

The Gospel of John, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 3: The Wedding at Cana and Cleansing the Temple

John 2:1–25

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

John 2 places two scenes deliberately side by side: the gentle provision of wine at Cana and the fierce cleansing of the temple. Together they reveal the full character of Jesus and guard us against a one-sided picture of Him. Doctrinally, the chapter teaches that Jesus' miracles are signs, pointers to His glory and identity, not just displays of power. It teaches that the new life He brings fulfills and surpasses the old ceremonial system. And in the temple scene, Jesus points to His own death and resurrection as the true sign and identifies His body as the temple, a claim that will reshape everything about how God's people approach Him.

At the same time, this chapter presses hard on the heart. Cana invites us to bring our ordinary needs to Jesus and to do whatever He tells us. The temple cleansing confronts us with the question of what we have allowed to take up residence in spaces meant for God, including the temple of our own bodies under the New Covenant. The closing verses warn us against a shallow, sign-hungry faith that never actually surrenders to Christ as Lord.

So aim at both. Help students see Jesus more truly, gentle and zealous, Savior and Lord, and let that fuller picture call them to a deeper obedience and a cleaner heart. The disciple we are forming both rests in Christ's blessing and welcomes His refining fire.

Question 1

Student Question:

John calls the changing of water into wine “the first of his signs” by which Jesus “manifested his glory” (v. 11). What is the difference between a mere miracle and a sign, and what was this sign meant to reveal about who Jesus is?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

John never uses the word “miracle” in his Gospel; he uses the word “sign.” That choice matters. A miracle is a display of power; a sign is a pointer. John says this first sign “manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him” (v. 11). The water-into-wine is not a magic trick; it is a window into who Jesus is.

Help students see what the sign reveals. It reveals creative power, the kind that belongs to God alone, who made the world and sustains the vine. It reveals abundance and joy, a Savior who provides not the minimum but the best, and more than enough. And it reveals glory, the same glory John spoke of in the prologue, now breaking into an ordinary village.

Note where and how Jesus chose to begin. Not with a public spectacle but at a wedding, quietly, with only the servants and a few disciples knowing what had happened. The glory of God shows up in the ordinary and the overlooked. This sets the pattern for John's Gospel, where each sign points beyond itself to the identity of Jesus.

Apply this to how students read the miracles of Jesus. The question to ask of every sign is not merely "What did He do?" but "What does this show me about who He is?" The signs are meant to lead to faith, as they did for the disciples here.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Johannine concept of "signs" as pointers to Jesus' identity and glory (John 20:30–31).
- Jesus' creative power as evidence of His deity.
- The abundance and joy that mark the kingdom Jesus brings.
- Signs intended to lead to genuine faith.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between seeing a miracle and reading a sign?
- What does the Cana sign reveal about the kind of Savior Jesus is?
- How does it change you to ask of Jesus' works, "What does this show me about Him?"

Question 2

Student Question:

Mary responds to the crisis simply by bringing the need to Jesus and telling the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (v. 5). In a current difficulty you are facing, what would it look like to bring the need to Jesus and then actually do whatever He tells you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Mary's response to the crisis is a small masterpiece of faith. She does not fix the problem herself, and she does not tell Jesus how to fix it. She simply brings the need, "They have no wine," and then says to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." That is the whole posture of trust in one sentence.

Help students apply this to a real, present difficulty. The pattern is twofold: bring the need honestly to Jesus, and then commit in advance to obey whatever He shows. We often do the first without the second, bringing our problems to God in prayer while reserving the right to ignore His direction.

Notice that the servants' obedience was costly and a little absurd. Filling six large jars with water when wine is what is needed makes no obvious sense. Yet the miracle came through their willingness to do exactly what He said. God often works through obedience that does not yet make sense to us.

Press toward specificity. Ask each student to name a current difficulty and to identify what “doing whatever he tells you” might actually require, perhaps a hard conversation, an act of forgiveness, a financial decision, a step of confession or repentance. The aim is faith that obeys before it fully understands.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith expressed in bringing needs to Christ and obeying His word.
- Obedience that precedes understanding (“do whatever he tells you”).
- The danger of praying about a problem while reserving the right to disobey.
- God working through ordinary, even costly, acts of obedience.

Discussion Prompts

- What current need do you most need to bring honestly to Jesus?
- Where is it hardest for you to “do whatever he tells you”?
- What obedience might God be asking of you that does not yet make sense?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus used six stone jars meant for the “Jewish rites of purification” and filled them with the best wine (vv. 6–10). How might this sign picture the way the new life Jesus brings surpasses and fulfills the old system of ceremonial religion?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

John makes a point of telling us the six stone jars were there “for the Jewish rites of purification” (v. 6). These were the vessels of the old ceremonial system, used for ritual washing. Jesus fills them, and the water becomes the best wine of the feast. The detail is not incidental; it is part of the sign.

Draw out the symbolism carefully. The water of ritual purification, good in its place, becomes the rich wine of celebration. This pictures what Jesus is doing on a larger scale: the old system of ceremonial religion is being fulfilled and surpassed by the new life He brings. The shadows give way to the substance (Colossians 2:16–17).

Connect this to the chapter’s other half. In the temple, Jesus confronts a religion that has become external and corrupt. At Cana, He shows what He brings instead, not the endless washings of ceremony but the abundant joy of the kingdom. The contrast between old and new runs through the whole chapter.

Apply it without despising the old. The point is not that the law or the Old Covenant was bad; it was God’s good gift in its time. The point is that it was always pointing forward to something

better, and that something better has now arrived in Christ. Students should leave with a sense of the surpassing richness of life in Jesus compared to mere religious routine.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The new life in Christ fulfilling and surpassing the old ceremonial system.
- Shadow giving way to substance (Colossians 2:16–17; Hebrews 8–10).
- The danger of settling for external religious routine over the joy of the kingdom.
- The goodness of the Old Covenant in its preparatory role.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the changed water picture what Jesus does with the old system?
- Where are you tempted to settle for religious routine instead of life in Christ?
- What does the “best wine” tell you about the richness of the kingdom?

Question 4

Student Question:

When the wine ran out, Jesus stepped quietly into an ordinary moment of human need (vv. 1–3). Where in your ordinary, everyday life do you most need to invite Jesus in, and what keeps you from doing so?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question draws on the setting of the first sign. Jesus performs His first miracle not in a temple or a synagogue but at a village wedding, stepping into an ordinary human moment of need and even potential embarrassment.

Help students see the dignity this gives to ordinary life. We often reserve God for the spiritual or the crisis moments and assume He is uninterested in the everyday, the work, the meals, the celebrations, the small failures. Cana says otherwise. Jesus cares about the wine running out at a party.

Invite honest reflection on where students keep Jesus out of ordinary life. For many of us, faith is compartmentalized: God belongs to Sunday and to emergencies, but not to Tuesday afternoon, the family dinner, the work project, the budget. The invitation is to bring Him into the ordinary places where we have not thought to ask.

Ask what keeps them from inviting Him in. Often it is the quiet assumption that our daily concerns are too small to bother Him with, or a desire to keep certain areas under our own control. Encourage one concrete area, this week, to consciously welcome Christ into the ordinary.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The presence of Christ in ordinary life, not only in crises or worship.
- The dignity of everyday work, relationships, and celebrations before God.
- The tendency to compartmentalize faith and how to resist it.
- Inviting Christ into the places we assume are too small for Him.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you tend to keep Jesus out of your ordinary, daily life?
- What everyday area do you most need to invite Him into this week?
- What assumption keeps you from bringing small concerns to Christ?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jesus drove the sellers and money-changers from the temple, saying, "Do not make my Father's house a house of trade" (v. 16). What does this scene reveal about how God views worship, reverence, and the misuse of holy things?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The temple cleansing reveals a side of Jesus we sometimes prefer to ignore. He makes a whip of cords, drives out the animals and sellers, pours out the coins, and overturns the tables, declaring, "Do not make my Father's house a house of trade." This is righteous zeal, not loss of temper.

Help students understand what provoked Him. The outer courts, the only place Gentiles could come to pray, had been turned into a noisy, profiteering marketplace. The system likely exploited worshippers, charging for approved animals and exchanging currency at a profit. Worship had been corrupted into commerce, and the place meant for prayer had become a place of gain.

Draw the doctrinal point: God cares deeply about how He is worshipped and about the reverence due His house. Worship is not something we get to redesign for our own convenience or profit. The holiness of God and the seriousness of approaching Him are at stake.

Apply it broadly and carefully. The misuse of holy things still happens whenever we treat worship as entertainment, as a transaction, as a means to our own ends, or as a routine drained of reverence. Jesus' zeal calls us to take the worship of God seriously, to come with awe rather than casualness or self-interest.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's concern for reverent, undefiled worship.
- The sin of misusing holy things for profit or self-interest.
- Righteous zeal as distinct from sinful anger.

- Worship offered on God's terms, not redesigned for our convenience.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the temple cleansing reveal about how God views worship?
- In what ways can worship still be corrupted today?
- How can we recover a sense of reverence in our approach to God?

Question 6

Student Question:

The disciples remembered the words, "Zeal for your house will consume me" (v. 17). When you examine your own heart, where has your zeal for the Lord grown cool, and what might rekindle it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up the disciples' memory of Psalm 69:9, "Zeal for your house will consume me." Jesus burned with passionate love for His Father's honor. The question turns the spotlight on the temperature of the student's own devotion.

Help students name, without shame, where their zeal has cooled. Spiritual coolness rarely announces itself; it creeps in. Prayer becomes mechanical, Scripture becomes familiar to the point of dullness, worship becomes routine, and the heart's first love quietly fades, much like the warning to Ephesus in Revelation 2:4.

Explore the causes gently. Zeal cools through busyness, through unconfessed sin, through disappointment, through simple drift. Often it is not a dramatic falling away but a slow settling into lukewarmness, which Scripture treats as a real danger (Revelation 3:15–16).

Then turn to what rekindles it. Zeal is usually rekindled not by trying harder but by drawing near again to Christ Himself, through honest repentance, through fresh attention to His word, through worship that re-engages the heart, and through the fellowship of God's people. Invite each student to name one specific way they will move toward the fire again this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Zeal and first love as marks of a living faith (Revelation 2:4).
- The danger of lukewarmness and spiritual drift (Revelation 3:15–16).
- Repentance and nearness to Christ as the path to rekindled devotion.
- The role of the word, worship, and fellowship in stirring zeal.

Discussion Prompts

- Where has your zeal for the Lord grown cool, and why?

- What tends to cause your devotion to drift into routine?
- What is one concrete way you will draw near to Christ again this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

When challenged for a sign, Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,” speaking of “the temple of his body” (vv. 19–21). What is Jesus predicting here, and why is His bodily resurrection central to everything He claims?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When the authorities demand a sign to justify His action in the temple, Jesus answers cryptically: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” They think He means the building, which took forty-six years to build. John tells us plainly: “he was speaking about the temple of his body” (v. 21).

Help students see the layered meaning. Jesus is predicting His own death and resurrection. The ultimate sign of His authority will not be a display in the temple courts but His rising from the dead. And He is making a stunning claim: His body is the true temple, the real meeting place between God and humanity, replacing the building of stone.

Stress the centrality of the resurrection. Everything Jesus claims rests on it. If He is raised, then His authority over the temple, His identity as the Son, and His power to take away sin are all vindicated. If He is not raised, it all collapses (1 Corinthians 15:14). The resurrection is not an add-on to the gospel; it is its foundation.

Connect the temple theme. With Christ’s body as the true temple, the old building is no longer the center of God’s dwelling. In Him, and now in His people whom He fills by the Spirit, God dwells. This reshapes everything about how God’s people approach Him, no longer through a building and a sacrificial system, but through the risen Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus’ prediction of His death and resurrection as the ultimate sign.
- Christ’s body as the true temple, the meeting place of God and humanity.
- The bodily resurrection as the foundation of all Jesus’ claims (1 Corinthians 15:14).
- The shift from the temple of stone to God dwelling in the risen Christ and His people.

Discussion Prompts

- What was Jesus actually predicting with the words about the temple?
- Why is the bodily resurrection central to everything Jesus claims?
- What does it mean that Christ, not a building, is now the true temple?

Question 8

Student Question:

John notes that the disciples only understood Jesus' words about the temple "when he was raised from the dead" (v. 22). When has the meaning of something God was doing only become clear to you later, and how does that encourage you to trust Him in seasons you do not yet understand?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

John adds a quiet but important note: the disciples did not understand Jesus' words about the temple at the time. Only "when he was raised from the dead" did they remember and believe (v. 22). Understanding came later, in the light of the resurrection.

Use this to comfort students in their own seasons of not understanding. The people closest to Jesus often did not grasp what He was doing while He was doing it. Clarity came in hindsight. This is the ordinary shape of faith: we walk now and understand later.

Invite students to recall their own experience of delayed understanding, a hard season, a closed door, a painful providence, that only later revealed its meaning. Naming these builds a memory of God's faithfulness that can steady us in present confusion.

Then apply it forward. There are things God is doing in each of our lives right now that we do not understand, and may not for years. The call is to trust the One who sees the whole, even when we see only a piece. Faith does not require present understanding; it requires confidence in a faithful God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Understanding that often comes only in hindsight, especially after the resurrection.
- Faith as trust in God's character amid present confusion.
- The disciples' experience as the normal pattern of growing faith.
- God's faithfulness across seasons we do not yet understand.

Discussion Prompts

- When has the meaning of something God was doing only become clear to you later?
- How does delayed understanding fit with genuine faith?
- What present confusion do you need to entrust to a faithful God?

Question 9

Student Question:

At the end of the chapter, “many believed in his name when they saw the signs,” yet Jesus “did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people” and “knew what was in man” (vv. 23–25). What does this teach us about the difference between a shallow faith based on signs and a genuine faith that surrenders to Christ as Lord, and what does it reveal about Jesus’ divine knowledge of the human heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question, and it turns on the sobering note that closes the chapter. “Many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man” (vv. 23–25).

Draw out the warning about shallow faith. There is a kind of belief that is real as far as it goes but does not go far enough, a faith excited by signs and benefits that never surrenders to Christ as Lord. Jesus could see that this crowd’s faith was thin, attracted by the spectacle but not committed to Him. He did not “entrust himself” to them.

Connect this to the kind of faith the whole Gospel calls for. Saving faith is not mere enthusiasm or mental agreement that Jesus is impressive. It is a faith that surrenders, that follows, that obeys, the living faith expressed in repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ, and then in a lifetime of discipleship. The crowd’s sign-faith is a warning against stopping short of genuine surrender.

Then highlight what these verses reveal about Jesus Himself. He “knew all people” and “knew what was in man.” This is divine knowledge, the searching omniscience that belongs to God alone (1 Samuel 16:7; Jeremiah 17:10). Jesus reads the human heart directly. This both warns us, since He sees the reality beneath our religious appearances, and comforts us, since the One who knows us fully still calls us to Himself.

Bring it home with honest self-examination. Each student should ask whether their faith is the thin, sign-seeking kind or the surrendered, Lord-following kind. The good news is that the Christ who sees what is in us also offers to make us new if we will truly give ourselves to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between shallow, sign-based belief and saving, surrendered faith.
- Saving faith as a living, obedient trust, not mere enthusiasm or mental assent.
- Jesus’ divine knowledge of the human heart (John 2:24–25; 1 Samuel 16:7; Jeremiah 17:10).
- The danger of a faith that admires Jesus without submitting to Him as Lord.
- The comfort that the Christ who fully knows us still calls us to Himself.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between being impressed by Jesus and surrendering to Him?

- What does it mean that Jesus knew “what was in man”?
- How would you describe the difference between sign-faith and saving faith?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this chapter, from the joy of Cana to the cleansing of the temple. What is one specific way Jesus is forming you, both to receive His blessing in ordinary life and to welcome His cleansing of what does not belong in you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question asks students to hold both halves of the chapter together. Cana shows Jesus blessing ordinary life and bringing abundant joy. The temple shows Jesus cleansing what has become corrupt. Both belong to the same Lord, and both belong in the life of every disciple.

Help students resist a one-sided Jesus. Some prefer only the gentle Savior of Cana and recoil from the zealous Lord of the temple; others are all zeal and miss His tenderness. Spiritual maturity holds both: we receive His blessing gladly, and we welcome His cleansing humbly.

Make the temple imagery personal. Under the New Covenant, the believer’s body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). The same Jesus who cleared the temple courts wants to clear out of our lives what does not belong, the cherished sin, the corrupt motive, the idol set up in a holy space.

Press for one concrete formation. Ask each student to name a single way Jesus is forming them through this chapter, both to receive His blessing in everyday life and to let Him cleanse a specific area that does not belong. The goal is a heart that is both glad and clean.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Holding together the gentleness and the zeal of Christ.
- The believer’s body as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19).
- Receiving Christ’s blessing and welcoming His cleansing as two sides of discipleship.
- Concrete, specific formation as the goal of the lesson.

Discussion Prompts

- How do you hold together the gentle and the zealous Jesus?
- What in your life is Jesus wanting to clear out as He cleared the temple?
- What is one way this chapter is forming both your joy and your holiness?