

The Gospel of John

Lesson 3: The Wedding at Cana and Cleansing the Temple -- John 2:1-25

It is a wedding, and the wine has run out. To us that might sound like a minor catering problem, but in a first-century village it was a small social disaster, the kind of failure a family might be teased about for years. The celebration was supposed to last for days, and somewhere behind the scenes the hosts are beginning to panic. And here, of all places, in the middle of an ordinary village party, Jesus performs the first of His signs. Not in the temple. Not before a crowd of thousands. At a wedding, to spare a family embarrassment and to keep the joy going. There is something deeply telling about a Savior who launches His public ministry by quietly rescuing a celebration.

His mother brings Him the problem with a beautiful, simple faith: "They have no wine." She does not tell Him what to do. She just brings the need and then turns to the servants and says the wisest words anyone says in this whole chapter: "Do whatever he tells you." Jesus has the servants fill six stone water jars, the kind used for ceremonial washing, and when the water is drawn out it has become wine, and not just any wine but the best of the feast. John calls it a sign, because it points beyond itself. The old water of ritual has become the new wine of the kingdom. Something better has arrived.

And then, almost in the same breath, John shows us a very different scene. Jesus walks into the temple in Jerusalem and finds it turned into a marketplace, the courts crowded with sellers and money-changers, the house of prayer reduced to a place of profit. The same Jesus who gently provided wine at Cana now makes a whip of cords and drives them out, overturning tables, scattering coins, His voice ringing through the courts: "Do not make my Father's house a house of trade." The tenderness and the zeal belong to the same Lord. He cares about the joy of a village family, and He burns with passion for the holiness of His Father's house.

Put these two scenes side by side and you begin to see the real Jesus, not the soft, sentimental figure of our imagination, but the living Lord who is both gentle and fierce, who turns water into wine and tables upside down. He will not be tamed or reduced. He blesses real life and He confronts real corruption, including the corruption that hides inside religion. Read this chapter and watch Him closely, because the same Lord who wants the celebration to continue also wants the temple cleansed, and in the New Covenant that temple is now you.

Group Discussion: At Cana, Mary tells the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (v. 5), and the miracle follows their obedience. Why do you think Jesus so often works through our simple obedience, and where is it hardest for us to actually "do whatever he tells us"?

Personal Reflection: Jesus was filled with zeal for the purity of His Father's house (vv. 16-17). Scripture says your body is now a temple of the Holy Spirit. What is one area of your life where you sense Jesus wanting to come in and clear out what does not belong?

Read John 2:1–25

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 25:6–9, the Lord's feast of rich food and well-aged wine; Malachi 3:1–4, the Lord suddenly coming to purify His temple; 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, your body as a temple of the Holy Spirit; Hebrews 9:11–14, Christ's blood cleansing the conscience beyond outward washings; Psalm 69:9, zeal for God's house consuming the servant of the Lord.