

Topic	The Lord, The Feast, and the Cleansing of the Temple
Reference	John 2:1 – 25
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This chapter contains two distinct seemingly unrelated accounts. The first is the miracle of Jesus, turning water into wine and the second is the cleansing of the temple.

Jerusalem at the time of the Jesus, most of the residence of the city lived in the southwestern site of the temple in two areas, knows at the upper city, more for the rich, and the lower city for the poor. Hence a very convenient access to the temple for them will be from the southwestern corner of the temple mount. In those days the southwestern entrance to the temple mount was via a huge overhead arch, known today as the Robinson's arch. It is possible that Jesus might have entered the temple area in John chapter 2 via this arch or any of the other five entrances. There was a long line of shops hugging the western wall, where the bulk of the selling of the sacrificial animals and the money changing took place.

They say that politics and business shouldn't mix and similarly religion and business shouldn't mix as well. This is how the trouble in the second half of John chapter 2 started because the priests up in the temple started to collude with the merchants and moneychangers down in the street. So with the consent of the priest, the commercial activities below started to spill onto the temple grounds above. What was below started to contaminate what was above. They brought their commerce from the street level to the southern perimeter of the temple grounds, known as the Royal Portico. Portico is a covered walkway and in those days it was very prominent because of its orange-brown roof and the buying and selling not only took place in this Royal Portico but also spilled into the open area in front, known as the court of the gentiles and all this set the stage for the dramatic event at the temple in John chapter 2.

The difference between the two scenes in this chapter is so striking. In Cana the mood was of celebration and cheers. In sharp contrast the picture here is one of chaos and confusion. There is also this sharp contrast between the two halves of John chapter 2, a contrast between celebration on one hand and chaos on the other hand, is as if John has put these two account side by side on purpose. At the wedding in Cana, Jesus must have been happy and full of joy for the newlywed couple but on the temple grounds in Jerusalem shortly after we see Jesus visibly angry and upset with the merchants and moneychangers. This is the contrast and with this background in mind that we dive into the text.

Verses 1 and 11 says, these took place at Cana in Galilee and then in verse 12 it says that the end of this episode Jesus and his entourage went to Capernaum for a few days. The village of Cana was located about 7 kilometers to the Northeast from Nazareth where Jesus grew up as a boy and

lived until about this time in John chapter 2. Capernaum was further to the northeast from Nazareth about 35 kilometers away, situated on the northern shore of the sea of galilee. Important because Capernaum would soon become the HQ or the base of Jesus ministry. Of all the miracles that Jesus performed in his three years of ministry, John says here

*11 What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which He revealed His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.*

Now instead of using the word miracle, John uses the word sign. A sign normally points to something. So to John each of Jesus's miracles points to something which he explains later in John 20.

### **John 20:30~31a**

*Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God,...*

In other words, to John each miracle that he records points to the deity of Jesus. John wants his readers to be so convinced that Jesus is indeed the son of God. In fact, to drive home this point, John decides to select and record only seven miracles or signs in his book

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|------------------------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Water Turning into Wine   | John 2:1~11  | from Blandness to Bliss    |
| 2. Healing of Official's Son | John 4:46~54 | from Despair to Faith      |
| 3. Healing of the Paralytic  | John 5:1~18  | from Impotence to Strength |
| 4. Feeding of the 5,000      | John 6:1~15  | from Famine to Feast       |
| 5. Walking on Water          | John 6:16~24 | from Anxiety to Assurance  |
| 6. Healing of the Blind Man  | John 9:1~42  | from Darkness to Light     |
| 7. Raising of Lazarus        | John 11:1~44 | from Death to Life         |

This first miracle happens in a wedding and you need to know that, a typical wedding in those days can stretch up to seven days. It is interesting to note that in Judges 14 which describes the wedding between Samson and his philistine bride we can read that the celebration lasted a whole week. So it is a long celebration with guest streaming in and out of the venue and is feasting and drinking over the entire period with the food and wine provided by the host family and when everyone is in such a celebrative mood the last thing you want is something to spoil that mood but something happened that day that threatened to spoil the mood they were in. They ran out of wine.

*3 When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to Him, "They have no more wine."*

To run out of a wine is a definite no-no at a Jewish wedding, because to the Hebrews, wine is the symbol of joy. The wedding is a joyous occasion and so there has to be this continuous supply of wine, a disruption to this free flow of wine is unthinkable. If you are the groom in the wedding in biblical times you would want to make doubly sure that there is an ample supply of wine, because to run out of wine will bring great embarrassment and shame and disgrace to you and your family. Also according to Bible scholar D.A. Carson there is evidence to suggest that the groom may even be subjected to lawsuits from the agreed family of the bride because the groom is supposed to provide the wine.

By performing this miracle obviously saved the groom and his family from a terribly awkward social situation but that's just the surface reason of why Jesus performed the miracle. There is more that meets the eye. Now to what it is, we need to go deeper.

*6 Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.*

John describes the vessels as the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing. In other words, what we have here isn't drinking water but rather water for ceremonial washing or ritual purification but why does John bother to make reference to Jewish ceremonial washing. This is a wedding, what is got to do with ceremonial washing but here lies the key to help us dig deeper.

Now all kinds of ceremonial washing using water are mandated by various laws in the Old Testament especially in Leviticus. They are mandated for all kinds of situations. Each time a person becomes ritually unclean, he has to go through a specified washing before he is deemed to be ritually clean again. One must also be ritually clean through ceremonial washing before he can enter the temple area and that's why archaeologist have found many ritual baths at the southwestern corner of the temple mount. So that worshippers could purify themselves ritually before stepping onto the temple grounds.

It is based on the idea that nobody with sin can stand before a holy God or commune with a holy God and this is reflected in all the laws in the Old Testament concerning ceremonial washing. All their lives, the Jews have to go through ceremonial washing repeatedly because they couldn't keep themselves ritually clean 24/7. Now we might ask, what good about God's laws if people keep on sinning and sinning and they have to go through ceremonial washing repeatedly. We see God's moral laws as laid in the Old Testament, they set a high spiritual standard demanded by a Holy God. It is His spiritual benchmark. He is a holy God and this is what he stands for. If you can obey all the laws into the last letter than you be of course deemed righteous before him but there isn't anyone in all of human history who can be justified by the law before God.

**Romans 3:20 (WWE)**

*No one will be put right with God because he has tried to obey the law. The law only makes people know what they have done wrong.*

The law makes us even more aware of our sins, as if to imply this point in verse 7

*7 Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim.*

As if to tell us, now here is all the water you want, 600 liters of water but no amount of washing can make you clean enough in the sight of God. No amount of religious rituals can make you right in the eyes of God, because as I said we keep on sinning, but still God mandates ceremonial washing in those days because he wanted to remind his people that he was a holy God and there will be sin.

***How can sin be removed by mere washing with water?***

They were merely ritually cleansed or symbolically cleansed not spiritually cleansed. If we boil it down, it is like this God is holy we are sinful. He cannot stand even the slightest sin, so how are we ever going to get close to Him, how are we ever going to get close to him, how are we ever going to have a relationship with him, that’s the start of the gospel message. The answer to this amazingly is in verse 9, when Jesus turns the water into wine there is a wealth of symbolism surrounding this. Water is bland and tasteless while wine has organic origins and represents the elements of life. Earlier, we saw how wine also serves as a symbol of joy and furthermore from the Lord’s Supper that we observe every month, wine also is the emblem of the blood of Jesus.

So when we put all of these three symbols together, wine as the blood, then joy and life, the deeper layer of meaning behind this miracle now becomes apparent, because no amount of washing will make you righteous before God, because no one will be declared righteous by the law. Jesus is in fact saying, I am going to do for you what you cannot achieve through the law, which is symbolized by the water and here is righteousness that comes by my blood symbolized by the wine. My blood has the power to put you right with God. I am going to die in your place, I am going to shed my blood for you, so that you may have life, which is also symbolized by the wine, so that you may have it joyfully and abundantly.

**Romans 10:4 (WWE)**

*Christ has made an end to the law as a way of getting right with God. Everyone who believes in Him is put right with God.*

So in short, on a surface level the miracle of turning water into wine might have saved the groom and his family from social disgrace but on the deeper level, this miracle is a sign to a greater miracle at a place called Calvary where our savior shed his blood, so that we can have life eternal

and the joy of salvation. *The miracle of turning water into wine hence is an elaborate metaphor for our redemption, taking us from law to grace from water to wine.*

## **ACCOUNT OF THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE:**

*13 When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*

This verse can be taken as the start of Jesus public ministry. What just happened at Cana cannot be considered public ministry, because the wedding was a private function and besides it appears that only the servants knew about the miracle. So it is worthy of note that Jesus's public ministry began with a Passover and ended three years later again with a Passover. Not only that, his public ministry began with the cleansing of the temple and ended three years later with another cleansing of the temple. There is a second cleansing of the temple not recorded in John but recorded in Matthew 21, Mark 11 and Luke 19, in Jesus last week before he was crucified.

Earlier we saw, how Jesus might have entered the temple grounds from the southwestern corner. The commercial activities from the street below spilled into the temple grounds into the royal Portico and also spilling into the temple grounds, open temple courtyard in the court of the gentiles and when Jesus saw all the business dealings taking place here, he reacted angrily. He was furious at two groups of people;

1. the animal merchants, those selling cattle, sheep and doves
2. the moneychangers

There are two pieces of information that you need to know.

### ***What were the money changers doing on the temple grounds?***

It is because the temple authorities collected a temple tax of half a shekel per person, which was mandated in Exodus 30. The temple authorities choose the shekel because of their high purity of silver and they wouldn't except any other currencies which explains the presence of the moneychangers, because if you only have the Roman denarii coins or the Greek drachmas coins you need the services of these moneychangers to change them into shekel. The half shekel tax that they collected was used for the upkeep and maintenance of the temple. The shekel coin had the picture of pagan God Hercules. How can a coin bearing a pagan God be chosen by the temple authorities and used on the temple grounds? They choose it because of its silver content but it is in direct contravention of one of the ten commandments, you shall have no other Gods before me. It only goes to show the level of hypocrisy of the religious authorities at the temple.

Animals are cattle, sheep and doves. Just as the law is concerning, ceremonial washing are so complicated, similarly the laws pertaining to animal sacrifice are also very complicated. The Book of Leviticus outlines a very complex sacrificial system including burnt offering, sin

offering, peace offering etc. During the Passover they conduct burnt offering which involve the sacrifice of young male animals. The purpose was that the animal was to be killed to symbolically atone for the person's sin because God wanted to remind the Israelites of the seriousness of sin.

It was not practical to bring your own animal from Galilee to Jerusalem, not even a pigeon because the bird may die during the journey which may take two or three days, hence it is more convenient to buy the animal after you have arrived at Jerusalem and that explains the presence of the animal merchants. Besides if you bring your own animal, it may be rejected by the temple priests. Why because Leviticus one specified that the animal must be without blemish, without defect, must be perfect animal. So when the priest examines your goat for example, he may complain one leg of your animal is shorter, how can you bring such an animal. So you are forced to buy a replacement animal from the merchants, one that they have already preapproved.

Some people feel uncomfortable when they read this passage in John chapter 2, because they see a side of Jesus that they are not familiar with, they see an angry Jesus because the only Jesus that they know is gentle Jesus, meek and mild.

Jesus can get very-very angry, although the gospels paint him mostly as a pacifist, if you want to see Jesus displaying fury read Revelation instead when he confronts sin and rebellion and evil in the end times. You will see a Jesus with a rage that consumes to the extent..

### **Revelation 6:16~17**

*They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who can withstand it?"*

Indeed, across the pages of scripture we sometime see God pouring out his wrath against obstinate sinners, recall the flood, recall Sodom and Gomorrah. In other times, he also acted in anger against his own people, who persisted in their sins, recall the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC and they call this holy anger. Although never to the degree of holy anger we too occasionally react with anger.

When your anger is selfish anger then your position will be precarious, selfish anger is when you want something for yourself but you cannot get it, so you get very angry.

What made Jesus so furious when he stepped onto the temple grounds and he saw all the buying and selling?

*15 So He made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 To those who sold doves He said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning My Father's house into a market!"*

Three Passovers from now, Jesus will take the place of these merchants and moneychangers and he would at the receiving end of an even more terrible whip. Jesus shows authority and intensity. Why don't the hundreds of merchants and moneychangers together with possibly 100s of temple priest and temple police, they all gang up and drive out Jesus instead? How can one man stand against so many?

The answer is simple. Revelation 6 says, hide us from the wrath of the lamb, who can withstand it. When God becomes angry, you better not be in the way.

There are two possible reason and the third actual reason that explains Jesus anger.

1. Because as a result of the commerce, the noise, the racket from the merchants and moneylenders, they are compromising the sacred atmosphere in the temple, those who were not there for worship, they are veiling and dealing, is disturbing and disrupting, even violating the sacred space in the temple. It can be this reason. Earlier in Cana, Jesus acted out of a concern for the groom and his family, saving them from public embarrassment. Is Jesus also acting out of concern here for the true worshippers who have come for private prayers and repentance. Is he angry because it was not possible to do solemn worship or prayer because of all the chaos and commotion around? It might be possible.
2. The second possible reason is derived from the second cleansing of the temple, when Jesus says to them

**Matthew 21:13** (also Mark 11:17, Luke 19:46)

*" 'My house will be called a house of prayer, 'but you are making it 'a den of robbers.' "*

Why did Jesus calls them robbers?

When a vendor freezes his customers, he is like robbing them and hence it is likely that the exchange rates have been inflated, the sacrificial animals way overpriced. As I mentioned earlier, the temple priest are in cohorts with the merchants and moneychangers and so you can expect some of the illegal proceeds to find their way into the priest's pockets. So Jesus was angry because he sees the masses being swindles and exploited. it is possible that he was angry because poor people being robbed in brought daylight.

3. The third reason, if you recall earlier remark that our holy lord cannot stand even a slightest sin, Jesus reacts with anger here because they have defiled the temple which is a dwelling place of the God of holiness. They show no regards whatsoever for the sanctity of the temple. Not only have they brought in physical filth like animal feces, they also come with their spiritual filth, with their greed and sleaze and corruption and so the space for consecration is now a place of desecration. They are making a mockery of what the temple stands for. That's why Jesus got fuming mad, because they have profaned what is sacred, they have polluted what is holy.

The immediate lesson for us is that we must be careful, lest we are also guilty of defiling the temple. Temple is our body, Paul writes

### **1 Corinthians 6:19**

*Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?*

God has harsh words for those who persist in defiling his temple. He says

### **Isaiah 1:11~15 (NLT)**

*“What makes you think I want all your sacrifices?” says the Lord. “I am sick of your burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened cattle. I get no pleasure from the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to worship Me, who asked you to parade through My courts with all your ceremony? Stop bringing Me your meaningless gifts; the incense of your offerings disgusts Me! ...they are all sinful and false... When you lift up your hands in prayer, I will not look. Though you offer many prayers, I will not listen, ...”*

In verse 18, the Jews confront Jesus and ask him, what sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all of this

*18 The Jews then responded to Him, “What sign can You show us to prove Your authority to do all this?”*

Now notice that they are not accusing Jesus of disrupting business activities on the temple grounds. There is a prophecy which foretold that the Messiah would come to the temple one day

### **Malachi 3:1**

*“I will send My Messenger, who will prepare the way before Me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple...” says the Lord Almighty.*

There is another prophecy that tells that on that day when he comes he will stop all the tradings going on in the temple

### **Zechariah 14:21**

*And on that day there will no longer be a merchant in the house of the Lord Almighty.*

Now the religious leaders they now their Bible well, they are aware of these prophecies and that's why instead of asking what do you think you are doing, they ask Jesus for a sign to prove that he is the Messiah foretold in Malachi 3 and Zechariah 14, show us the miracle to prove your credentials. Jesus refuses their request and instead he gives them a future sign

*<sup>19</sup> Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." <sup>20</sup> They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and You are going to raise it in three days?" <sup>21</sup> But the temple He had spoken of was His body.*

The relevant question to ask here is, why do you think Jesus uses a temple metaphor to describe his own death which will happen of course three years from this point in time. I think Jesus is also speaking to us. He is saying to us, if you see me cleaning out the temple, but they will be back. I can cleanse the temple once or twice, many times but you will keep coming back and this is what I am going to do. I am going to crucify, I am going to be resurrected and then you will see real cleansing of your soul. It sounds familiar as earlier we also came to a similar deeper conclusion from the account in Cana and this is where the second half of John chapter 2 is linked to the first half, both halves point to the cross and with that we are ready to join the two halves of the chapter to draw out an important lesson, so that we can take home something to help us to be better Christians.

As we learnt earlier, the account of Jesus turning water into wine is really an elaborate metaphor for redemption. It is about our conversion, after conversion comes cleansing and that's why John puts both accounts side by side in John chapter 2, conversion then cleansing and not the other way around. In all other religions, all your life you try to clean up your act and then may be you will be found right with God. Christianity is the other way around, first we are put right with God and then we get cleanup, but the trouble with many Christians is that including many of us, is that we want the conversion but not the cleansing. In other words, give me the wine but spare me the whip. I want my passport to heaven of course but please don't tell me to give up my lifestyle and indulgences. Now if that is our attitude then we are like bringing animal merchants and moneychangers into the temple and just like how they allowed a pagan God into the temple in the same way we also allow little gods into our lives.

Jesus can get very angry when God's temple is defiled. The most critical question today is how do we get cleanse after conversion. In other words, how do we live a life pleasing to God and

not the life still in bondage to sin. Interestingly I chance upon the answer to this question during the second day of our Israel trip. We were at Yad Vashem, which is the holocaust museum in Jerusalem and there was this huge front courtyard and on one side I saw row of pillars, on top of which was inscribed the verse from Ezekiel 37;14

*I will put my breath into you and you shall live again, and I will set you upon your own soil.*

God promised to put his spirit in us and that's how according to Paul our body becomes the temple and then I found another verse one chapter before this in

**Ezekiel 36:27**

*And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws.*

In other words, God knows that the task of cleansing after our conversion is very difficult, so he puts his spirit in us to move us, to help us overcome our sinful nature or our propensity to sin. So in our conversion Jesus took away the penalty of sin and put up on Jesus, so that we are qualified to go to heaven and then comes the cleansing when he puts his spirit in us to help us break the power of sin.

First it removes the penalty of sin, then he breaks down the power of sin in your life. So that sin would have no more hold on us. I have always said, without cleansing we may not be ready for heaven, because heaven has no place for animal merchants and moneychangers metaphorically because they defile the temple. With the spirit cleansing one by one, the merchants and the moneychangers are chased out of our lives, one by one the little gods get kicked out of our lives but it takes a whole lifetime and that's why it is often said that becoming a Christian is easy but being a Christian is tough.

The holy spirit molds us into the shape that God wants. The question is, are we cooperating with the Holy Spirit day by day who is at work in us, trying to cleanse us, to refine us or are we resisting his work. Our prayer should be the prayer of David

**Psalm 51:7,10** *Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

May you pray this prayer and God replies

**Isaiah 1:18** (NLT) *Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool.*