

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Encounter Jesus – The Son of the Living God

Wedding Wine and Dirty Temples

The word miracle in the English language has fallen into casual usage. “It’s a miracle she arrived on time.” “It’s a miracle I passed that test.” A true miracle is an event so clearly supernatural that a sense of wonder and awe is produced in those who see it and there is no possible human explanation. Some words used in scripture to describe miracles include sign, wonder, mighty work, power. These point out the inspired authors’ sense of God’s pervasive activity in nature, history, and people. As the old song says, “It took a miracle to hang the stars in place. It took a miracle to hang the world in space. But when God saved my soul, cleansed and made me whole, it took a miracle of love and grace!”

This lesson will look into the **first miracle** Jesus performed and then we will look into the **importance of being clean**.

The miracle involves the turning of water into wine. This miracle is only found in *John*. Neither *Matthew*, *Mark*, nor *Luke* relate it. Perhaps only John relates this miracle because he was among the few who actually witnessed it.

Read John 2:1-3 (ESV) ¹ *On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.* ² *Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples.* ³ *When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.”*

Most scholars agree that John’s reference to the third day is a reference to Jesus’ encounter with Philip and Nathanael. We do not know much about the town of Cana other than it was in Galilee and it was the hometown of Nathanael. I personally know that right in the middle of modern day Cana is a wine store named Cana Wedding Wine – a clear indication of modern-day merchandising of the gospel.

Wine was part of ancient meals and festivities. It should not be said that this wine was really grape juice. It was wine! This is not a study of whether to drink alcohol or not. Our choice to drink or not to drink should be based on how that choice affects our witness for Christ. The circumstances will vary from individual to individual.

By the way, this was not the wedding of Jesus. Mormons have taught for years that Jesus was married. If it was Jesus' wedding, why was He invited to His own wedding?

Was Mary asking Jesus to do a miracle regarding the wine or was she simply hoping that her son would help solve this major wedding problem? We do not know. Some Bible scholars speculate that Mary was possibly in charge of the refreshments for the festivities because of her concern over the lack of wine. However, it was possible that it was just a part of Mary’s natural nature to be attentive to the needs of others.

John always refers to Mary as the mother of Jesus and never calls her by name. She is not to be deified or worshipped. Jesus should always be our focus.

Read John 2:4-8 (ESV) ⁴ *And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”* ⁵ *His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”* ⁶ *Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.* ⁷ *Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim.* ⁸ *And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it.*

Jesus' reply seems a bit abrupt in our language but it was not. ‘Woman’ was a polite way to address her. In fact, He addressed her the same way when He was on the cross. **John 19:26 (ESV)** ²⁶ *When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!”*

Mary knew that her son was destined to be the Messiah. She knew better than anyone else of His virgin birth. Possibly at this point in His life, she may have expected things to change but it is doubtful that she comprehended what those changes would be. Jesus’ comment of “*My hour has not yet come*” would be a similar theme of his ministry. Finally at the end of His public ministry in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of Jesus’ arrest, we read in **John 17:1 (ESV)** ¹ *When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, **the hour has come**; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.”*

Each of the six stone water jars contained about 20 or 30 gallons. However, we are not told that all of the available water in the jars turned into wine. Only that which the servants drew out and served was transformed into wine.

Read John 2:9-10 (ESV) ⁹ *When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom* ¹⁰ *and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.”*

As I think of this miracle, I see it in the light of being a ‘personal miracle’ – something Jesus did at the request of His mother. This is part of the reason that Catholics choose to pray to Mary. However, this is not scriptural. **1 Timothy 2:5 (ESV)** ⁵ *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,* God’s children are able to go directly to the throne of grace through Jesus. The Catholics go through Mary with their prayers believing Jesus is too busy. Jesus is never too busy to hear our prayers! The miracle also did have an effect upon His disciples who were present. It revealed His glory and gave them a stronger foundation for their faith.

Few people knew how the wine appeared. This is why I like to think of the first miracle as being a personal miracle. We all experience personal miracles – *signs from God* that are for us alone and strengthen our faith reminding us that God hears and answers our prayers.

Read John 2:11-12 (ESV) ¹¹ *This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.* ¹² *After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.*

By the way, the fact that this was *the first of his signs* automatically declares as false the stories about the miracles performed by Jesus when He was an infant or a young child. **Matthew 4** describes Jesus' 40-day temptation in the wilderness which occurred before Jesus turned this water into wine. He did not yield to Satan's temptation of turning stones into bread when He was hungry. Charles Spurgeon says, "It was in His power to have commanded the stones to become bread; and had He done so the beginning of signs would have been a miracle worked for His own necessities... He would not make bread for Himself, but He will make wine for others." Later, Jesus would make bread for men, a necessity of life, but at the Cana wedding, He made wine – a luxury – something that brought joy to the precious occasion.

The Importance of Cleansing

In 1818, Ignaz Phillip Semmelweis was born into a world of dying women. The finest hospitals lost one out of six young mothers to the scourge of 'childbed fever.' A doctor's daily routine first began performing autopsies followed by examining expectant mothers. Semmelweis reached the conclusion that this high mortality rate was due to the absence of hand-washing practices among doctors. He introduced the system of washing hands with chlorinated lime solutions which markedly reduced mortality rates. "Wash me!" was the anguished prayer of King David. "Wash!" was the message of John the Baptist. "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me," said Jesus to Peter at the Last Supper. Without our being washed clean, we all die from the contamination of sin.

Read John 2:13-14 (ESV) ¹³ *The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.* ¹⁴ *In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there.*

Jesus, His family, and His disciples had remained in Capernaum a few days, and then He went to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Notice that John labels this feast the *Passover of the Jews*. This feast had been described as the LORD's Passover in **Exodus 12:27**. Time had diminished the significance of the feast. The One of whom the Passover speaks has now come to earth. **1 Corinthians 5:7 (ESV)** ⁷ *Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*

As we read the next passage, notice how Jesus was careful not to destroy anyone's property (He did not release the pigeons, for example); but He made it clear that He was in command. Most other translations use the word dove in place of pigeon. Doves and pigeons belong to the same family. They are often mentioned in the Bible as if they are the same bird – hence the difference in translation. The temple was His Father's house, and He would not have the religious leaders pollute it with their money-making enterprises.

Read John 2:15-17 (ESV) ¹⁵ *And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.* ¹⁶ *And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade."* ¹⁷ *His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."*

Wiersbe comments, "The condition of the temple was a vivid indication of the spiritual condition of the nation. Their religion was a dull routine, presided over by worldly minded men whose main desire was to exercise authority and get rich. Not only had the wine run out at the wedding feast but the glory had departed from the temple."

Business was going on in the Temple courts like it was a market. It might have started innocently to supply lambs and doves for visiting Passover guests but the service had degenerated into commercializing the things of God – animals were being sold at exorbitant prices to folks who had traveled far to get to the Temple. Jewish males over 20 were to pay a half shekel temple tax but Roman money could not be accepted. The exchange rate might cost as much as a half day's pay. This business was carried on in the court of the Gentiles, the place where the Jews should have been meeting the Gentiles and telling them about the one true God. Any Gentile searching for truth would not likely find it in a 'religious' market.

This was the first of two cleansings of the Temple. There are those who like to debate the events and even call the different accounts contradictions. John records a cleansing at the beginning of Jesus' ministry while the other gospels record a cleansing at the end of His ministry. (*Matthew 21:12-17, Mark 11:15-18, Luke 19:45-47*). Only John mentioned (1) the oxen and sheep, (2) the whip of cords, (3) the scattering of the money, (4) Jesus' command, "Take these things away," and (5) the disciples' remembrance of *Psalms 69:9*. John did not include Jesus' quotation of *Isaiah 56:7 (ESV) ...for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples*" which is prominent in all three of the other accounts. You can do a comparison for yourself. For me, I feel confident that there were two separate cleansings of the Temple performed by Jesus. The first cleansing at the beginning of His ministry caught people by surprise and the second cleansing at the end of His ministry led to His death.

Read John 2:18-22 (ESV) ¹⁸ So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²² When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

The temple authorities challenged Jesus to show them a sign to prove He had authority from God to cleanse the temple. They asked for a sign but undoubtedly they did not want a sign because that would destroy their marketing opportunities. Sadly, when the sign of which Jesus spoke did come, they missed it.

Jesus used the image of the temple to convey the truth that Jesus' body was the Temple of God. They were spiritually blind and misunderstood this *spiritual* truth and interpreted Jesus' words in material or physical terms. This happened often in Jesus' ministry. This statement was, of course, a prediction of His own death and resurrection. It took the actual resurrection but His disciples finally saw the 'temple picture' after He was raised from the dead. When we consider Jesus cleansing the physical temple in Jerusalem, it should be a reminder that we are to continually cleanse our own temples. I am not talking about the church. I mean our hearts and minds. **1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (ESV)** ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.