

## JOHN 2

## JESUS, THE SON OF MAN

Is it not wonderful that the miracle recorded in this chapter was our Lord's first one? If we had been asked to select the one which seemed most appropriate to stand as the frontispiece of His earthly ministry, we would likely have selected the raising of Lazarus, the calming of the storm, or the feeding of the hungry crowds. But who would have chosen this one? The inventive genius of man would have conceived an introductory scene which combined the glorious features of the Transfiguration and the majestic display of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. But how different is the simplicity of this incident! In the previous chapter, we were told that the Apostles beheld in Jesus Christ the glory of the Only-begotten of the Father. And when we ask one of those eyewitnesses to give a sample of that glory's choicest manifestations, we are conducted to a little village in the highlands of Galilee – the distance of an afternoon's walk from Nazareth – where the Master sits at a simple wedding-feast among His friends, and makes wine out of water to supply their lack. The miracles recorded in John's Gospel are signs (chapter 20:30) that have been carefully selected because they very clearly depict our Lord's Person and work, which the Evangelist sought to portray. There was a distinct purpose in Christ's performing this miracle as His first, and in its being so prominently set forth at the front of this narrative. We are told that He manifested forth His glory; and now we reverently ask, "How?" As we strive to answer that question, may we sit again at His table, and hear Him speak!

First, it was the Savior's glory to show that true religion is perfectly consistent with ordinary life. There is a common tendency to associate the highest type of religion with rigorous austerity of life, as if the human were too common to be Divine. We wrongly imagine that the person whose thoughts commune most deeply with the Eternal One must be stern, silent, and solitary. This type of religious life was exemplified by some of the prophets, who dwelt in the solitudes of uninhabited deserts and hills – withdrawn from the common joys and ties of human existence, and only emerging now and then to pour the burning words of the living God upon the ears of awe-struck crowds. Such had been John the Baptizer. The wilderness was his home, the locusts and wild honey were his food, and the camel's cloth formed his garments. And we might have expected to find the Son of God even more rigorous in His isolation, living by Himself in severe and solitary grandeur. But no! His early years are not spent in a desert, but among a family in a home. He comes eating and drinking. He moves freely among human beings, just as one of themselves. He interweaves

**Outline of the chapter:**

- ❖ Jesus works His first miracle at a wedding in the village of Cana – verses 1-11
- ❖ He casts the buyers and sellers out of the Temple – verses 12-22
- ❖ Many persons believe in Him – verses 23-25

His life with the life of the home, the marketplace, and the street. And in accordance with this purpose, He worked His first miracle at a simple peasant's country wedding.

The harder kind of religion is that in which our Savior here set us an example. It is easier to live like a hermit and cut ourselves off from interaction with the world, than – like Jesus – to be in it and not of it. It is easier to decline an invitation to the house of a great person than to go there and behave as the Son of God. It is easier to refuse the pleasures of this world entirely than to use them without abusing them. It is easier to maintain a life of prayer, far away from the dwellings of men, than to enter those dwellings while still maintaining constant fellowship with God in the unruffled depths of the soul. Nothing except the grace of the Holy Spirit can suffice for these difficult things, but His grace is sufficient if it is daily and believingly sought.

This kind of religion that Jesus exemplified is most honoring to God. The idea of the ascetic life is that every human feeling is a weakness, and every natural instinct a sin. No wife's caress, no childish voice, no tender love, and none of the jewels or flowers of existence are permitted to soften the rigors of that lot. But is not all this a libel on God's original creation? Has He made such a great mistake in creating us that we must thwart His ideal at every step before we can rise to our true manhood? Must we make ourselves something other than humans before we can be children of God? Surely, to reason thus is to dishonor the wisdom and love of God in our original creation!

Jesus' kind of religion is also that which is most useful to the world. Of what use is salt, unless it is in counteracting contact with corrupting carcasses? The holiness which builds holy tabernacles amidst nearly inaccessible rocks is of little help to the breaking hearts of demon-possessed human beings in the valleys below. But this is not our Savior's message. "Go," says He, "to Jerusalem and Samaria – to the crowded cities and homes of men. Live amongst them, kindling them with the passion of your holiness. Allow little children to come to you, let publicans and sinners draw near to you, and permit crowds to gather around you. All I ask is that whether you eat or drink, and no matter what else you do – do all to the glory of God!"

There was only one place and time for our Lord to fittingly inaugurate His public ministry (verses 12-22); it must be at the capital city of the nation, and in the Temple – the very center of life and worship. It must be at the time of the Passover-feast – the most solemn period of the year, and the season when the city would be thronged with pilgrims from every quarter of the globe. There and then, He could offer Himself to the people as their Messiah – the One Who was to fulfill all the pictures and hopes which were suggested by the great national festival.

On the eve of the Passover, Jesus appears in Jerusalem and presents Himself as the Messiah by an act of deep symbolism. He drives from the Temple

the merchants by whom the place of Divine worship has been defiled. He comes as the Son of God, filled with zeal for His Father's house. He comes as the Messiah of Israel, offering national purification, which will preface the Messianic Kingdom and blessedness. The abuse which our Lord was rebuking had arisen from what had once been a mere matter



of convenience for worshipers. The sale of animals for sacrifices in a place adjacent to the Temple, and the exchange of foreign money for the sacred coins with which the Temple-tax could be paid, was all innocent enough; but little by little, the business-tables had crowded into the very court of the Temple itself! Naturally, it was accompanied by disorder, greed, dishonesty, and extortion – until the place of worship had become, as Christ declared, nothing more than “a house of merchandise.” So our Lord takes up a scourge of cords – perhaps as an instrument of discipline, but certainly also as a badge of authority – and He expels the traders, with the declaration that the Temple is His Father's house. In no other more definite or picturesque way could He have asserted His claim to be the Christ, the Son of God!

The significance of the act is immediately appreciated by His disciples, who realized that this incident was the fulfillment of a Messianic prophecy: “Zeal for thy house shall eat me up” (Ps. 119:135).

On the other hand, however, the rulers regard the Savior's actions with sullen unbelief, or with a sense of offended dignity. They demand that He show them a “sign” in justification of what He has done, and as proof of the Divine authority which He is claiming to possess. But their demand was a stupid impertinence! It was like asking for proof of a proof. His act, in and of itself, was a “sign” which they should have understood.

However, Jesus does promise a sign that was so significant, that no person would henceforth be left with any excuse for doubting that He was indeed “the Christ, the Son of God!” He declares that His death and resurrection would be the unanswerable arguments concerning His Divine Person and mission. But He phrases His reply in such language that, for the time, not even His disciples are able to comprehend His meaning: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Thankfully, the Holy Spirit inspired John to explain to us that “he spake of the temple of his body.” The Jews thought He was referring to the literal Temple, and they received His words with contemptuous incredulity. But after Jesus' resurrection, “his disciples remembered that he spake this; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.” It is only in the light of the resurrection that we can understand the Bible, and interpret and believe the words and claims of Christ.

It is noticeable that Jesus began His public ministry with an act of holiness rather than of power. He wished to teach the Jewish nation that their supreme need was spiritual cleansing and purification as the people of God; and He wished to suggest that He could bring them such blessings, if they would only accept and follow Him. Moreover, it is interesting to observe how Jesus saw – in the unbelief that was manifested even in the first hour of His ministry – the certainty of His final rejection and the clear vision of the cross. Those who would not receive Him would indeed destroy the “temple of his body.” But He also saw the certainty of His resurrection, and all that it would imply and secure. It would forever be the supreme justification of His claims. And just as His death pictured the destruction of the physical Temple and the cessation of its symbolic worship; so also, His resurrection would be the building up of a truer spiritual Temple – namely, His Church. No longer do we worship God with a ritual of forms and shadows and symbols; for now there has arisen a system of truer worship, and of more real fellowship with God Himself!

During the seven days’ celebration of the Jewish feast, Jesus remained in Jerusalem (verses 23-25) – arousing curiosity, wonder, and even apparent faith by performing certain miracles. “Many believed on his name” – that is, they were willing to accept Him as a Worker of miracles, as they observed “his signs which he did”; but they did not really trust Him or commit themselves to Him as Master and Lord. They did not believe in Him as “the Christ, the Son of God.” Hence we read that “Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men.” He Who could read the heart was not deceived by any mere external appearances or outward professions. He could distinguish between insincere “belief” and real faith; and to those who are not willing to commit themselves to Him and trust Him entirely, He never reveals Himself in all His fullness.

It is noteworthy that these verses form a link between the preceding narratives and the following remarkable events. In this chapter, we have seen the absolute unbelief of the Jewish rulers and the true faith of the disciples. But in the next chapter, we shall behold a picture of a Jewish ruler whose faith (at first) is only the imperfect belief of those who only accepted Christ as a Worker of miracles; but as his faith deepens, Christ does reveal Himself to him – and then the ruler also becomes His disciple!

*Lord Jesus, we pray for the grace of Your Holy Spirit, so that as we go into the crowded cities and homes of those around us, we may kindle them with the passion of our holiness – doing everything to the glory of God! Amen.*