

Notes on John 2

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The Miracle of Water to Wine and Cleansing the Temple – Chap. 2

Jesus' First Miracle: Water Turned to Wine — 2:1-12

Verses 1,2

1. What event occurred (v1), and where was it (see MAP)
2. Who was present (vv 1,2)?

Jesus and His disciples attend a wedding ceremony.

On the third day, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee (the exact location of which is uncertain, but several sites are suggested). Jesus' mother attended, as did Jesus and His disciples. Note that by this time Jesus is said to have had disciples. Doubtless this included the ones who began to follow Him at the end of chap. 1 and probably others.

The presence of Jesus and His disciples proves that Jesus was a sociable person, not a recluse from society. It also shows Jesus' approval upon the institution of marriage and of wedding ceremonies in particular. Though He Himself never married, it is not because He opposed marriage nor even because He claimed that those who marry are somehow spiritually inferior to those who do not (as some people think). Marriage is honorable (Heb. 13:4). Woman was created by God for man because it was not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18ff). Jesus honored marriage.

We might add that the account shows that Jesus was not opposed to enjoying pleasant celebrations. While He would never have fellowship with any activity that was immoral or unwholesome, yet He attended this wedding, which surely involved feasting, merrymaking, and celebration. It was what we would call a party or banquet. And He even provided some of the refreshments. Jesus was not opposed to recreation, entertainment, or enjoyments that were wholesome of themselves.

Verses 3-5

3. What problem occurred, and what request did Jesus' mother make?
4. What did Jesus tell His mother, but how did she respond (vv 4,5)?

Mary requests Jesus to provide wine.

At some point in the proceedings, they ran out of wine. Jesus' mother informed Him of this, evidently expecting Him to do something about it. Wedding ceremonies in that day, we are told, sometimes lasted for several days (this may be implied in Gen. 29:27; Judges 14:10-12). Many guests might attend, so apparently the family had miscalculated the amount of wine that would be needed. To run out of food and provisions for the guests was a serious social embarrassment.

Jesus however responded by asking Mary what her concern had to do with Him, for His hour had not yet come. He is not here speaking disrespectfully to His mother, but He is showing her that, though she is his mother in the flesh, His decisions about what He should do are based on higher considerations. He must be about His Father's work, and this is controlled by His Father's will.

Such statements appear to contradict Catholic teaching. Their belief in prayer to Mary is based on the view that Mary "commands her Son," and Jesus must obey His mother's will. In matters pertaining to His ministry, teaching, and miracles, however, Mary had no authority over Jesus. In any case, it seems clear that Jesus had to act according to higher principles than the wishes of Mary.

Jesus did, however, eventually do the miracle that Mary requested. In fact, she proceeded to make arrangements for Him to do it. So what does His statement mean? Perhaps at the time He

made the statement God had not yet given Him instructions to proceed with miracles, but He did so soon after Mary made the request. Some commentaries think it simply was not yet the right time in the feast to do the miracle, but that time eventually came. (Jesus often uses the expression “my hour” to refer to His death, but that does not seem to have connection to this passage — John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 17:1; Matt. 26:45; Luke 22:53.)

King expresses the helpful thought that Jesus had not, at first, intended to begin His miracles this early in His ministry, but He had soon planned to do so. However, this was not a matter “set in stone,” nor had God given a definite instruction to Jesus about when to do His first miracle. It was not a matter of right or wrong if Jesus began His miracles at this time – it was just not what He had originally planned. However, the fact that He did do the miracle indicates that God’s will can be influenced by the requests of His people. This illustrates the power of prayer. God may not have originally planned to do a thing a certain way, but the prayers of His people may change His plans, if it can be done without harm to any greater principle.

Evidently Mary did not take Jesus’ statement as an absolute denial, for she told the servants to do whatever He said to do. Perhaps she hoped that He might do a miracle and wanted to do all she could to encourage Him, or perhaps she expected Him to provide the wine in some non-miraculous way. In any case, she did not take His response as an absolute refusal.

We are later told that, when Jesus had done the miracle, it was His first (v11). Why then would Mary have been expecting a miracle? She surely knew about the miracles involved in His birth. The virgin birth obviously directly involved her, and she surely remembered the visions of the angels. She most likely knew of the Father’s speaking from heaven at Jesus’ baptism. These miracles had been done to Jesus or about Him, not by Him; yet perhaps all this gave her faith that He could do this. And she could see for herself the evidence that He was making disciples and obviously preparing to begin public teaching. Or perhaps she did not know what He would do, but just was confident He could solve the problems by some means or other.

Verses 6,7

5. How many water pots were present, and how large was each?

6. Look up the size of the pots, and calculate the total amount of liquid involved. (Think: What lessons can we learn from the amount of wine Jesus made?)

Six waterpots filled with water

Six waterpots were standing nearby, available for purifying as practiced by the Jews (perhaps the practice of washing before eating). Each of the six contained 2-3 firkins (ASV) (perhaps some were a little larger and some a little smaller). *Zondervan’s Pictorial Bible Dictionary* says a firkin is 10.3 U.S. gallons, though some commentators say it was less, maybe only 7 1/2 gallons. The NKJV calculates each jar as 20-30 gallons. If so, the total amount would be 120-180 gallons. They were filled with water to the very brim.

The purpose of these details is to emphasize what was important in John’s account. He is showing the greatness of the miracle to give evidence for Jesus’ claims. This is the first of Jesus’ miracles, and John uses it to establish faith in Him. As a result, many details are not mentioned (such as who the bride and groom were, etc.). Yet the details that are mentioned help show the greatness of the miracle.

This event did not involve a handful of liquid that may have been mistaken in origin. Nor was it possible for someone to have slipped some strong wine into each pot to be diluted by the water. The jars were filled to the brim with water and that is what miraculously became the wine served at the feast. And the quantity was huge to prove the power required.

Verses 8-10

7. What did Jesus tell servants to do with the water, and what happened when they did?
8. What observation did the ruler of the feast make about the wine? What does this prove?

The water became wine.

Jesus had the servants take the waterpots to the ruler or master of the feast. A man was in charge of the feast, and it was one of his jobs to check the wine. He tasted its quality, but some claim that he was especially to check on the alcoholic content. We will discuss later the aspect of intoxication and alcohol as relates to this wine. But decent people made sure that wine at their feasts was not such as to make people drunk.

The water had now become wine, but the ruler did not know how this happened — only the servants knew. The ruler called the bridegroom and complimented this wine by saying that people customarily gave better wine at the beginning of the feast and then poorer quality wine after men had been drinking awhile. However, in this case the better wine had been saved for the last.

The purpose of John in recording this is no doubt not because he wanted to approve the common practice but because he wanted to show that the wine Jesus made was good quality and could not possibly be a fraud. It was such real wine that it tasted even better than the real wine that had already been provided. Note that the ruler is not saying this wine was intoxicating nor was he saying anyone there was drunk. He was simply commenting on the ***taste*** of the wine Jesus made by contrasting what happened here to the usual practice.

Verse 11

9. What effect did this event have (v11)?
10. For each of the following passages, indicate whether the “wine” was alcoholic or not: Isa. 16:10; 65:8; Jer. 48:33; Rev. 19:15.
11. List at least 3 Bible passages about drunkenness or the danger of alcoholic wine.
12. Application: Considering the above information, what can you conclude about the alcoholic content of the wine Jesus made? Would He have made this much alcoholic wine (like we have today) for people who had already drunk all the wine available? Explain.

This was Jesus’ first miracle.

This was the beginning of Jesus’ miracles. It proved Jesus’ power to turn one substance into something completely different. As such it was impossible by natural law — a miracle. Water combined with other nutrients can be made into wine by grape vines, but it takes months of natural processes. Jesus did the same in an instant. This is especially interesting in light of the claim that Jesus is the Creator (1:3). Here He duplicates in an instant of time that which His Creation takes months to accomplish.

This demonstrated His glory and caused His disciples to believe on Him. Note that John records seven miracles, often including miracles not mentioned by other gospel writers or giving details that others do not give. But in each case he is careful to give sufficient details to make sure the miracles provide evidence of who Jesus is.

So from this very first miracle, John makes clear that we are aware that the purpose of the miracles was to give people reason to believe. Jesus’ claims had to be substantiated, and the disciples needed evidence to convince them to preach His message with conviction and to suffer for His cause. His miracles accomplish the same purpose for us and give unbelievers reason to believe (Mark 16:20; John 5:36; 20:30,31; Acts 2:22; 14:3; 2 Corinthians 12:11,12; Hebrews 2:3,4; 1 Kings 18:36-39; Exodus 4:1-9; 7:3-5; 14:30,31).

For an in-depth study about the nature and purpose of miracles, see our articles on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/

Implications for social drinking

Some people use this passage to justify modern social drinking “in moderation”: if Jesus provided wine at a feast, why can’t we today drink alcoholic beverages at social gatherings?

Remember first that the purpose of this account was, not to teach us about drinking wine, but to substantiate Jesus’ claims by showing His power of doing miracles. Let us not lose sight of this in discussing side issues. Details, that might be interesting in a discussion of wine drinking, are not given because they are not relevant to the point of the story. To understand Bible teaching about drinking alcoholic beverages, we must go elsewhere.

The meaning of the word “wine”

Many words, like “baptism,” “church,” and others, have different meanings today from used in the Bible. So “wine” in the Bible does not mean what “wine” means today, but was similar to our use of “cider”: it could be fermented or unfermented, depending on context.

(1) Wine was often unfermented (Isa. 16:10; 65:8; Jer 48:33; Rev. 19:15 — cf. Rev. 14:10; Gen. 40:9-11). This “wine” was often spoken of as a blessing. Some claim the wine in John 2 had to be fermented because wine could not be kept unfermented till this time of year. But any good encyclopedia will show clear evidence that people then knew how to keep wine unfermented.

(2) Sometimes grape juice was boiled down to a syrup and kept unfermented. This was later diluted again to make a non-alcoholic grape drink.

(3) Obviously “wine” was sometimes fermented, but again encyclopedias show that our wines today are much more intoxicating than even the alcoholic wines of Bible times. Their wines were naturally lower in alcohol due to climate, and they never fortified their wines with distilled alcohol as is often done today. The distilling process was unknown then. Instead, custom demanded that, when fermented wine was used (as at feasts) it must be diluted with water (3 parts water to one part wine, and some say even more dilute) to cut the alcoholic content. And even then care was taken to avoid over-indulgence. Drinking of fermented wine without dilution was always considered strong wine or much wine (Rev. 14:10). These facts are confirmed both by secular encyclopedias and religious commentators. Alcoholic wine is never viewed in Scripture as a blessing, but is often warned against as a danger.

If Jesus provided alcoholic drinks such as are common in our society, then He provided for or at least tempted people to drunkenness.

The passage says Jesus *provided* wine, which would make His influence and fellowship important. *If the “wine” was like today’s alcoholic drinks, then He provided 120-180 gallons of a poisonous, addictive, mind-altering, narcotic drug for people who had drunk up all the booze in sight!* Surely that would encourage some people, not to moderation, but to excess! This would make Jesus little less than a bartender! Even the world admits the one of every ten social drinkers becomes an alcoholic or problem drinker. Knowing this, would Jesus provide people with booze like we have today after repeatedly warning against the dangers of drunkenness and alcoholic drink (cf. Eph. 5:11,18; Proverbs 23:29-32)? 1 Pet. 4:1-4 likewise condemns “banqueting” or “drinking parties,” which is what modern social drinking is. Would Jesus be a good influence and example if He provided 120-180 gallons of alcoholic drinks like we have today?

Isaacs (Jewish rabbi) says: “The Jews do not, in their feasts for sacred purposes, including the marriage feast, ever use any kind of fermented drinks ... they employ the fruit of the vine — that is, fresh grapes — unfermented grape-juice, and raisins, as the symbol of benediction. Fermentation is to them always a symbol of corruption ... rottenness.” (Patton, p70)

Some claim the reference to giving inferior wine when guests have “well drunk” proves that this was wine that could make people drunk.

Actually, the reference is just to people being satisfied with drink. Many translations translate the expression “have well drunk” (ASV, NKJV) — not necessarily intoxication. Food and drink are not nearly as attractive when we are full as they are when we are hungry and thirsty, so

the usual practice was to give the best food and drink at the beginning of the feast. Forms of the Greek word for “drunk” are used in the LXX in Psalms 36:8; 65:10; Song 5:1; Isaiah 55:10; 58:11; Jer. 31:14,25 to mean simply filled or satisfied. (See McQuiggan, pp 118,119).

In any case, the statement referred to typical practice, not to this particular case. This case was clearly different – that is the point of the statement - in which case we have no proof the wine was intoxicating.

But if this statement does mean that people were drunk in this case, then Jesus provided booze for people who were drinking to **excess**, not in **moderation**. The result of the argument would mean Jesus provided 120+ gallons of booze for a bunch of drunks! No, sir! Not my Lord! But if the wine was nonalcoholic, the whole story makes sense.

We conclude that the wine Jesus made was not intoxicating like modern wines. This confirms our previous conclusion that Bible wines were not always intoxicating like modern drinks. And instead of an argument in favor of modern social drinking, what we really have is an argument against it. The passage shows that Jesus did **not** provide the kind of alcoholic drinks commonly used in our society. And we have further evidence that the wines that are described favorably were nonalcoholic.

In any case, social drinking cannot successfully be defended on the basis of this passage. We need not prove from this passage that social drinking is wrong. That can be settled elsewhere. But this passage is no defense for those who argue for social drinking.

Verse 12

13. Where did Jesus go next, and who else went there too (v12)? (See MAP.)

14. List other passages showing that Jesus had brothers (and/or sisters) in the flesh.

15. Case Study: Catholic teaching says that Mary was a perpetual virgin, even after Jesus was born. Explain the significance of the above information for this doctrine.

Jesus goes to Capernaum

After the miracle at Cana, Jesus went to Capernaum with his mother, brothers, and disciples. Capernaum was a city on the northern end of the Sea of Galilee (see MAP). They stayed there not long in terms of days. Capernaum seems after this to be somewhat a home base for Jesus. He did not apparently live at Nazareth any longer.

Note that, contrary to Catholic doctrine, Jesus did have “brothers.” These were His brothers in the same sense that Mary was His mother. It was not a spiritual relationship, nor were they just cousins. They were brothers in the flesh in His immediate family like Mary was His mother in the flesh in His immediate family. Other passages name the brothers, and still others state that He also had sisters. They show conclusively that these people were physical members of His physical family like Mary was His earthly mother. Hence, Mary was not a perpetual virgin after Jesus’ birth. See also Matt. 12:46; 13:55; Mark 3:32; 6:3; Luke 8:19,20; John 7:3,5,10; 1 Cor. 9:5; Gal. 1:19. (Johnson has an excellent summary of the evidence on this matter. See also McGarvey’s *Fourfold Gospel*.)

The fact that Joseph is nowhere mentioned is taken by many to imply that he had died by this time.

Cleansing of the Temple — 2:13-25

Verse 13

16. Where did Jesus go next and for what purpose?

17. List other **passages** about this feast and explain the purpose of it.

Jesus attends the Passover.

Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover. This was an annual Jewish feast in memorial of the time God slew all the firstborn of Egypt but spared the Israelites because they had put the blood of lambs on their doorposts (cf. Exodus 12 & 13).

It seems significant that this was Jesus' first recorded public act in His ministry. He had been baptized and had made some disciples in Galilee and had done a miracle. But after a brief period at Capernaum, He went to the temple in Jerusalem, for His first major acts at the center of Jewish worship. But He did not begin quietly, nor by preaching a message of sweetness and positive mental attitude. He began by creating a major confrontation against the perversions of the Jews!

Verses 14-17

18. What did Jesus find happening in the temple?

19. Describe what He did about this.

20. List at least 2 other **passages** describing Jesus doing a similar act. (Think: Do all these passages refer to the same event? What do you make of this?)

21. What reason did Jesus give for His action (v16)?

22. What Scripture did Jesus' act remind His disciples of? Explain the application to Jesus' act.

23. Application: What lessons can we learn from this event about worship? What can we learn about spiritual vs. material interests? List applications regarding the church and denominational practices today.

People selling animals and changing money in the temple.

In the temple Jesus found people who changed money and people who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, all of which were animals commonly used as sacrifices. Jews were obligated to pay a tax for care of the temple of 1/2 shekel — Ex. 30:13; Matt. 17:24. Presumably the money was exchanged for this purpose. Some commentators explain that Roman money was in common use, but only Jewish money was accepted for the temple tax, thus requiring the change of money.

“In the temple” cannot possibly mean in the physical building itself, which was built as a replacement of the tabernacle. That is, this was not done in the Holy Place or Most Holy Place. Only the priests were allowed there, and anyone else who entered was put to death. Even these callous Jews would not have allowed that.

But the temple area had become a complex of courtyards and porches. After the beginning of the church, the Jerusalem congregation met in a porch of the temple. Other meetings occurred there. So various areas of the temple compound were open to the public, and the entire area is here and elsewhere referred to as “the temple.” These merchants had set up business in some of these areas of the temple, yet Jesus still objected.

Jesus drives them out.

Jesus made a scourge of cords and drove them all out of the temple — sheep, oxen, etc. — and he overthrew the tables of the moneychangers. Presumably He used the scourge in driving out the sheep and oxen, although it is not directly stated exactly who or what, if anything, He struck with the scourge. It is possible that the mere threat of its use was enough to drive them out. Animals and men have often been “driven” by means of a whip without ever being struck — the mere threat of the whip being enough to motivate them.

On the other hand, based on Jesus' own teaching elsewhere (such as Matt. 5), if it was wrong to actually beat men with the scourge, then it would have been wrong to threaten to do it. Whether or not He struck men is not stated; but acting as the authorized Son of God, He would have had the right to do so, especially under the Old Testament law with its physical punishments for sin.

This is not the only time Jesus cleansed the temple. He did the same thing later on a different occasion when He visited Jerusalem (Matt. 21:12,13; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-47). Obviously these men returned after He left. Apparently the rulers, who ought to have kept them out, did not oppose the activity. So Jesus was opposing, not just the men who were making a finan-

cial profit, but probably also the people in charge of the temple. Consider the courage it would require to take the stand Jesus did here.

The reasons for Jesus' action

Jesus' found justification for His deed in Scripture. The temple should have been a house of prayer (Mark 11:15; Matt. 21:13; cf. Isa. 56:7), but they had made it a den of thieves (Jer. 7:11) or a house of merchandise (John 2:16). When Jesus had cleansed the temple, Jesus' disciples remembered the Scripture that said this was an indication of zeal for God's house (Psalm 69:9).

The activities Jesus removed pertained, indirectly to the worship. The animals were offered for sacrifice, and the change was made so people could pay the temple taxes, sacrifices, etc. God Himself had commanded these sacrifices and taxes God. What then was the problem?

Probably some of these men were corrupt in overcharging for their products to take advantage of people who needed sacrifices but could not easily obtain them elsewhere. So God's worship requirements were being used as a means for personal profit to line the pockets of the merchandisers without regard for God or man ("a den of thieves").

But there was another reason the practice was objectionable. Even if the fee had been fair and just, the business ("merchandise") should still have been conducted elsewhere. With fair business dealings, selling the doves and making change may have been acceptable as a business matter. But to do it on the premises of the temple was a perversion of the purpose of the temple. It was to be a house of prayer — worship and spiritual service — not a place of making financial gain (a "house of merchandise"). Jesus' zeal for the temple required Him to resist these perversions of its purpose.

Lessons for us

Note that this presents several lessons for today.

(1) God distinguishes between worship activities and everyday activities (what we call "secular activities"). This is a valid distinction and in Scripture the two are at times separated with regard to time and circumstance. The Old Testament often referred to acts specifically designated for worship to God as "holy" — set apart for a special use. He rebuked Israel for not distinguishing the holy from the common.

When God gives a spiritual purpose to an activity or an ordinance, we displease Him greatly when we change that purpose to another purpose, especially one that is materialistic or physical in emphasis, to satisfy human desires instead of giving Him honor and praise. Note, for example, Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians for turning the Lord's Supper into a common meal (1 Corinthians 11:17ff).

(2) God does not have to expressly say a thing is wrong for it to be wrong. I know of no Old Testament passage that expressly forbade selling or making change in the temple (though unfair business practices were often condemned). But God said what the temple was for, and these activities were not included. Likewise, we are wrong if we simply do things differently from what He said, in ways that are not authorized or not included in what God commanded. This is the principle that we must have Bible authority for all we do, and we must not change what God has said and follow human ideas instead (Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19).

(3) Specific applications of these principles can be made in numerous areas, because similar conduct is common today in the name of religion.

Consider, for example, modern-day "faith healers" who claim they can do miracles by the power of God like Jesus and His apostles did. But they expect and may even require a generous donation first. Many of them get filthy rich, and yet they are not doing true miracles. In many cases they are frauds and know it. Religion has become "a house of merchandise" and in many cases "a den of thieves."

Other groups make merchandise off the people by offering spiritual benefits (indulgences, masses), but the people must pay a fee for the service. Often these services are not Scriptural or not needed by the people, but the religious leaders convince people it is needed and then charge a fee or otherwise get rich off it.

Then compare the modern “Social Gospel” movement. The church is God’s temple today — not a building, but the people, and particularly the local congregation (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19,20; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5-9; Eph. 2:19-22). The church was sanctified by God for spiritual purposes, to worship Him and teach His word, just as the Old Testament temple was (1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Cor. 14; Eph. 4:16; etc.). Yet many people today seek to get the church involved in sponsoring or using its facilities for recreation, entertainment, business activities, social gatherings, secular education, common meals, kitchens, camps, gymnasiums, “fellowship halls,” and other physical activities of personal desire and enjoyment.

Often this is justified by seeking a connection of some kind between the activity and the work of the church — just like in these examples in the temple. But the fact is that the activity itself is no part of what God authorized the church to do, nor is it spiritual in its nature and emphasis. There may be no specific passage forbidding such, but it violates God’s purpose and intent for His church just as surely as these moneychangers in the temple. And Jesus, were He to return, would cast them out of His church as surely as He cast these money changers out of the temple. Those who share His zeal for the church will act as He would.

This is not to say that it is wrong to financially support a preacher of God’s word, if each member is simply expected to give in accord with prosperity. Support of preachers is expressly taught in God’s word (2 Cor. 11:8,9; Phil. 4:15-18; 1 Cor. 9:6-14). But every member should give voluntarily in accord with His ability and prosperity. And every person, member or not, should be offered the teaching in accord with his need. The service a person receives should depend, not on his ability to pay, but on his need.

What is objectionable are activities that are not authorized in God’s word for the church, or spiritual services which people genuinely need, but can’t obtain unless they can pay for it, or the rich people get more spiritual benefit because they have more money to buy the services. Such was never God’s intent.

We today need the same zeal for the purity of God’s spiritual temple, the church, that Jesus had for the temple in Jerusalem. Let the church focus on its lofty purposes of preaching the gospel, worshipping God, and saving souls, but not come down from those works to engage in material interests and pleasing the physical desires of the people — “a house of merchandise.”

For an in-depth study about the work and organization of the church, see our article on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/

Verse 18

24. What question did the Jews ask Jesus regarding the cleansing of the temple? (Think: Why would they ask such a question?)

The Jews challenge Jesus right to cleanse the temple

No doubt the Jews were surprised or even angered by Jesus’ action. They asked Him what sign He did, since He had acted so. The request was, in effect, a question regarding His authority or right to so act. This was the proper purpose of signs — to validate the teaching or action of a man as being from God. The Jews asked Him a similar question after He cleansed the temple the second time (Matt. 21:23). The fact they asked these questions implies that they were responsible for, or in agreement with, the activities that Jesus had cast out.

Asking for authority for a man’s action is a good thing to do. As demonstrated here and on other occasions, however, Jesus knew that these people did not really respect Divine authority (note vv 24,25). In fact, had the Jews been more concerned about having proper authority, they would never have allowed these practices in the temple to begin with (see notes above). As His

ministry proceeded, Jesus often did numerous signs to prove He was from God; but instead of accepting the evidence and believing in Him, they became more and more antagonistic.

But in this case, Jesus had already explained His authority when He quoted Scripture (again, see notes above). The Jews needed to learn that signs are not needed when Scriptural authority has been cited. The Scriptures constitute authority from God validated by the record of the signs they contain. Likewise, people today need to learn that signs are not needed at all now that all truth has been revealed, recorded, and confirmed (2 Tim. 3:16,17; John 20:30,31; Luke 16:19-31; 1 Cor. 13; Jude 3).

Nevertheless, though a sign was not needed, Jesus gave them one anyway, as shown in the next verse.

Verses 19-21

25. What response did Jesus give?

26. What did the Jews think Jesus' statement meant?

27. How did Jesus' enemies later use this statement against Him (see cross-references)?

28. What did Jesus' statement really mean? Explain.

29. Case Study: Premillennial folks say that Jesus did not know, when He began His ministry, that He would have to die. How can you use this passage to help such people?

The sign of Jesus' temple

The sign Jesus offered was not one that would happen immediately. Instead He predicted a future sign: They would destroy the temple and in three days He would raise it up. He was speaking of His body, using the physical temple they were standing in as a symbol of His bodily temple. They would kill Him, but three days later He would arise.

The Jews, however, assumed He was referring to the temple buildings (which He had just cleansed). So they objected that it had taken 46 years to build them, so how could He restore them in three days? Solomon had built the original temple and Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed it. The Jews rebuilt it after they returned and Herod had been 46 years in the process of restoring it (McGarvey says that the restoration was still in progress at that time and continued till 64 AD). This temple was then destroyed by Rome in 70 AD, just shortly after the renovation was completed.

Note that the Jews' confusion over this point continued. In fact, they offered this as an excuse later to kill Him, claiming He had said He would destroy the temple — Matt. 26:61; Mark 14:58. The same charge was raised against Stephen before he was stoned (Acts 6:14).

Though the Jews misunderstood, Jesus was here offering them the greatest sign of all as proof of His authority — the resurrection. This is the fundamental proof of who He was. The apostles repeatedly used it to prove His claims, and we should do the same. When people questioned Him, this was the highest evidence He could produce (John 20:24-31; 1 Cor. 15:1-8ff; Rom. 1:4; cf. Acts 2:22ff; etc.).

It is ironic that, although Jesus here referred to the destruction of the temple of His body, yet He later prophesied the destruction of the physical temple buildings (Matthew 24). And that temple was destroyed, because of the willful rebellion of the Jews in general against God's will. They continued in disobedience, so He allowed the destruction of their national monument. And the ultimate expression of their rejection of God was that they killed Jesus. Because they destroyed Jesus' temple, God destroyed their temple. So indirectly, Jesus statement did predict that they would be responsible for the destruction of the physical temple building!

Note that He knew, from the very outset of His ministry that He would have to die. Premillennial and other folks are sorely mistaken when they think that Jesus came expecting to be an earthly king, but had to change His plans when people rejected Him. Nonsense! Jesus knew and

stated from the beginning what would happen, as many other passages confirm (see notes on Acts 2 & 3).

This was the first of many examples recorded in John (and other gospel accounts) in which the people, especially the Jewish leaders, misunderstood Jesus' teaching. These misunderstandings were caused by their rebellious resistance to truth. Jesus often deliberately spoke in such a way that their sinful attitudes would cause them to not understand, yet He explained His meaning further for those sincere followers whose hearts were open to truth. Yet even they, as in this case, may have required considerable time before coming to an understanding.

This example also illustrates how these misunderstandings were often caused by the fact that Jesus was speaking of a spiritual application, but people insisted on making a physical application of the statement. Time and again He speaks spiritually – especially of Himself and His work – but they misunderstand because they fail to see the spiritual application. We will observe this repeatedly as the record proceeds.

Verse 22

30. What effect did Jesus' statement have on the disciples later?

31. Application: What does this show regarding the purpose of prophecy and the resurrection?

The disciples eventually understand Jesus' statement.

The disciples may not have understood Jesus' statement at the time, but later they remembered it and saw the significance. The result of this was to produce faith. This is the purpose of miracles and of the prophecies of Christ. They confirm that He was who He claimed to be.

In addition, consider the multiplied power of this miracle in light of the fact that Jesus had predicted it ahead of time. It is amazing enough that He arose. It is far more increasingly evident that He was who He claimed to be in that He predicted ahead of time He would do this. It is incredible that anyone could arise, but imagine that person actually being able to predict His own resurrection! If one was a fraud, He would know that three days after His death everyone would know He had been a fraud. Jesus made the prediction and fulfilled it. And the result was faith. We need to use this evidence to convince unbelievers and strengthen believers.

The passage also says that they believed Scripture. This may refer to the fact that they realized that the resurrection was the fulfillment of Scripture (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). Or it may mean simply that they believed the many prophecies that He fulfilled and that convinced them of who He is.

Verse 23

32. What else did Jesus do at the feast, and what was the result (v23)?

Jesus did many signs during the Passover.

Following this at the feast, Jesus did miracles. This, as always, validated His claims to be from God. People had questioned His authority and had demanded that He do signs (v18). He did not then accommodate them, knowing their hearts. But He did do miracles later even at that very feast. As a result, some came to believe in Him. That was the purpose of miracles. All doubt about who He was should have been removed when they saw His miracles. The miracles confirmed the message preached (Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3; etc.; see notes above on turning water to wine).

Unlike modern so-called faith healers, Jesus did not refuse to do miracles in the presence of unbelievers. On the contrary, as long as there were sincere people present who were seeking for truth, He did signs for the express purpose of giving them reason to believe.

Verses 24,25

33. What power did Jesus have according to vv 24,25?

34. Who else has such power (see 1 Kings 8:39)? Since Jesus had this power, what does this prove about Jesus?)

Jesus knew the very thoughts of men.

Although people were believing in Him, Jesus did not trust Himself to them, because He had power to know the inner man. He could tell the thoughts, intents, and character of a person without anyone have to do or say anything to reveal this.

Apparently He knew that, though the people had a measure of faith, yet they really did not understand His real intent and purpose. Subsequent events proved that many of these people forsook Him (Chap. 6), and none stood with Him to the end. In His time of greatest need, one of His own disciples betrayed Him, and another denied Him three times.

We are not told exactly in what sense He did not trust them. Apparently it includes the fact that He did not tell them precisely all His plans and purposes, but developed this gradually as the people gained understanding. Perhaps it also means that He would not allow them to take Him and make Him king (as some soon wanted - see chap. 6).

Note that this ability to know the hearts of men is a power uniquely belonging to God (1 Kings 8:39). Man cannot know this (1 Cor. 2:11). Yet Jesus often demonstrated this ability (John 1:42,47,48; 3:3; 4:29; 6:61; 11:4,14; 13:11; 21:17; etc.). This is a great sign cited by John to show Jesus' Deity, validating His claims. While apostles and others duplicated many of Jesus' signs, this is one rarely if ever accomplished by prophets, and never to the extent Jesus could do it.

The passage says Jesus knew "**all** men." Even if other prophets may have at times known something of men's thoughts, none of them know the hearts of **all** men. This is a unique characteristic of Deity: no one but God can do this. Yet Jesus possessed this characteristic. Here is a solid proof that John is claiming Deity for Jesus.

And note that Jesus possessed this unique power of Deity and exercised it even while He was alive on earth. Those who claim that Jesus surrendered or emptied Himself of the powers of Deity while He was on earth are greatly mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures. Yes, He exercised some limits on some of His powers in order to accomplish His purposes. But He never lost or surrendered those. God cannot, would not, and did not give up the powers of God.

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