

John 2: The first of Jesus's signs...

The wedding at Cana (John 2 v 1 to 12)

“There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there” (v 1) – there is no mention of Joseph. By this time Joseph had probably died, and Jesus had to support his mother and his family. It was only when his younger brothers and sisters were able to look after themselves that he could leave home.

“Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples” (v 2) – Jesus was always welcome among those having a good time, and in the Jewish culture of that day a wedding was the best party of all...

“When the wine ran out” (v 3) – this was a major social *faux pas*. A wedding was supposed to be the best party of all, and for a host to fail in providing adequate hospitality was dishonourable. This may also indicate they were poor and had made the minimum provision hoping for the best. “They have no wine” – we do not know why Mary brought this problem to her son Jesus. Perhaps she eagerly anticipated the day Jesus would miraculously demonstrate that he was the Messiah – which would vindicate Mary, who lived under the shadow of a pregnancy and birth that many people questioned.

“Woman, what does this have to do with me...” (v 4) – Jesus spoke to his mother with respect, but he did not call her ‘mother’. Jesus seemed to say to Mary, ‘I won’t do it. It’s not time’ – but then he went on to do it! What he was really saying to Mary was, ‘We now have a different relationship. Let me consult my heavenly Father.’ Jesus must have prayed and then known what to do, because he later said: “the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing” (John 5 v 19) – see also John 5 v 30; John 8 v 28, 29. “Do whatever he tells you” (v 5) – the recorded words of Mary are few, but they consistently glorify Jesus. It is wise for everyone to obey Mary’s direction, and to do whatever Jesus tells us...

“Fill the jars with water” (v 7) – Jesus could have filled the jars himself, or created the liquid in the jars; but he knew that if the servants shared in the work, then they also shared in the blessing. The servants were especially blessed because they obeyed without question, and to the fullest (“they filled them up to the brim”). “Now draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast” (v 8) – imagine how angry the master of the feast would be if they brought him water to taste! Yet in faith, they obeyed Jesus. “The servants who had drawn the water knew” (v 9) – the master of the feast only knew it was good wine; he did not know it was a miracle. This knowledge was a special blessing for the faithful servants.

The large quantity of wine, probably much more than a village wedding party could consume, was deliberate. Selling the excess wine was a likely source of income for the newlyweds, and it would provide proof, after the feast was over, that the transformation had been real.

“You have kept the good wine until now!” (v 10) – the master of the feast paid the bridegroom a great and public compliment. Running out of wine would have meant social disgrace; the miracle of Jesus transformed this into a better wedding party than ever. When Jesus made wine, it was good wine. It doesn’t mean that it had a particularly high alcohol content, but that it was well-made wine.

- This is the first of seven ‘signs’ in John’s Gospel that reveal the identity of Jesus. A ‘sign’ is a miracle with a meaning: what particular aspect of Jesus’ glory does this miracle display (v 11)?
- What can you learn from Mary’s response to Jesus (v 5)?
- What change in your life would ‘turning the water into wine’ represent? See 2 Corinthians 5 v 17. How might this help answer the question: “What do you want?”

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“This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory” (v 11) – this is the first of seven signs presented in John’s gospel, each designed to bring the reader to faith in Jesus (John 20 v 30, 31). The ancient Greek word for ‘sign’ σημεῖον (*semeion*) is used 74 times in the New Testament, of which 23 are in John’s writings, including Revelation. The seven signs are

1. Turning water into wine (John 2 v 1 to 11)
2. Healing the official’s son (John 4 v 46 to 54)
3. Healing at the pool of Bethesda (John 5 v 1 to 15)
4. Feeding the five thousand (John 6 v 1 to 14)
5. Jesus walking on the sea (John 6 v 15 to 21)
6. Healing the man born blind (John 9 v 1 to 41)
7. Raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11 v 1 to 44).

Jesus cleanses the Temple (John 2 v 13 to 25)

“The Passover of the Jews was at hand” (v 13) – Jerusalem would be crowded with visitors; the temple mount would be particularly crowded, and Jesus saw many including “the money-changers” doing business in the outer courts of the temple.

“He drove them all out” (v 15) – those doing business in the outer courts of the temple spoiled the only place where Gentiles could come and worship, making it into a “house of trade”; their dishonesty made their presence all the worse. “Zeal for your house will consume me” (v 17) – the disciples remembered Psalm 69 v 9 and connected it to the zeal Jesus had for the purity of God’s house and worship practised there.

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (v 19) – Jesus spoke here of the temple of his body. The irony is that the religious leaders themselves would be the means by which this prophecy was fulfilled. When Jesus said, ‘Destroy this temple,’ he knew that they would do their best to destroy it. At the trial of Jesus, one of the charges brought against him was that he said he would destroy the temple (Matthew 26 v 60, 61; Mark 14 v 57 to 59); and when he died on the cross, the mockers reminded Jesus of that promise (Matthew 27 v 39, 40; Mark 15 v 29).

Jesus was not against the temple, but he looked beyond it: he told the Samaritan woman that there was a day coming when people would no longer worship at a temple in Samaria or Jerusalem, but they would worship God in Spirit and in truth (John 4 v 21 to 24). The body of Jesus is still a temple. Ephesians 2 v 19 to 22 and 1 Peter 2 v 5 both connect the idea of the church – metaphorically called the body of Christ – with a temple built upon and built by Jesus Christ.

“His disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture” (v 22) – it was only after the death and resurrection of Jesus that his disciples understood and believed both the Scriptures and the specific promises of Jesus. The Scripture they believed would most likely have been Psalm 16 v 10, the promise that God’s Holy One would not remain in the grave and ‘see corruption’ (see also Acts 2 v 27).

- The concept of the ‘temple’ unites v 13 to 17 with v 18 to 22. What crisis did this first incident foreshadow in the mind of Jesus? What role did Jesus play in each case?
- What do you think gave Jesus the authority to drive out the traders from the temple? See Malachi 3 v 1 to 3. What miraculous sign proved his authority (v 18)?
- What is the real temple? Where does God really live? See 1 Corinthians 6 v 19, 20.
- Why was Jesus not satisfied with the faith referred to in v 23? Is your faith the kind that pleases God?

“Many believed in his name when they saw the signs” (v 23) – Jesus knew that this was superficial belief, based on nothing other than an admiration of the spectacular. “He knew all people” (v 24) – Jesus knows the worst about us; yet he sees the image of God, even upon fallen men and women, and he loves us...