

# The Arrival of Newness

*John 2:1-22*

## Introduction

We all understand the excitement and anticipation of the arrival of something new. Even the youngest among us know of the excitement of receiving a new toy, perhaps an American Girl doll, or a new bicycle or skateboard. Maybe you are excited about a new pair of soccer cleats, you know, the ones that promise to make you run faster and jump higher (oops, that was the slogan for Red Ball Jets). But one of the strongest settings providing emotion on the arrival of newness, a situation many of you are recently familiar with, is in the arrival of a new baby. Whether at the end of a nine month pregnancy or the anxiety in completing adoption paperwork; whether your own, or your own child's, or even the newborn of a sibling or friend, there is great joy and excitement with this event. There is a new creation, an arrival of newness full of promise and hope!

As we open the Gospel of John, we are challenged to read it through John's own purpose statement found in John 20:30-31. There John says, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John says these were written so that we (the intended audience, both original and later, like us) may believe...and that in believing we might have life, both a "life to come" and "true living now." So, we will be focusing on what constitutes correct belief or faith throughout the text. The gospel of John was written to bring people to a true, saving, eternal life receiving belief. John in these verses indicates that it is a belief that creates new life, but it is also a faith that sustains new life.

But is not just a belief for believing's sake. It is a belief "that". There is an object to this faith. John's desire is that in the reading/hearing of his gospel we will believe "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." And John's view of faith is a complete faith. Through the years, Christians have identified three distinct aspects of Biblical faith. We see all three of this right here in John 20:31 (and by extension, throughout the entire Gospel). First, there is the content of faith, the data that must be understood and acknowledged. This corresponds to John's "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." It is not just merely "knowing" something that brings life; it is acknowledging it as true. There must be some assent to (agreement to, affirmation of) the factuality of what it is that one believes. You cannot have a Biblical faith and constantly be one who doubts whether or not this is real. But there is a dimension even deeper than just agreeing that this is true. Faith lives accordingly. Genuine, Biblical faith aligns its "doing" with what it says it believes. Are you willing to live in this reality and truth, in doing so we are promised this kind of believing will with it bring "life in his name."

As John is building this vision of faith/belief, he vitally connects it to demonstrating God's work as the impetus and ground of belief. In doing so, he overtly and consciously connects the intrusion of the Messiah, the Christ, to the overall program of God's work in all of history. He began with clear allusion to the "creation narrative" and continued with the preparation of the prophet. He now opens a section that runs from verse one of chapter two to the end of chapter four. This section has several individual narratives that introduce the work of the Christ as "newness." Not a "newness" disconnected from the old or the past, but a newness in fulfillment of what has been promised in the past, a reality that until now has only been in picture and in shadow. Let us open by looking at one of these shadows in order to set the tone for our reading this morning in the Gospel of John chapter two by first opening our Bibles to the prophecy of Joel, chapter three.

## **New Hope – True Promises**

The book of Joel is a record of Joel's prophecy is about the impending judgment upon Israel as a nation because of their rejection of God's covenant promises and their outright unbelief. He uses a contemporary famine, the result of a phenomenal locust invasion, as a picture of the human armies of judgment yet to come. Joel is careful to present this judgment as "from God" even though it is in the context of human politics and warfare. And yet, because of God's promises, Joel completes his prophecy of "doom and gloom" with ultimate hope and salvation. Turn to Joel 3:16-21 and we will read from verse 16 of chapter three...

The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake. But the Lord is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.

"So you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it.

"And in that day  
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,  
and the hills shall flow with milk,  
and all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with water;  
and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord  
and water the Valley of Shittim.

"Egypt shall become a desolation and Edom a desolate wilderness,  
for the violence done to the people of Judah,  
because they have shed innocent blood in their land.

But Judah shall be inhabited forever,  
and Jerusalem to all generations.  
I will avenge their blood, blood I have not avenged,  
for the Lord dwells in Zion."

These assertions from this passage are pertinent to John's gospel, not that John is quoting this passage (most of John's use of the Old Testament is in the form of

allusion rather than quotation), but that this type of passage is a backdrop to John's understanding of God's program for creation.

### **God Roars**

First off, God's voice roars. Note in verse sixteen that God speaks in deliverance. His Word announces and brings his redemptive blessing and assurance. We have heard that idea echoed in the opening verses of John's gospel, that the Messiah/Christ/deliverer is the very Word of God.

### **God Renews**

Second, God's deliverance brings renewal. Look to verse 17. That "day" will bring the blessing of wine, milk and water. It is a day of "re-creation", of "new creation." Sustenance yes, and even more, abundance and joy! God will not merely restore but bring a new and living relationship out of barrenness.

### **God Resides**

Thirdly, from verses 17 and 21 we see God's presence as he resides in Zion. Zion is not merely a reference to Jerusalem, but to the temple mount in particular. When you see mention of Zion, you should think God meeting with his people in residence. This is pictured for us in the OT as the tabernacle and temple. And in that "day" God is present in Zion.

### **God Restores**

And lastly, God's people are with Him forever. The fear and dread of covenant unfaithfulness is removed. There is a very real sense of "newness" expressed in the salvation announced by Joel in his prophecy. With this as a backdrop, let us now turn to John chapter two and be exposed to two events in Jesus' ministry and life that should scream "newness" to us in our anticipated reading. The first we note the bringing of "new wine and indeed true blessing."

## **New Wine – True Blessing (vv 1-12)**

### **A Celebratory Situation (vv 1,2)**

Let us read this narrative by recognizing the setting and situation.

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples.

Jesus was invited to a wedding. Not so unusual in this culture that celebrated family and marriage. But don't get caught in the trap of only seeing this as some affirmation in Jesus' ministry of the institution of marriage. John wants us to see more. John refers to Cana to connect this to the end of chapter four. And don't overlook the fleeting reference to "the third day." (John is not in the habit of wasting his words.)

### **A Simple Problem (vv 3,4)**

We go on to read the problem. Most narratives will be arranged around a problem and resolution. The “meaning” of the narrative will be principally found in this relationship and how the problem or conflict was resolved. This is then enhanced by the context of the narratives surrounding it. We read the simple problem in verse three.

When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.”  
And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”

Running out of provisions for the banquet would be a social disgrace to all involved. Because of Mary’s apparent concern, some speculate she was serving somewhat as a hostess, this being a family member’s wedding (some even suggest John’s own). This seems to be a mundane concern but read between the lines in the dialog. Jesus brings ministry importance to it by his remark that John uses to increase the tension in this dialog. We should be wondering, “What is the big deal?” Much is being said in the simple statement, “they have no wine.”

### **A Subtle Complication (vv 5,6)**

Mary may have understood Jesus’ veiled reference to his ultimate mission, and yet left the response to his own purposes. We read in verse six these words.

His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”  
Now there were six, stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

Again, do not miss the details. We are not looking at six ordinary water pots. These are ceremonial, used in ritual washings. They are not full. This information should complicate our problem. We now have the issues in front of us in these ideas, “they have no wine” and they have “empty water jars for purification.”

### **A Surprising Climax (vv 7,8)**

What we have in the narrative next is the climax, the resolution of the problem. Let’s again notice what we see.

Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it.

The climax finds itself in Jesus commanding the pots to be filled. Note that John does not resolve the tension by explicitly saying “and he turned water into wine.” In the next verse we find a passing reference to there being wine there in the pots, but Jesus resolution is to “fill the pots.” The point of our story is in the filling of the ceremonial pots.

### **Satisfying Observation (vv 9-12)**

After the climax there are often issues of the story that bring closure and completeness to the story. We have this illustrated in the host of the party’s remarks.

When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now."

He is in essence saying, "We now have real wine!" What we had before was a just a prelude to the real thing. This is unusual and special, that the best would come in the face of crisis. Because of the filling of the pots, the wedding now has "good" wine. The celebration is better, more satisfying, and complete. John finishes with his own editorial remarks.

This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

In identifying this as a "sign", John introduces a term he uses, not as just identifying the miraculous, but also the purpose of the event just related. We see belief engendered by Jesus' displaying glory. Was it just because he turned water to wine? Our informed reading tells us otherwise! Jesus is bringing a cleansing, a purification that results in abundance. We should tingle at the connection to "the day" of Joel and related passages. The Word made flesh and dwelling among us, the one bringing light into darkness, is now bringing a cleansing that is permanent, celebratory and glorious!

## **New Temple – True Presence (vv 13-22)**

### **A Solemn Setting (v 13)**

As we move forward in this unit, we should be on the alert for relatedness in this next section to what we have just read. Again, we begin with the setting of our narrative. We are told Jesus is going to Jerusalem because it is Passover. There has been much ink spilled over whether this is the same event reported by the other gospel writers at the end of Jesus' ministry or an additional event only recorded by John. Respected authors have both opinions, but for us, remember John is using events to inform and instruct us about who Jesus was and how we are to believe.

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Keep in mind the significance of Passover. It is not to be thought of as merely a festival day, but rather a day commemorating God's miraculous deliverance from bondage and oppression. Using the blood of an innocent, those whose belief followed in obedience were spared from God's judgment. This festival was one of solemnity and worship; it caused one to reflect on God's covenant provision and expectation.

### **A Shameful Issue (v 14)**

And then we are confronted with a complication of the setting.

In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there.

It is easy to read this as though the activities of “those” were somehow corrupt and sinister. But John does not care about their motives. It is their presence, their presence in the temple that is corrupting the worship and power of the occasion. This leads us to the actual conflict; yes, I am suggesting that the presence of “money-changers” and sellers of animals is not the conflict that John is highlighting.

### **A Surprising Action (vv 15-17)**

The conflict is found in Jesus’ action, which was surprising for many.

And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.” His disciples remembered that it was written, Zeal for your house will consume me.”

Because of Jesus zeal for bringing relationship and worship to his people as intimated in the sixty-ninth psalm, he moves this distraction from the temple area (likely the court of the Gentiles, which no one really cared about at this time in Jewish history anyway). God’s house is God’s presence. Worship is required. But it is more than that, this action is one of removal of the old. The provision for sacrifice is no longer to be needed. The temple as the locus of atonement and forgiveness is about to undergo transformation.

### **A Significant Response (vv 18-19)**

Recognizing some justification for this action, the leaders responsible for the temple and its activities do not have this “rabble-rouser” or “lunatic” carted off, they come for a reason that his authority superseding theirs.

So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?”  
Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

They wanted a sign (they just saw it), something that demonstrated his right to do what he did. So he explains the sign. In effect he is saying, I am the presence of God for you, I bring atonement and forgiveness. I bring worship. Destroy this temple, the one that this great edifice is but a mere shadow and picture, and it will be raised in three days (see the three day remark again?). The conflict and resolution is that Jesus is preparing them to think of new temple and true presence of God, not picture, they don’t even get the picture correct!

## **A Split Understanding (vv 20-22)**

But in everyone's blindness they don't see the sign.

The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

Even John reports that his disciples did not grasp the significance of this event and dialogue until after Jesus had been raised.

When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

There is new wine of blessing and celebration because Jesus brings cleansing and forgiveness, and a new temple and worship because Jesus brings God's real presence to us. How does this affect our belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God?

## **Reflect and Respond**

### **Jesus as God's blessing...**

We first must see Jesus as God's blessing. Our need for cleansing and forgiveness must be in the forefront of our relationship with Him. We must see our sin and failure as a barrier. We must recognize our rebellion as worthy of "a hoard of locusts" in judgment. And then we see Jesus! We have no wine. Our water pots are empty and ineffective. Jesus is here to answer our every need and in abundance.

### **Jesus as God's presence...**

Then we must see Jesus as God's presence. We may try to find alternative routes to God's presence. We may avoid God's appointed way and (as later we will see) argue whether God can be worshipped on our own mountains. We are trashing God's worship, cluttering it with garbage and waste. Then in comes Jesus! We are distant. We are alone. But then, God is here because Jesus is here! Jesus brings peace and love, blessing and presence, forgiveness and life, so that we believe and know we are his children forever!

Do you believe?