

He left no room for trickery. While he stood back—perhaps even while reclining at table in the other room—the servants handled the jars, fetched the water, and drew the sample. Then, somewhere between the jars and the wedding coordinator, the miraculous transformation took place.

Note that the provision of wine was abundant and the quality of the wine was excellent. Take note of the Lord's motivation as well: This was a simple act of kindness done for the sake of love for His friends. He didn't make this a sideshow spectacle. In fact, it appears the only people who knew about it were those who had already believed in Him as the Christ. The "headwaiter" didn't even know what had happened.

— 2:11-12 —

John concludes the vignette with a comment and a transition to the next scene. He calls this miracle of Jesus the first of many "signs." The supernatural display of power attested to His identity as God. Moreover, it was symbolic of what He had come to do: to transform all who believe in Him. While the time for Jesus' "glory" had not come, His disciples witnessed it nonetheless. And their faith was strengthened as a result.

Afterward, Jesus and His disciples—five of them at this point—enjoyed a time of family reunion in Capernaum, roughly 18 miles northeast of Cana. Because Joseph is not mentioned by any Gospel after Jesus' twelfth year (Luke 2:41-52), most interpreters conclude that he had died. Mary probably lived with one of Jesus' half-brothers.

— 2:13-14 —

An unknown period of time had gone by; we have no way of knowing how long. Unlike Luke, whose chronicle reads more like a traditional history—chronological and event-driven—John's narrative is more philosophical and driven by a central theological purpose: to prove that Jesus is the Son of God. Therefore, some episodes appear out of chronological order, organized by topic rather than by time or place.

In John's Gospel, the Feast of Passover is a signpost along the journey through Jesus' life, and it plays a crucial role in the narrative. Earlier, John the Baptist called Jesus "the Lamb of God" (1:29, 36). John does not use the term again, but he does use symbolism to identify Jesus as the true sacrificial lamb and the ultimate fulfillment of the Passover festival.

Passover goes back to the time in Egypt when Moses was given instructions to prepare a lamb a certain way and to honor the Lord's

presence by spreading its blood on the lintel and doorposts of every Israelite's house. When the death angel moved through Egypt to take the life of the firstborn male in each household, he passed over every home bearing the blood of a sacrificial lamb.

By the first century, the festival was very different. It hardly resembled the solemn event of Israel's exodus from bondage in Egypt. The priesthood was completely corrupt and the temple had been polluted by the priests' greed. The courts of the complex had become a mixture of flea market and stock market. This so-called "Annas Bazaar" was named for Annas, a godfather-like figure who once held the office of high priest but had been deposed by the Roman government more than fifteen years earlier. Since that time, he ruled through a successive series of puppet priests, most of them his sons, and continued to run a well-established con game on a grand scale. Put bluntly, he was corrupt to the core.

Throughout the year, but especially at Passover, all Jewish males were expected to visit the temple, to pay the tax required by the Law of Moses, and to sacrifice an animal. On Passover, the sacrifice was to be a lamb, and as always, it had to be without blemish or defect. Moreover, the tax had to be paid in shekels, not in foreign currency, which bore images forbidden by the Law.

Annas and his cronies set up stations in the temple courts for the purpose of exchanging foreign currency for shekels—for an exorbitant fee, of course. Then, he supplied sacrificial animals, for which he charged top price. If someone brought his own animal, an inspector would judge it unfit and offer another in trade... for additional cash. Undoubtedly, the inferior animal would become some other man's "superior" sacrifice later on. What a racket!

During the Passover festival, the population of Jerusalem would swell to more than 250,000 males. Josephus put the total number of people (males and their families) close to three million.¹³ Obviously, the money-making potential of the temple was staggering.

This is what Jesus had seen each year as He and His family visited the temple to celebrate festivals, observe sacrifices, and glorify God. This year, like all the others, He found not a place of worship, but a shameless sham—a shrine to greed and a sanctuary for thieves. Only this year, something was different.

— 2:15-17 —

Before the official beginning of His ministry, Jesus visited the temple as a worshiper in His Father's house. But the time had come for Him to

enter as the Messiah, the owner and ruler of the place. In fulfillment of prophecy (Mal. 3:1-4), His first official act was to purge His temple of a stubborn infestation.

Jesus' disciples stood back—probably in stunned silence. With mouths wide open, they stared astonished as Jesus tossed furniture like toothpicks and slung coins like seeds. The lash of His whip sent livestock scurrying behind their unclean owners as the temple Owner's voice echoed through the courts, "Take these things away!" And the disciples remembered Psalm 69:9, "Zeal for Your house has consumed me."

— 2:18-19 —

Once the commotion died down, the inevitable confrontation came. Jesus was not surprised. He knew it would happen . . . and where it would lead Him.

The religious leaders knew the Scriptures too. Concerned with the issue of authority—just as they were with the Baptizer in the Judean wilderness—they said, in effect, "If you're declaring Yourself to be the Messiah by this act, authenticate Yourself with a series of miracles." John uses the term "sign" here, just as he did in 2:11, because Jesus was not opposed to offering a miracle as a seal of authenticity under the right circumstances (2:23). In this case, however, the burden of proof was not His to bear. He was not in violation of the Law. His actions were not blatantly immoral. The rightness of His actions was authority enough. So instead, Jesus gave them a veiled response. Only a perceptive hearer would comprehend it, and none of them qualified. In fact, His own disciples didn't understand His true meaning until after His resurrection.

John highlights this tendency of Jesus more than the other Gospel writers. Jesus didn't waste His words on people who didn't want to hear. In fact, He didn't speak in order to convince the skeptic or sway the dissenter. His words were intended to divide His audience into two groups: receptive hearts and hard hearts. He understood that hearing Him is not an intellectual process, but a crisis of the will. Several times throughout the story when Jesus says something cryptic, some people *think* they understand Him and turn away, while others admit their confusion and draw nearer.

— 2:20-22 —

Just as Jesus expected, the religious authorities took His challenge literally. They completely missed His point.

The temple was constructed to be the dwelling place of God—not that He needs a structure! God is omnipresent—present everywhere simultaneously. He ordered the temple constructed to house the special manifestation of His presence, a supernatural light called the *shekinah*, "glory." In the Old Testament, this light appeared in a bush to Moses (Exod. 3:1-3), it led the Israelites through the wilderness in a pillar (Exod. 13:21-22), and it settled on Mount Sinai before the Israelites (Exod. 19:18; 24:17). When the tabernacle was constructed—and later the temple—the *shekinah* hovered over the ark of the covenant behind a thick veil in the most holy place (Exod. 25:22; Lev. 16:2). The Lord did this for the benefit of His people, to affirm His presence among them as their one and only God.

Unfortunately, because of the people of Israel's repeated and persistent failure to worship Him exclusively and because of their immorality and rebellion, the *shekinah* had long ago departed (Ezek. 10:18). While God's love for Israel never faded, and He continued to guide the nation after its return from exile, the temple had not been the dwelling place of God for centuries. When Jesus issued His challenge to the religious leaders, it's as though He were pointing to His own chest to say, "This is the authentic dwelling place of God."

— 2:23-25 —

John concludes this part of the story on a positive note. While the religious leaders had remained defiant and rejected their High Priest, many others believed. John adds that those who believed did so by "observing" Jesus' signs. The Greek word translated "observing" is *theoreo* [2334], from which we derive our word "theory." The term means "to come to understand as the result of perception."¹⁴

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Throughout this section (1:19-4:54) and the next (5:1-12:50), John is careful to show that Jesus is unlike any religious or political leader the world has ever known. His power and authority come from a different realm, one that stands in stark contrast to the system of this world that is corrupt with sin. People of the world seek charismatic leaders who will lead them where they already want to go. Consequently, worldly leaders usually derive their power and influence from popular support. But not this Man; not this King.

Jesus simply presented Himself in truth; some will believe in Him and some will not. He performed miraculous signs, not to convince

skeptics or sway dissenters, but to signal His own arrival as Messiah. He offered "signs" to prompt willing, prepared hearts to respond. Furthermore, He wasn't depending upon a favorable response from anyone—the religious leaders or the masses—to complete His mission. He wasn't running for election; He didn't need popular support to claim the throne. He had no plans to train an army. He didn't entrust Himself, His mission, or His future to humanity; He trusted His Father, and then He invited humanity to trust Him.

There have been courageous men and women who have led in this way: long before Jesus arrived, they spoke the truth and led those whose hearts resonated with that truth. Some amassed great hordes of followers. Most were ignored or martyred. All of them died. But Jesus is different, and His kingdom is different.

APPLICATION: JOHN 2:1-25

Keeping Your Temple Clean

John tells the story of Jesus cleansing the temple in Jerusalem to establish three primary truths:

1. *God owns His temple, not priests.* He called priests to steward the temple and to help people approach Him as He has commanded.
2. *God's Word is the only authority recognized in the temple, not the high priest or any other designated position.* Anyone acting contrary to His Word has no authority.
3. *God's Son came to claim ownership of the temple, and the religious "authorities" rejected Him.* This point is repeated often in John's narrative and ultimately leads to the final rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.

This incident also illustrates a practical truth for believers: *God's temple is sacred ground, a dedicated place of meeting between the Lord and His people.* In the Old Testament, the Lord used a physical structure for that purpose; first a tabernacle, which the Hebrews called the "tent of meeting," and then a permanent building in Jerusalem. The Lord was very specific about reserving everything in the temple for the purpose of worship. Once Jesus completed His work of atonement for the sins of the world, the place of meeting changed, but the standards remain

the same. Believers are now His temples (1 Cor. 6:19-20), and we are to remain no less sanctified.

What do you think the Lord wants to drive out of your temple?

While the Lord wants the temple of your body to be clean, the task is not yours to complete. Note that the corruption in the temple was not removed by any mere mortal; God in human flesh confronted and removed the impurity—as only He can. Our role is to submit to His cleansing process; first by refusing to tolerate the presence of corruption, then by asking Him to remove it.

Here is a simple prayer to help you get started:

Lord, I recognize You as the Owner of my temple. I willingly submit to the authority of Your Word. I confess that I have allowed the corruption of _____ to take up space that is reserved for worshipping You. I freely admit that I do not have the power to remove it on my own. Please cleanse me, even if I must endure hardship or suffer affliction in the process. Grant me the courage to remain steadfast as You work. Grant me patience to endure the process and provide extra encouragement when my patience wears thin. Then let me rejoice when Your temple is again pure. I make the same request as David did so many years ago:

Create in me a clean heart, O God (Ps. 51:10).

I ask this in the matchless name of Jesus,

Amen.

Brainstorming the New Birth

JOHN 3:1-21

NASB

¹Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; ²this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." ³Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

⁴Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old?"

NLT

¹There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. ²After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you."

³Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."

⁴"What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go