

First Miracle at Cana and Clearing the Temple (John 2)

Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

I. Wedding at Cana: Changing the Water to Wine

a. Read **John 2:1-12**

b. Storyline:

- i. Jesus, his mother and his disciples at a wedding in Cana, in Galilee.
- ii. Mary, the mother of Jesus, becomes aware that they have run out of wine at the wedding (highly embarrassing to the party hosting this).
- iii. She tells her son Jesus; Jesus' reaction ("My hour has not yet come") and His mother's response ("do whatever He tells you") implies that His mother thought He could do something (miraculous) to fix the problem.

1. **Question:** How did Mary know that her son could make wine? Did he do other, private miracles around the home we don't know about?

2. **Possible answer:** It seems to me that *this was* his first miraculous sign.

- a. "This *beginning of signs* Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him." (**John 2:11**, NKJV)
- b. Mary knew from before she conceived (as a virgin) that her son would be someone very special. The angel had told Mary that her son would be called the Son of God, and He would reign over an eternal kingdom (**Luke 1:29-35**) No doubt she could recall those things thirty years later. "Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart." (**Luke 2:19**, NKJV)
- c. Jesus seemed to realize that once He started performing miracles, this would set in process a series of events – there would be no turning back.

- iv. Servants are told to fill six large stone water pots used for Jewish ceremonial washing, with water (so no possibility of this being a trick, or wine already being in those containers).
- v. Jesus orders the servants to draw out some of the water and take it to the master of the banquet, who recognizes it as high-quality wine.
 - 1. **Question:** Jesus performed many miracles (raising the dead, walking on water, healing the sick, feeding thousands with bread, curing leprosy, etc.) Why would God choose *this* to be the first miraculous sign?
 - 2. **Possible answer:**
 - a. Throughout the gospel of **John**, parallels are made between Moses and Jesus. An example we saw from the first chapter: “For the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (**John 1:17**, NKJV)
 - b. Jesus is presented as the Prophet, the One who would be like Moses (**Deuteronomy 18:15-18**, **John 1:45**).
 - c. Moses’ first *public* miracle, the first of the 10 Plagues: *turning water into blood*. (**Exodus 7:14-25**) That water turned red, but then *stank* and became *undrinkable*!
 - d. However, in contrast, when Jesus turned the water into wine, it was *much better quality wine* than what they had been drinking before. The master of the banquet tells the bridegroom, “You have kept the good wine until now.” (**John 2:10**)
- c. The question about wine.
 - i. My wife and I grew up in Roman Catholic families where it seemed that everyone drank wine, beer, and stronger alcoholic drinks. Wine was offered up and drunk by the priest as a central part of the Sunday worship. Given this background, Christians drinking wine and other alcoholic drinks seemed quite normal to us.
 - ii. However, later in life, we met conservative Protestants (and Anabaptists) who insisted that serious Christians should abstain from drinking alcohol altogether.
 - 1. Later on, we noticed that while alcohol was very much a part of the social fabric we were raised in, there were several people among friends and family whose lives were seriously damaged by alcohol abuse (drunkenness, alcoholism, etc.).

- iii. The Bible does have a lot to say about the dangers of drunkenness, which is a serious sin. (It seemed that in Irish Catholic circles, people looked the other way on this sin and avoided addressing it.)
 - 1. Writing to Christians, Paul warned that living that way would disqualify them from eternal life.
 - a. “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (**Galatians 5:19–21**, NKJV; see also **Romans 13:13, Ephesians 5:18**)
 - 2. Peter reminds the disciples that they left that way of life.
 - a. “For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.” (**1 Peter 4:3**, NKJV)
 - 3. Jesus warned us not to be like the wicked servant who, while waiting for his Master to return, “begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards.” (**Matthew 24:49**, NKJV; see also **Luke 12:45**)
 - 4. One of the qualifications Paul gives for an elder or overseer is that *he must not be* “given to wine” or “addicted to wine.” (**1 Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7**)
- iv. On the other hand, it certainly seems to me that Jesus and the apostles drank wine that had alcohol in it (as opposed to non-alcoholic grape juice).
 - 1. “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, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ But wisdom is justified by her children.” (**Matthew 11:18–19**, NKJV)
 - a. John the Baptist abstained from drinking alcohol. His father Zechariah was told before John was born, “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink...” (**Luke 1:15**, NKJV)
 - b. In contrast to John the Baptist, Jesus drank wine.

- c. Obviously, Jesus did not get drunk or give in to the sin of gluttony. While He was tempted in every way like us, He was without sin. (**Hebrews 4:15**)
- 2. “Then they said to Him, ‘Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?’” (**Luke 5:33**, NKJV)
- 3. “For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry, and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing?” (**1 Corinthians 11:21–22**, NKJV)
- 4. Paul told Timothy, “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities.” (**1 Timothy 5:23**, NKJV)
- v. Given the above Scriptures, sincere Christians coming from various backgrounds, patterns and practices take various positions on whether to drink wine or not.
- vi. Best guiding principles that I have come up with: know yourself, know your weaknesses, and consider others, too, in light of what it says in **Romans**. (Read **Romans 14:12–15:6**)
 - 1. The Kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking. (**Romans 14:17**)
 - 2. Listen carefully to your conscience. “But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.” (**Romans 14:23**, NKJV)
 - a. If your conscience tells you not to drink alcohol for any reason (perhaps you are prone to the sin of drunkenness), then you must listen and follow your conscience. To do something that violates your own conscience is a sin.
 - 3. Better not to drink wine if it causes a brother to stumble. (**Romans 14:21**)
 - a. We don’t live to please ourselves; but live to please our neighbors; we strive to do what is for *their* good!
 - b. Even Jesus did not live to please himself (**Psalms 69:10** quoted). Let’s be really respectful of others, not causing them to stumble or lead them into what would be sin to them.
 - 4. Paul supports this discussion with the statement that all things written in the past (in the Old Testament) were written for our

learning. This is yet one more reason why Christians need to study the Old Testament!

II. Jesus Drives the Merchants Out of the Temple Area

- a. Read **John 2:13-25**
- b. Storyline:
 - i. Jesus goes up to Jerusalem at Passover time.
 - ii. He sees people making money off of the temple worship, setting up shop to exchange money and to sell animals to sacrifice.
 - iii. Jesus refers to the temple as “My Father’s House” and drives the merchants out, filled with zealous anger.
 - iv. His disciples are reminded of what it says in **Psalm 69:8-10**.
 - v. The Jews who see this temple-clearing ask for a sign of his authority to do this.
 - vi. This account of clearing the temple seems (to me) to be earlier in Jesus’ ministry than the similar events in **Matthew 21:12-13**, **Mark 11:15-17** and **Luke 19:45-46**. Therefore, I assume there were two different temple-clearing events; this one in **John 2** was early in His ministry, the event described in the other three gospels would have been later.
- c. Any lessons for us in this story?
 - i. **Question:** Does God want *us* to be zealous for His honor, taking matters into our own hands when we see evil; or does He want us to be passive people? Consider some heroic examples from the Scriptures who displayed similar zeal in the face of wickedness. They acted, sometimes alone, while many others who witnessed the same evil looked the other way.
 1. **Numbers 25: 6-13** - Phinehas took matters into his own hands when Israelite men were committing fornication with the Moabite women.
 - a. The Lord said he stopped the plague because “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, stopped My wrath from among the children of Israel when he was zealous with my zeal among them.” (**Numbers 25:11**)
 - b. The same word for “zeal” in the LXX used here as in **Psalm 69:9-10** (also LXX) and **John 2:17**.
 2. In **1 Kings 17-19** (**3 Kingdoms 17-19** in the LXX) – Elijah goes solo against the forces of evil king Ahab and queen Jezebel. He calls out Ahab’s sin, challenges hundreds of prophets of Baal to

a showdown at Mount Carmel, calls fire out of the sky and has the false prophets put to death.

- a. Elijah is discouraged, goes to a cave at Mount Horeb (Sinai), and reports to the Lord.
- b. Elijah said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord Almighty since the children of Israel have forsaken You. They tore down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking to take my life." (**1 Kings 19:10**)
- c. Elijah was zealous, stood alone and took matters into his own hands to address wickedness among God's people.

3. **Nehemiah 13:23-31** – Nehemiah saw the intermarriage of his people with the pagans, and he was distressed. This was a clear violation of what Moses handed down in **Deuteronomy 7** regarding not intermarrying with the nations around them. Nehemiah demonstrated great zeal in forcefully addressing sin among God's people. (**v. 25-28**)

ii. However, religious zeal is not always a good thing.

1. Paul said he was zealous back when he was persecuting Christians (**Philippians 3:6**)
2. Paul said in **Romans 10** that the Jews "have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." (**Romans 10:2**)
3. Being zealous and passionate can be a destructive thing unless we are rooted first in the truth.

d. My own conclusions regarding this kind of religious zeal:

- i. Many men today are zealous (passionate) for sports teams, for making money, for retirement, etc. But who is zealous for God? Where do you see that, and what does it look like? If we are followers of Jesus, we should reflect His zeal.
- ii. Jesus was both humble and submissive to authority on one hand; yet bold, courageous and zealous for God (even being willing to take a stand alone) on the other hand: especially in the case of sin in the lives of religious people who were dishonoring God. I believe both characteristics (calling on different kinds of strength) are important for a mature man of God today.
- iii. The zeal of Jesus here reminds me of similar zeal of other heroes of faith: Phinehas, Elijah, Nehemiah in the Old Testament; John the Baptist, Stephen and Paul in the New Testament.

- iv. This is a zeal that must be based on knowledge (the Word of God), not just feelings or what was handed down to you by your religion.
 - v. This is not a reaction to a personal insult; it is zeal for God, for God's house (the church), for God's honor, for the commands of the Lord, and out of fear of the Lord. There is never an excuse for lacking a spirit of self-control.
 - vi. Not sure, personally, to what degree we should be exhibiting this zeal to the sinful pagan world around us; but certainly it is appropriate among those who profess to follow God.
- e. The sign of Jesus' authority to clear the temple
- i. Natural question asked by the Jews who saw Jesus' action: "Who do you think you are to do this? What authority do you have? Can you show us some sign?"
 - ii. "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'" (**John 2:19**, NKJV)
 - 1. He was standing in the temple area, so people at the time took Him literally regarding "the temple."
 - 2. They reasoned: it had recently taken Herod the Great 46 years of construction to restore the temple, and Jesus was going to rebuild it *in three days*?!
 - 3. Later, Jesus' disciples recalled this statement about "the temple" and understood that Jesus had meant it figuratively, referring to his body.
 - a. This also is in fulfillment of the prophecy made by Nathan 1,000+ years before, in **1 Chronicles 17:11-15**, after David wanted to "build the temple" the first time.
 - i. After David died and was buried;
 - ii. God would "raise up" David's seed (which everyone took figuratively, as in "raising up a leader"), but was meant literally. (God literally *raised up* Jesus from the grave.);
 - iii. Through David's seed, God would establish His throne and kingdom, which would last forever; and
 - iv. "He shall build Me a house" (which everyone took literally regarding the temple, but which God meant figuratively, referring to the body of Jesus being "the temple in which God dwells")
 - v. This seed *could not have been Solomon*, as **1 Chronicles 17:11** says this seed would come to

power *after David had died*; yet Solomon ascended to the throne while David was still alive (**1 Kings 1-2**). The seed was Jesus!

- vi. This prophecy is like a riddle. The meaning intended by God was hidden in plain sight; different from what people thought.
- 4. On another occasion, Jesus made a similar statement that there would be *just one sign: his being raised from the dead*. He expressed this by pointing to the story of Jonah.
 - a. Read **Matthew 12:38-40**
 - b. This would be the one and only sign: He would be “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”
 - c. In the story of Jonah, in **Jonah 2:1-3** the prophet is swallowed up by a whale (or large fish) from which he prays to God, saying “I cried out in my affliction...out of the belly of *Hades* You heard the cry of my voice.” Jonah is in the belly of the whale “three days and three nights.”
 - i. Note that *Hades* is the place where spirits of the dead go awaiting final judgment, and where Jesus’ spirit went between the time of his crucifixion and resurrection. (**Acts 2:25-32; Psalm 16:8-11**)
 - d. Jesus is saying that the story of Jonah foreshadowed Jesus’ own death and resurrection on the third day.
- 5. According to Jesus, all of his authority rests on his resurrection from the dead on the third day, which He said beforehand would happen (and to which so many prophecies attested as well; prophecies written hundreds of years before his birth).
- 6. Either the resurrection happened, or it did not. This is the most important question facing anyone who is considering the claims of Jesus. You cannot just say He was a good moral teacher or a good prophet, or one (of many) paths to God.
- f. Paul said the same thing in **1 Corinthians 15**. The Christian faith all hangs on one sign: the resurrection of Jesus, confirming His authority and our faith.
 - i. Read **1 Corinthians 15:1-6**
 - 1. Christ rose again on the third day “according to the Scriptures” (in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies)
 - 2. He was seen by hundreds of eyewitnesses.

- ii. Read **1 Corinthians 15:14-19**. *If Christ is not risen*:
 - 1. Paul's preaching is empty;
 - 2. Our faith is empty;
 - 3. Paul is a false witness about God;
 - 4. We are still in your sins;
 - 5. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (**1 Corinthians 15:19**, NKJV); and
 - 6. (according to Jesus himself) Jesus had no right to clear the temple in **John 2**!