s gospel, where miracles are often labeled as signs designed to indicate Jesus’ power and authority, culminating with his

Making Connections *continued*

crucifixion and resurrection as a final sign.” What signs have you experienced in your life that are a testimony to Jesus’ power and authority? How have you shared those signs with others?

For you, where does Jesus dwell? Is he in the sanctuary? Is he out in the world? Is he at your home? Is he at your business? How does where he dwells affect the way you live?

So What?

In the large group, ask everyone to consider these questions:

What is going on in your church that you consider to be the body of Christ?

What is going on in your church that you consider to be something other than the work of God?

If Jesus were to show up at your church, what type of cleansing would he need to do?

Give everyone time to think about those questions, then ask for volunteers to share their thoughts and ideas. Encourage your group to think deeply and share the good with the bad. Every church has some cleansing that Jesus would love to do. Figuring out what Jesus would do is the first step in getting the church back on track.

Spend time listening and having conversation about the good things happening in the church and the things that need to be cleansed in the church. For the things that need to be cleansed, what can each member of your class do to help the process happen quicker?

The Challenge

This week, start working on doing one thing to cleanse your church.

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for the church you’ve given us and this group that meets to learn and grow together. We are aware that there are things that happen in this church that need to be cleansed by Jesus. Help us to focus on what you desire from us to help keep your sanctuary clean. Forgive us when we lose sight of your true call for us. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

John and the lectionary—The Revised Common Lectionary, which we follow in this curriculum, follows a three-year pattern in its treatment of the gospels. Year A focuses on Matthew, Year B on Mark, and Year C on Luke. Readings from John are scattered throughout all three years. That’s why, even though this is Year B (Mark) and we’re using the gospel texts during Lent, three of the four texts for March come from the Fourth Gospel.

The Fourth Evangelist—Most modern commentators believe the gospel of John was written by an anonymous member of a “Johannine Community” of John’s disciples rather than by John himself. The gospel does not name an author, but refers six times to “the disciple whom Jesus loved” or “the beloved disciple,” a description not used in the other gospels. A tradition going back to the second century identifies the beloved disciple as John.

The Fourth Gospel makes more claims of having been related by an eye-witness than the other gospels, but there is also evidence that it is based on traditions going back to John rather than having been written by John himself: after a reference to the beloved disciple leaning on Jesus’ breast in 21:20-23, the text says “This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true” (21:24). It would seem odd for John to say of himself “we know that his testimony is true.”

Scholars who specialize in a study of the Fourth Gospel often speak of a three-layered composition that developed over a period of time and was completed around 90 CE. The final writer probably incorporated multiple sources into the ultimate composition, and scholars often refer to him generically as the “Fourth Evangelist.” For the sake of simplicity, we will refer to the author as “John,” with awareness that the apostle who knew Jesus personally may



not have been the final author of the gospel that now bears his name.

A longstanding church tradition holds that John lived out his final years in Ephesus, bringing Jesus’ mother Mary with him to that area of Asia Minor, now Turkey.

The traditional site of John’s burial, in the ruins of the 6th century Basilica of St. John, near Ephesus, Turkey.

Synoptics—“Synoptic Gospels” is a scholarly term referring to Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The word “synoptic” is from Greek, meaning “seen together.” Mark was probably written first and largely incorporated into the work of Matthew and Luke. Although Matthew and Luke

Digging Deeper *continued*

also added common traditions from a source generally called “Q” (from the German word *quelle*, meaning “source”), along with birth and infancy narratives unique to them, the three synoptics follow a similar timeline.

Placing the story—It should not trouble us that the story of Jesus’ cleansing of the temple appears at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in John, and near the end in the other gospels. If the Fourth Gospel was composed by disciples of John relying on stories, sermons, or written materials that may or may not go back to the apostle, the chronology could easily have become muddled. The gospel is organized more on thematic grounds than on an attempt either to follow or to correct the timeline of the other gospels.

G. R. Beasley-Murray suggests that the author’s placement of the cleansing of the temple near the beginning of Jesus’ ministry “provides a vital clue for grasping the nature and the course of our Lord’s work, his words and actions, his death and resurrection, and the outcome of it all in a new worship of God, born out of a new relation to God in and through the crucified-risen Christ” (*John*, Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 36, 2nd ed. [Word Books, 1999], 39).

Temple grounds, and the temple proper—Jesus found the stalls of money changers and livestock merchants after entering “the temple,” according to the NRSV and KJV, though NIV11 and NET more properly have “temple courts.” The word used is *hieron*, which could describe the temple or the entire complex, including its various courts, outbuildings, and the inner temple proper (*naos*), which only priests could enter.

The temple tax—Jewish officials required that the annual half-shekel temple tax be paid with coins from Tyre, even though the Tyrian coins also contained graven images, with the head of the god Melqart (equated by the Romans with Heracles) on one side, and an eagle on the other. Even though this also violated the law, officials needed the tax to support the temple and the priestly hierarchy. Forbidden to produce their own image-less coins, temple leaders swallowed hard and accepted the Tyrian coins. The Tyrian shekel, at right, would cover the temple tax for two people.



A softer whip?—Several ancient Greek texts add the word *hos* prior to *phragellion*, suggesting that Jesus made “something like a whip.” This appears to be an effort to soften the unexpected image of Jesus using a whip to drive people from the temple.

A long construction project—According to Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews* (15:11.1), Herod the Great began the work of remodeling the temple in the 18th year of his reign, which would have been about 19 BCE. Forty-six years later would yield a date of 27-28 CE, which would predate the presumed beginning of Jesus’ ministry around 30 CE, but is close enough.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

What is the significance of “signs” in John?

Scholars have long noted that the Fourth Gospel specifically refers to certain of Jesus’ mighty acts as “signs” denoting his authority. Though not all are denoted in the gospel as signs, the miracles typically cited include the changing of water into wine (2:1-11), the healing of a royal official’s son in Capernaum (4:46-54), the healing of a paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-18), the feeding of the 5,000 (6:5-14), Jesus’ walking on the water (6:16-24), the healing of the man born blind (9:1-7), and the raising of Lazarus from the dead (11:1-45).

Some scholars do not include Jesus’ walking on the water, and consider the crucifixion and resurrection to be separate signs. A few writers consider the post-resurrection harvest of fish to be a final sign (21:1-14).

John places today’s text immediately after the changing of water to wine at Cana, which he names “the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory” (2:11), followed by the cleansing of the temple, at which the Jewish officials asked Jesus what sign he could show to prove his authority (2:18). While Jesus was still at the Passover festival, the author says, “many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name” (2:23).

In chapter 3, Nicodemus commented: “No one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him” (3:2), and in the next chapter Jesus complained: “Unless you people see signs and wonders ... you will never believe” (4:8).

Seeing signs did often lead to belief. In addition to the connection drawn in 2:23 and 4:8, the author notes: “a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick” (6:2). When Jesus fed the 5,000, John writes, “after the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say ‘Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world’” (6:14).

At the time, Jesus accused the people of being more interested in the food than the signs (6:26), and challenged them to believe he was the one sent from God (6:29). Unsatisfied, the people asked “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?” (6:30).

When the people spoke of Moses providing manna in the wilderness, Jesus declared that he was the true bread from heaven: the sign was not so much what he did, as who he was.

As more people came to believe, some argued: “When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man?” (7:31). References to the signs Jesus performed continue in 9:16, 10:41, 11:47, 12:37, and 20:30, all related to the question of Jesus’ authority and the people’s willingness—or unwillingness—to believe in him as the Messiah.

The Hardest Question *continued*

John's constant conversation about the relation between signs and belief challenges us to ask how much we are like those over whom Jesus lamented that they would not believe or follow unless they personally observed or experienced some miracle or mighty work. While we may say that we believe, do we require the "sign" of particularly inspiring worship, physical healing, or financial blessings in order to remain faithful in supporting the Christian community? Are we in it only for what we can get out of it, or do we believe in and follow Jesus because we believe it is right to obey his command to love God and love others as he has loved us? (15:9-17).