

John sermon #3

Encountering Jesus (John 2:1-25)

Six disciples have now trusted Jesus and started a lifelong walk with him as his disciples. Immediately Jesus begins their training—and his focus is to help them know him better. In John chapter 2 this knowledge comes to them in three dramatic encounters with Jesus where they experience Jesus' glory, his zeal and his knowledge.

1. His Glory (2:1–12)

¹ On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee...

This "third day" is apparently the 7th of John's new creation week (three days after Nathanael's call on the 4th day, see John 1:45–51). Why this chronology? To make the point that Jesus is on a divine schedule, which now takes him to a Jewish wedding. Here Jesus is encountered as guest, son and host.

a. Jesus the party Guest (1, 2)

¹ ...Jesus' mother was there,² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

Jesus loved parties, so much so his enemies accused him of being a 'glutton and a drunkard'—an untrue accusation, but Jesus did go to parties and when he did his presence was positive—sanctifying. Such was the case at this wedding feast where he was accompanied by his mother and six disciples.

b. Jesus the Son (3–5)

³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." ⁴ "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Since Jewish wedding feasts typically lasted a week, it was necessary for the groom to have adequate provisions. It would be a major social faux pas to

run out of either food or wine. But they did. Why did Mary approach Jesus about the problem? Certainly she knew who he was, even though she did not declare this to others. And perhaps her concern was because she was close to either the bride or the bridegroom. Perhaps Mary was assisting in serving the meals.

Jesus' reply to Mary's statement seems a bit abrupt—even harsh; but such is not the case. In that culture, “woman” was a polite way to address her. His statement merely means, “Why are you getting me involved in this matter?” Jesus was concerned about the ‘time’: “my hour has not yet come” (NRSV). Jesus lived on a “heavenly timetable,” marked out by the Father (John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1).

Mary's words to the servants reveal that she trusted Jesus to do what was right. It would be wise for all of us to obey what she said! It is worth noting that it was Jesus, not Mary, who took command and solved the problem; and that Mary pointed not to herself, but to Jesus.

c. Jesus the Host (6–11)

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. ⁸ Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, ⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." ¹¹ This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

This is the first of seven ‘miraculous signs’ of Jesus which John presents in his gospel (verse 11). They are not merely ‘miracles’—rather they are ‘signs’ that convey an essential message about Jesus’ identity. This one was not a spectacular sign that everybody witnessed (though everyone enjoyed the wine Jesus created). The intended audience of this sign was Jesus’ disciples

and mother (and perhaps also the wedding servants). Through this sign Jesus revealed something of his glory (1:14). And this gave his disciples a stronger foundation for their faith.

Though Jesus usually interpreted the signs he gave, he didn't here. Nevertheless, John no doubt thought his readers would understand the rich imagery. In the Old Testament, Israel is "married" to God and unfaithful to her marriage covenant (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 31:32; Hosea 2:2ff). Her 'wine' ran out, and all Israel had left were pots that held water for *external* 'ceremonial washings'. They were devoid of what brings real cleansing and true joy (wine symbolizing joy in Scripture). It is Jesus who comes now bringing fullness to replace emptiness; joy to replace disappointment, and something *internal* for what was merely external.

And note that this happens on "the third day" (John 2:1)—perhaps an intended allusion to our Lord's resurrection on the third day. The blessings revealed here in symbols come through Jesus—through his death and resurrection (John 2:19).

Interestingly, Moses' first miracle was turning water into blood (Ex. 7:19ff), an act speaking of judgment, while Jesus' first miracle speaks of grace and about serving God. The water turned into wine because the servants cooperated with Jesus and obeyed His commands. Several of the signs in John's Gospel involve this cooperation of man with God: the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6), the healing of the man born blind (John 9), and the raising of Lazarus (John 11). Whether we pass out bread, wash away mud, or roll away the stone, we are co-workers with God in the truly miraculous. Note also that the servants knew the source of this wine (John 2:9). We are not just Jesus' *servants*; we are also his *friends*—he tells us what he is doing (John 15:15).

2. His Zeal (2:12–22)

¹² After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days. ¹³ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Jesus, his family, and his disciples remained in Capernaum a few days, and then went to Jerusalem for the Passover where Jesus revealed a zeal characteristic of God's promised Messiah.

We note here that John mentions in his Gospel several Jewish feasts: Passover (John 2:13; 6:4; 12:1), Tabernacles (John 7:2), Dedication (John 10:22) and perhaps Purim (John 5:1). Jesus a Jew living in Palestine, with access to the Temple in Jerusalem, lived under the Old Covenant. And though he deliberately violated man-made traditions added to those celebrations, Jesus obeyed the customs of the Law of Moses, and through his life and death fulfilled them and brought that covenant to its ultimate conclusion. Now in union with Christ, believers are under a New Covenant (which includes the Law of Christ, Gal. 6:2). Christians are not under the Law of Moses (Acts 15:10).

a. Cleansing the temple (14–17)

14 In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. 15 So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" 17 His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

The priests had established a lucrative business exchanging foreign money for Jewish currency and selling animals for the sacrifices. No doubt, this "religious market" began as a convenience for the Jews who came long distances to worship in the temple; but in due time the "convenience" became a business, not a ministry. The tragedy is that this business was carried on in the court of the Gentiles in the temple, the place where the Jews should have been meeting the Gentiles and telling them about the one true God.

Our Lord suddenly appeared in the temple and cleaned house! Though he didn't destroy anyone's property (he did not release the doves, for example); he made it clear that he was in command. The temple was his Father's house, and he would not have the religious leaders pollute it with their money-making enterprises.

The sad 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. When they saw his courageous zeal, the disciples remembered Psalm 69:9, “zeal for your house consumes me.” Psalm 69 is a messianic psalm quoted several times in the New Testament.

There was still a godly remnant in Israel who loved God and revered his temple (Luke 1:5–22; 2:25–38), but most religious leaders were false shepherds who exploited the people. When Jesus cleansed the temple, he “declared war” on the hypocritical religious leaders (Matt. 23), and this ultimately led to his death. Indeed, his zeal for God’s house *did* consume him!

b. Giving His life (18–22)

18 Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." 20 The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" 21 But the temple he had spoken of was his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

It was logical for the religious leaders to ask Jesus to reveal the source of his authority. After all, they were the guardians of the Jewish faith, and they had a right to test any new prophet who appeared. “The Jews require a sign” (1 Cor. 1:22). Often, during his ministry, the leaders asked Jesus to give them a sign; and he refused to do so, *except* for the sign of Jonah (Matt. 12:39ff) which is death, burial, and resurrection.

Jesus used the image of the temple to convey this truth. “Destroy this temple [my body], and I will raise it again in three days” (2:19). Being spiritually blind, those who heard misunderstood what he was saying. Throughout the Gospel of John, you will find people misunderstanding *spiritual* truth and interpreting it only in material or physical terms (3:4;

4:11; 6:52). Herod's temple was started in 20 B.C. and not completed until A.D. 64. How could one man "raise it again" in three days?

This statement was, of course, a prediction of his death and resurrection; and his disciples remembered it after he was raised from the dead. But his enemies also remembered it and used it at his trial (Matt. 26:59–61); and some of the people mocked him with it when he was dying on the cross (Matt. 27:40).

In writing this Gospel, John included a number of vivid pictures of the death of the Savior. The first is the slaying of the Lamb (1:29), indicating that His death would be that of a substitute for sinners. The destroying of the temple is the second picture (2:19), suggesting a violent death that would end in victorious resurrection. The third picture is that of the serpent lifted up (3:14), a reference to Numbers 21:5–9. The Savior would be made sin for us (1 Peter 2:24). His death would be voluntary (John 10:11–18): the Shepherd would lay down his life for the sheep. Finally, the planting of the seed (John 12:20–25) teaches that his death would produce fruit to the glory of God. His death and burial would look like failure, but in the end, God would bring victory.

The temple was an important element of the Jewish faith, for in it God was supposed to dwell. All of the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Law of Moses centered in the temple. When Jesus suggested that their precious building would be destroyed, their angry reaction was predictable. After all, if *his* body is the temple, then the Jewish temple would be needed no more. In this cryptic statement, our Lord actually predicted the end of the Law. This was one of the purposes John had in mind when he wrote his Gospel: the legal system has ended, and "grace and truth" have come through Jesus Christ. He is the new sacrifice (1:29) and the new temple (2:19). John will tell us later that the new worship will depend on inward integrity, not outward geography (4:19–24).

3. His Knowledge (2:23–25)

²³ Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. ²⁴ But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. ²⁵ He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.

While in Jerusalem, Jesus performed miracles that are not given in detail in any of the Gospels. It must have been these signs that especially attracted Nicodemus (3:2). Because of the miracles, many people professed to believe in him; but Jesus did not accept their profession. Why? Because, being God, he knew what was in each person's heart and mind.

The words *believed* in 2:23 and *entrust* in 2:24 are the same in Greek. Because these people believed in Jesus only superficially, he did not 'believe' in them in the sense of entrusting himself to them. It is one thing to respond to a miracle but quite something else to commit one's life to Jesus Christ and continue in his Word (8:30, 31).

John was not discrediting the importance of our Lord's signs, because he wrote his book to record these signs and to encourage his readers to trust Jesus Christ and receive eternal life (20:30, 31). However, throughout the book, John makes it clear that it takes more than believing in miracles for a person to be saved. Seeing the signs and believing in them would be a great beginning; in fact, even the disciples started that way and had to grow in their faith (compare 2:11 and 2:22).

Throughout the Gospel of John, you see the Jewish people divided over the meaning of these miracles (9:16; 11:45, 46). The same miracles that attracted Nicodemus to Jesus caused some of the other religious leaders to want to kill him. They even asserted that his miracles were done in the power of Satan. Our Lord's miracles were testimonies (5:36), giving evidence of his divine sonship; but they were also *tests*, exposing the hearts of the people (12:37ff). The same events that opened some eyes made other eyes that much more blind (9:39–41).

It is important to see that Jesus tied his miracles to the truth of his message. He knew that the human heart is attracted to the sensational. The 5,000 that he fed wanted to make Him King—until He preached a sermon on the Bread of Life, and then they left him in droves. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (1:17). In grace, Jesus fed the hungry; in truth, he taught the Word. The people wanted the physical food but not the spiritual truth, so they abandoned Him.

"He knew all men" (24b) is a statement that is proved several times in John's Gospel. Jesus knew the character of Simon (1:42). He knew what

Nathanael was like (1:46ff), and he told the Samaritan woman “all things” that she had ever done (4:29). He knew that the Jewish leaders did not have God’s love in their hearts (5:42), and that one of his disciples was not truly a believer (6:64). He saw the repentance in the heart of the adulteress (8:10, 11) and the murder in the hearts of his enemies (8:40ff). Several times in the Upper Room message, Jesus revealed to his disciples their own inner feelings and questions.

Conclusion

As we follow our Lord’s ministry in John’s Gospel, we will see him moving gradually out of the bright light of popularity and into the dark shadows of rejection. At the beginning, it was easy for people to follow the crowd and watch his miracles. But then, his words began to penetrate hearts, with conviction following; and conviction leads either to conversion or opposition. It is impossible to be neutral. People had to decide, and most of them decided against him.

Yes, Jesus knows the human heart. “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders...you will never believe” (4:48). People who want his works but not his Word can never share his life. “Seeing is believing” is not the Christian approach (11:40; 20:29). First we believe; then we see. Miracles can only lead us to the Word (5:36–38)—it is the Word that generates saving faith (Rom. 10:17).

Our Lord’s accurate knowledge of the human heart is another evidence of his deity, for only God can see the inner person. This brief paragraph prepares us for the important interview with Nicodemus that we will see next time in chapter 3. Note the repetition of the word *man* from 2:25 to 3:1. Nicodemus wanted to learn more about Jesus, but he ended up learning more about himself.

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**GROWING in our RELATIONSHIP
with the TRIUNE GOD**

John 2:1-11 "A Wedding in Cana"

What was the result of the sign at Cana?

John 2:12 "Capernaum... for A Few Days"

Where is Capernaum?

John 2:13-17 "Zeal for Your House"

Where does the "zeal for Your House" quotation come from?

John 2:18-22 "The Temple of His Body"

Compare this with 1 Corinthians 6:19.

John 2:23-25 "He Knew All People"

What is in everyone?

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