



## got life?

### The Gospel of John A Bible Study with Stan Key

#### A BOTTLE OF WINE AND A WHIP

*John 2:1–25*

##### I. What does God look like?

###### A. Philip's request.

*Near the end of Jesus' ministry, Philip makes a poignant request: "Master, show us the Father; then we'll be content" (John 14:8, The Message)*

*Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still **do not know me**, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9)*

Jesus' response to Philip's request introduces us to two astounding claims:

1. To see Jesus is to see God. Jesus is the **face** of God.
2. God doesn't **look like** what you think he does. He could move in next door and you might not even realize it!

###### B. The Old Testament sets the stage.

Biblical history introduces us to the reality that God doesn't look like what we expect him to look like.

1. When God first reveals himself, he does so through his **voice** more than through his appearance. He **speaks** to Abraham and calls him to follow. In other words, the ear (not the eye) is perhaps the first organ to rightly perceive who God really is.
2. God's early appearances are full of mystery.
  - a. To Abraham.
    - "When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between [the divided pieces of animal sacrifice]" (Gn 15:17).
    - "And the LORD appeared to [Abraham] by the oaks of Mamre. . . . He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, **three men** were standing in front of him" (Gn 18:1– 2).
  - b. To Jacob.
    - "Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the LORD is in this place, and I **did not know it**'" (Gn 28:16).
    - "So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, 'For I have seen God **face to face**, and yet my life has been delivered'" (Gn 32:30).
  - c. To Moses.
    - "And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a **bush**. . . . the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed" (Ex 3:2).
    - "Moses said, 'Please, show me your glory.' . . . [God] said, 'You cannot see my face and live. . . . I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away

my hand, and you shall see my **back**, but my face shall not be seen”  
(Ex 33:18–23).

C. The Gospel makes a stunning announcement.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory . . . full of **grace** and **truth**. . . . No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known. (John 1:1, 14, 18)*

But this announcement begs the larger question: if and when God does come among us, will we **recognize** him?

*He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. (John 1:10– 11)*

But how, oh, how is it possible to fail to hear and fail to see God? John’s Gospel helps to answer this question by explaining that:

1. We are so **deaf** that we can’t hear the Word of God (Jn 12:27–30).
  2. We are so **blind** that we can’t see the Light of the world (Jn 1:8; 9:40–41).
  3. God comes in **forms** that we never imagined (Jn 14:9): shepherd, servant, cross, etc.
  4. We **don’t want** to hear him or see him because his coming interferes with our plans. We actually prefer the darkness (Jn 3:19).
- D. John 1. Before John **shows** us what Jesus does (Jn 2ff.), he **tells** us who Jesus is (Jn 1). In other words, if we are listening (ears), then when God walks into town perhaps we’ll recognize him (eyes). So, listen closely:
1. Jesus is the **Word** (Jn 1:1, 14).
  2. Jesus is the **Lamb** of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29, 36).
  3. Jesus is the **Son of God** (Jn 1:34, 49).
  4. Jesus is the **Messiah/Christ** (Jn 1:41).
  5. Jesus is the **King** of Israel (Jn 1:49).
  6. Jesus is the **Son of Man** (Jn 1:51).
- E. John 2. Were you listening? If so, you should recognize God when he walks into the room. Right? That’s what John 2 is about. But what if God shows up with a **bottle of wine** in one hand and a **whip** in the other?

II. Examine the text.

The wedding at Cana: The disciples realize who Jesus is and they believe. Jn 2:1–12	The cleansing of the Temple: The disciples remember this event later and they believe. Jn 2:13–22	Jesus knows that the “faith” of many is superficial. Jn 2:23–25
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A. The wedding at Cana (John 2:1–12).

1. John emphasizes that this was Jesus’ **first** miracle. This was thus the initial demonstration of Jesus’ true identity to the watching world.

2. But almost everything about this event is unimpressive:
    - a. The **location** is a nondescript village in the middle of nowhere: Cana.
    - b. The bridal couple is not even named.
    - c. The occasion is a wedding reception where Jesus' action is aimed at saving the bridal couple from **social embarrassment**: the wine ran out.
    - d. Jesus seems to be forced into this miracle by his **mother**.
    - e. And do we really need **180 gallons** of wine? Even if the alcoholic content is low and there was nothing else to drink, isn't this a bit over the top?
  3. John calls this miracle a "sign." It **points beyond** itself to something else. Don't just look *at* the miracle—look *through* it. This sign signifies that:
    - a. Jesus has come to **bless** and enrich our lives, not curse them. What a contrast to how Moses began his public ministry by turning water to **blood** (Ex 7:14–25)! The six pots contained water "for the Jewish rites of purification" (Jn 2:6). Jesus has brought **new wine** as the prophets foretold (Am 9:13; Jl 3:18). When "the wine runs out," invite Jesus to come and work a miracle. He comes to make life abundant (Jn 10:10).
    - b. We know better how to understand the person and place of **Mary**. Is she sinless? A super-saint? Should we pray to her? Did she ascend to heaven? Is she the mother of God? Or is she just another woman sinner saved by grace like the rest of us? Mary's words to Jesus imply more than "fix the problem." She is telling her son that it's time to get on with his mission. His "hour" has come to reveal his identity to the world. Though Jesus refuses to be manipulated (he takes his signals from his Father in heaven), he agrees to do something about the problem. Mary's words to the servants reveal her true place in history: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5).
    - c. **Weddings** are of primary significance. History began with a wedding (Gn 2) and will end with a wedding (Rv 19–22). For Jesus to begin his ministry at a wedding has huge theological significance. This perhaps explains why the name of the bride and groom are omitted. John seems to be implying that Jesus is the **bridegroom** (see Jn 3:29; Mt 9:15). But where is his bride (the church).
- B. The cleansing of the Temple (John 2:13–22).
1. From the wedding in Cana, Jesus goes directly to the Temple in Jerusalem. Why? Could it be that he (the groom) is looking for his **bride** (the church)?
  2. The synoptic Gospels all place the cleansing of the Temple near the **end** of Jesus' ministry but John places it at the **beginning**. Though some believe John ignored the chronology of events so he could force the story into his narrative purposes, it seems more likely that Jesus simply cleansed the Temple twice!
  3. The problem Jesus is addressing can be summarized as:
    - a. Seeing worship as a means to personal **profit** (both for the leaders and for the worshippers). This sin lies at the heart of the so-called "Prosperity Gospel."

- b. Legalism and works righteousness.<sup>1</sup> The money changers insisted that worship be done **correctly** (the right coinage, the right animal sacrifice, etc.). Technique and style became more important than substance.
  - c. Worship leaders began to assume that the Temple belonged to them. Jesus knew who the building really belonged to: “My **Father’s** house.”
4. In speaking of his own body as the true Temple, Jesus was acknowledging the secondary importance of all structures, forms, and rituals. “These are a **shadow** of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col 2:17). When Jesus rose from the dead, the new temple would be called “the **body of Christ**.”<sup>2</sup>
  5. In cleansing the Temple, Jesus was clearly fulfilling one of the actions foretold that would be accomplished by the messiah.
    - “And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, ‘Holy to the Lord.’ . . . And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day” (Zech 14:20–21).
    - “And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. . . . But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a **refiner’s fire** and like fullers’ soap. . . . and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord” (Mal 3:1–4).
- C. Jesus knows that the faith of many is **superficial** (John 2:23–25).

These powerful actions (turning water to wine, cleansing the Temple, etc.) caused many to believe in Jesus. However, faith that is based on the presence of outward impressive actions of power is superficial faith. Jesus is not impressed. He knows that followers who have this kind of faith will **fall away** when the going gets tough.

### III. A bottle of wine and a whip.

John puts two stories side by side: turning water to wine and cleansing the temple. Why? He is comparing and contrasting two actions of the Messiah that he knows will cause many to **struggle**. Some may even stumble and fall. Does the Son of God really look like this?

#### A. The **party** Jesus.

1. Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus was accused of associating with the **wrong people** and hanging out in the **wrong places**.

*Jesus called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and said, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are **sick**. Go and learn what this means: I*

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<sup>1</sup> Jesus had already “overturned” Jewish religious practices when at Cana the water he chose to turn into wine was precisely water used in religious purification rituals (Jn 2:6). By turning *this* water into wine, he was boldly proclaiming that the old order of things was indeed passing away.

<sup>2</sup> The fact that the physical temple in Jerusalem was actually demolished in 70 AD by the Roman army only underscores that absolute nature of this reality.

*desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but **sinners**." (Mt 9:9–13)*

*For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a **demon**.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A **glutton** and a **drunkard**, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds." (Mt 11:18–19).*

2. Imagine Jesus at a wedding reception. Did he mingle? Did he tell a joke? Did he talk about sports? Did he dance? Is this picture of Jesus jarring to your senses? Why?

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3. Many contemporary churches highlight the fact that Jesus was a “friend of sinners.” This “party Jesus” provides the rationale for much of what they do (informal worship, contemporary music, seeker sensitive activities, small groups that meet in bars, wine served at church events, etc.

When are these activities proper and right?

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When do these activities cross the line and become harmful to the purposes of God rather than helpful?

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B. The **angry** Jesus.

1. When Jesus encountered profiteering in the Temple, he became very upset. Taking a whip, Jesus drove out the money changers. The disciples explained such violence by quoting Psalm 69:9: “**Zeal** for your house will consume me.”
2. Related to the word “jealous,” to be zealous is to **burn** with passion; to have intense emotion and fervor. The Zealots were a political group devoted to armed revolt. To describe Jesus as zealous is to describe him in terms of hot passion (flushed cheeks, veins standing out on his neck, an edge on his voice, swinging a whip, etc.).
3. Anger, when practiced by most of us, is usually **sinful**. It is prompted by petty hurts and snubs, motivated by hatred and expressed in destructive ways. Paul tells us: “Be angry and do not sin” (Eph 4:26–27). Because Jesus was sinless, we can be certain that his anger was righteous. On at least four occasions Jesus got angry.
  - a. Mark 3:1–6. Jesus heals a man with a withered hand on **the Sabbath**. “And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart” (v. 5).

Jesus gets angry when people see religious **ritual** and **tradition** as more important than the needs of those around them.

- b. Mark 10:13–16. When parents were bringing their **children** to Jesus so that he could bless them, the disciples rebuked them. Jesus was “indignant.” When Jesus said, “Let the children come to me,” there was an edge on voice and his cheeks were flushed with anger.

Jesus gets angry when the persons for whom he came (children, widows, sick, poor, the marginalized, etc.) are **hindered** from coming to him.

- c. John 2:13–17. Jesus cleanses the temple.

Jesus gets angry when the worship of God is seen as a means of making money and **self-advancement**.

- d. Revelation 6:12–17. When the sixth seal was opened, the unrepentant kings and generals, and the rich and powerful hid in caves and among the rocks saying, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the **wrath** of the Lamb” (Rev 6:16).

Jesus gets angry when people **refuse** to turn from their sins and come to him for grace and mercy.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the significance of the Biblical teaching that God seldom looks like or performs like we think he should.
2. Describe your reaction to “the party Jesus.” Describe your reaction to “the angry Jesus.” Which Jesus is more difficult for you to accept? Why?
3. Jesus came to save us from our sins so that we could imitate him. Ask God to show you one area in your life where you need to be more like the “party” Jesus. Now ask him to show you another area where you need to be more like the “angry” Jesus.