

John Chapter 2

The beginning of the Book of Signs

BACKGROUND

- Wedding festivities usually lasted a week, and may have depended in part in the donations from guests for wine.¹
- The expression Jesus responds with to his Mother in v. 4 literally means, “what to me and to you”. It is found in various places in the OT (e.g. Hos 14:8) and was not necessarily rude, meaning in cases like this “that is your business; how am I involved?” Neither was it rude in Jesus’ day to address one’s mother as “woman.”
- According to Josephus, the prices for sacrificial animals in the Temple were inflated to 3-4 times normal prices.
- *Fun fact:* Since the improvements to the Temple are said to have taken 46 years to build (v. 20), and is known to have been begun by Herod in 19 B.C., the cleansing of the Temple must have taken place in 28 A.D.²

WARM-UP QUESTIONS

1. When does the wedding at Cana occur (see v. 1)? “The opening events of the gospel therefore are contained within one week almost every day of which is noticed; it culminates in the manifestation of Christ’s glory.”²
2. What time does Jesus refer to in v. 4? See 12:23, 27.
3. What effect did the miracle at Cana have on Jesus’ disciples? What did they think about Jesus before? (See 1:41.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

4. According to Helyer³,

John’s Gospel, in narrating Jesus’ miracle of changing water to wine, mentions that the water was stored in six large jars, each holding some twenty to thirty gallons of water. These stone water jars – stone was less likely to convey impurity than clay – were probably employed for the ritual washing of the guests’ hands and perhaps for various vessels used in the preparation of food (Jn 2:6).

 - a) Read Mk 7:1-11. What was Jesus’ perspective on ritual washing? Was Jesus’ view a new one? (Note that the size of the Law grew dramatically from Isaiah’s time to Jesus’.)
 - b) John describes eight major “signs” of Jesus that were more than simple demonstrations of power and were meant to point the way, or

¹ Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible Commentary on John*.

² *Jerusalem Bible* footnote.

³ Larry R. Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period* (IVP:Downer’s Grove) 2002, p. 473.

convey a message. What does the sign of the water being changed into wine point to? After this miracle, what would the people at the wedding have done when they needed water for ritual cleansing?

5. *Celebration*, as at the Cana wedding feast, is practiced by many key figures in the Bible – e.g. Miriam (Ex 15:20), Deborah (Judg. 5), and David (2 Sam 6:12-16) and is encouraged (e.g. Eccl 5:18-20). In *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Dallas Willard writes,

[Celebration] is one of the most important disciplines of engagement, yet most overlooked and misunderstood. It is the completion of worship, for it dwells on the greatness of God as shown in his goodness to us. We engage in celebration when we enjoy ourselves, our life, our world, in conjunction with our faith and confidence in God's greatness, beauty, and goodness. We concentrate on our life and world as God's work and as God's gift to us. Typically this means that we come together with others who know God to eat and drink, to sing and dance, and to relate stories of God's action for our lives and our people.

What role has and does this discipline play in your life? *Extra credit*: How many spiritual disciplines can you name?⁴

6. What does Jesus say to the merchants he drives out of the Temple?
- What sins are being condemned in Jer 7:9-15, Zech 14:20-21, Mal 3:1-5? What was Jesus condemning?
 - Read 2 Sam 7:2,7; 1 Kings 8:27-29, Is 66:1. How attached was God to the first Temple?
 - What is the meaning of "temple" (or "house") in each of the following: 1 Pet 2:4-5, 1 Cor 6:19, Heb 9:11-12. What was Jesus' meaning? What does this imply about the use of a Temple in the new covenant?
 - Read Jn 4:21-24, Acts 7:48. Given the role of the Temple in the new covenant, what would be a modern prophetic warning equivalent to Jesus' cleansing of the Temple? (*Extra credit*: Explain how Ezekiel's prophecy in Ezek 40-46 meshes with the Temple in the new covenant.)
7. John describes eight miraculous signs in chapters 2-11, and many more additional miracles. His response to his Mother makes it sound like he doesn't want to perform miracles yet. Do you agree? Why would Jesus say this, when he performs many public miracles before his "hour?" Is it possible that Jesus knows something at the end of his conversation with Mary that he didn't at the beginning?

⁴ The list from Willard's book includes solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, sacrifice, study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession and submission.