

SESSION 3

I Will Raise

Jesus brought honor to the Father in word and deed.

JOHN 2:11-23

MEMORY VERSE: JOHN 2:19

FIRST THOUGHTS

While driving, we may see a sign that indicates what is on the next exit. That sign is not the entity it advertises but points beyond itself to a restaurant, hotel, or other attraction we may want to visit. John wrote his Gospel so readers “may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing [they] may have life in his name” (20:31). The signs in John’s Gospel point to Jesus being the Messiah, the Son of God.

(In PSG, p. 28) **What signs stand out to you when driving on a highway? How do those signs help you make decisions along the way?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 2:1-25

This session’s context includes three incidents in which people believed in Jesus. Each time, Jesus displayed His glory and honored the Father. The first involved a wedding in Cana of Galilee. This city was located near Jesus’s hometown of Nazareth. Apparently, His mother was close to the families of the couple being married. So, Mary, Jesus, and His disciples were invited.

At some point, the wedding party ran out of wine. It is curious that Mary came to Jesus with this need. The couple may have been embarrassed, but it was not Jesus’s problem. In fact, He asked His mother what the situation had to do with Him. Nevertheless, He quietly performed a miracle, turning a large quantity of water into wine. The headwaiter declared this wine to be superior to what had been served previously. In this simple act, Jesus displayed His glory and His disciples believed in Him.

The second incident features the primary passage for this lesson. It describes the famous scene of Jesus expelling money changers and merchants from the temple courtyard. The other Gospel writers place the cleansing of the temple after Jesus’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem, less than a week before His crucifixion.

Some scholars argue these narratives described two separate events. Others point out that John was not interested in presenting a chronological account of Jesus’s activities. They contend the incident occurred only once and that John included it earlier in his Gospel for theological reasons. Since John’s primary purpose was to help readers believe in Jesus, we could understand why he might place the story here.

The scene ends with Jesus’s prophecy that if the temple were destroyed, He would raise it in three days. He was speaking about the resurrection of His crucified body. After His resurrection, the disciples recalled His statement and believed in Him.

This took place during the Passover festival, which was also when the third incident of faith occurred. Jesus performed various miracles, probably healing people who came to Him. As a result, many observers believed in Him. Jesus understood that these were not necessarily true believers, so He did not depend on anyone who held circumstantial faith.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

GLORY SHOWN (JOHN 2:11-12)

Verse 11

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.

Reviewing the changing of water to wine in *Cana of Galilee* often focuses on the content of the wine rather than the purpose behind Jesus's act. He was under no obligation to assist the couple who had not purchased enough refreshments, but He used this situation to reveal His divine nature. John used the term *signs*, a word that implies a validation of authenticity. This was the *first of the signs*, and Jesus performed it for two reasons.

First, He honored the Father as He *revealed his glory*. *Glory* can have many meanings, but in this context, it refers to the greatness of Christ's person and power. John later used similar wording in his first epistle to describe how Jesus's divinity was demonstrated to the apostles (1 John 1:2).

During the actual miracle, only a few servants knew what had happened. They filled the jars with water and transported a sample of the new wine to the headwaiter. Jesus made no display for the benefit of the wedding guests. This sign of His deity was known only to a few.

A second purpose for this miracle involved Jesus's *disciples*. Having joined Jesus and His family for the occasion, they probably remained near Him. In all likelihood, they heard Mary as she informed Jesus of the need and saw His response. They witnessed the servants' actions and heard the testimony of the headwaiter. His transformation of one substance into another furthered their faith.

As a result, they *believed in him*. The verb tense suggests a growing faith. Interestingly, John mentioned nothing about a faith response on the part of the wedding participants or by Jesus's family.

Verse 12

¹² After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

Following the wedding, Jesus *went down to Capernaum*. Biblical geography employs different references from what is familiar in western culture. To "go down" does not indicate someone traveled southward. Capernaum was actually northeast of Cana, but to get there, one journeyed from a higher elevation to a lower location. So, to "go down" literally means moving from a higher spot to a lower spot.

Being accompanied by *his mother and brothers and disciples* suggests they were all at the wedding. The phrase *brothers* refers to James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (Matt. 13:55). They and Jesus shared a common mother, but Joseph was the father of Jesus's half-brothers.

Although Nazareth was their home, Capernaum became Jesus's primary residence when He was in Galilee. Located north of the Sea of Galilee, it was far from the political and religious maelstrom of Jerusalem. In addition, Capernaum was near the homes of several of Jesus's disciples, including his earliest followers: Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, and Nathanael. However, the group *stayed there* for only a few days.

(In PSG, p. 31) **How does Jesus reveal His glory to us today?**

WORSHIP EXPECTED (JOHN 2:13-17)

Verse 13

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

Trying to reconcile John's insertion of the temple cleansing at this point is futile. The three Synoptic Gospels place the event at the end of Jesus's ministry, prior to the crucifixion. John, however, was not trying to present a chronological account of Jesus's life. He recorded events and stories in a way that would help people believe that Jesus was the Son of God and be saved (John 20:30-31; 21:25).

About half of John's Gospel focused on the last two weeks of Jesus's life. At the end of the temple narrative, he mentioned the disciples' recollection of this event after His resurrection. John was captivated by the fact that Jesus loved him and gave Himself for him. He filtered every aspect of his Gospel through that loving sacrifice.

This passage began by introducing the setting, rather than offering a time-stamp. *It was almost time for the Jewish Passover.* This *Passover* was one of at least three, and possibly four, Passovers in John's Gospel. Specifying this festival as *Jewish* seems unnecessary, but John may have been emphasizing Jesus's identification with Israel. As a Jewish man, it was natural for Him to go *up to Jerusalem* for Passover. The spatial reference *up* addressed elevation, as Jesus actually traveled south.

Verse 14

¹⁴ In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.

In the temple, Jesus found cattle, sheep and doves, and others . . . exchanging money in an area known as the Court of the Gentiles. The temple complex had several distinct sections. The temple itself held the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place surrounded by various porches, the treasury, and other vital components. The western court was used exclusively for male Jews. On the eastern side was the Court of Women, where female Jews could worship. On the outer edge was the Court of the Gentiles, where non-Jewish worshipers came to pray. The merchants and animals had displaced the Gentile worshipers from their space, even though God had intended His house to be a place of prayer for all nations (Isa. 56:7).

The Jews had ceased allowing Gentiles into the temple area, considering them unclean (Acts 21:29). In addition, they began letting the merchants in the Gentile court. Many pilgrims could not easily bring animals on the long journey from various points in Israel, but in the courtyard, they could purchase whatever animals they needed for their sacrifices. Some scholars believe unscrupulous merchants added to the problem by charging exorbitant prices (Matt. 21:13), though John did not mention that in his account. Whatever the specifics, all the activity would have made it difficult for anyone to focus on their worship.

Verses 15-17

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!" ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

Jesus responded not with a flare of human anger but with deliberate, righteous indignation. He took time to make a *whip out of cords*. Using materials on hand, He fashioned an instrument to drive the animals and their owners *from the temple*. The text does not say Jesus actually struck anyone. The term *drove* implies force but not necessarily violence. Nor should the word *all* be taken to include the worshipers since this term is associated with *sheep and cattle*. Jesus's attention was on the ones causing distractions and hindering worship.

While Jesus did not use His whip against the *money changers*, He did pour out their *coins* as He *overturned their tables*. As noted, in addition to distracting Gentiles, dishonest merchants may have been taking advantage of Jewish pilgrims as well. The poorest worshipers could not afford oxen or sheep, so the law allowed them to offer pigeons or *doves* (Lev. 5:7). If the merchants were gouging prices, they were taking advantage of the most vulnerable of God's people.

Whatever the exact situation, Jesus ordered the merchants to *get these out of here* and to *stop turning my Father's house into a market*. These dealers and their customers may have been astonished at Jesus's bold
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interference with their businesses. They and the Jewish religious authorities also were likely amazed that Christ referred to the temple as His *Father's house*.

The passage indicates that Jesus's *disciples* did not join in His actions. Still, they later *remembered* the Messianic Scripture about how zeal for God's *house* would *consume* him (see Ps. 69:9). Of course, the purpose of the sacrificial system ended with the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God.

As we worship God both privately and corporately, believers must demonstrate sincerity by focusing on Jesus rather than trying to make worship conform to what pleases us. We must avoid anything that draws attention away from Jesus and consistently check our own hearts and motivations for worship.

(In PSG, p. 32) **What are some ways people show disregard for worship today?**

SIGN REMEMBERED (JOHN 2:18-23)

Verses 18-19

¹⁸ The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

While no one apparently tried to stop Jesus, some did challenge Him. The word *responded* does not mean *the Jews* asked a question. They were responding to His actions. While the reference to the Jews could apply to the merchants, John often used this general term to mean Jewish authorities. This latter interpretation fits the context better.

They wanted to know *what sign* Jesus could offer to justify His *authority to do all this*. The term *sign* did not mean they expected a miracle. Instead, they wanted validation for His authority to commandeer the courtyard and expel the merchants. The phrase *can you show us* implied their belief that they alone had the right to determine what went on in the temple.

Jesus did not offer any human credentials. Instead, He promised a different kind of validation. He *answered* with a cryptic prophecy about what would happen if someone were to *destroy this temple*. He claimed the power to *raise it again in three days*. Greater than healing the sick or changing water to wine, this sign would powerfully proclaim Jesus as the Son of God—and His right to judge those perverting the house of God.

Verses 20-22

²⁰ They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?"

²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

Given the proximity to the temple, the Jews naturally thought Jesus was referring to the physical structure that had been under construction for more than forty-six years. In fact, work was still going on in various parts of the complex, and construction would not be completed until AD 63 or 64.

The Jewish leaders believed God protected the place where He was worshiped. Plus, the reconstruction had been an ongoing project for nearly half a century. King Herod's close political connections to the Roman power structure made any attack on the temple unthinkable, though it would be destroyed some 40 years later in AD 70. Even if the impossible took place, how could Jesus claim the power to *raise it in three days*?

Of course, Jesus was not referring to the buildings that surrounded Him. He was talking about *his body*. Some in this group likely were in the mob that would later shout for His crucifixion (Luke 23:21). These religious leaders would demand that the Roman governor, Pilate, order the death penalty for trumped up charges. Both Roman and Jewish hands were instruments in the Father's purpose of offering His Son for the payment of human sin (Matt. 27:27-37; John 11:47-53; Acts 2:22-23).

The people standing before Jesus would not have understood His hidden meaning. Certainly, they were not considering His death and resurrection. Jesus's words were more for the benefit of *his disciples* who *recalled what*

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he had said after He was raised from the dead. Again, John was writing from the future perspective of accomplished events. Even the disciples, including John, did not understand Jesus's allusion at the time. They probably were as mystified as the Jewish authorities who confronted Jesus.

Only with the advantage of hindsight did John and the others recall this saying. As they confirmed His prophetic promise in the reality of the resurrection, the disciples *believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken*. *Believed* doesn't suggest that they doubted Jesus's words when He spoke them. Rather, it indicates that they continued to believe or reaffirmed their belief later with deeper understanding.

Later, Jewish leaders used Jesus's words against Him during His trial (Matt. 26:61). As He hung on the cross, they ridiculed Him with their version of what He had said (Matt. 27:40). Not only did they misapply the statement He made regarding His body, but they also misquoted Him as saying that He would destroy the temple. To the end, they continued to misunderstand His words.

Verse 23

²³ Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name.

While Jesus refused to answer the Jews with a sign of His authority beyond His upcoming resurrection, He did many miraculous *signs* during the *Passover Festival*. As mentioned, this week-long event brought thousands of pilgrims to *Jerusalem*. While Jesus would not perform like a stage magician for the benefit of His opponents, He did have mercy on the sick, lame, and blind. These acts are more easily understood in the context of Jesus's final week before the crucifixion. John's inclusion of the *signs* supports the argument for his non-chronological insertion of this account.

As a result, *many . . . believed in his name*. To believe in Jesus's name meant much more than simply understanding that He was Jesus of Nazareth. The way He taught Scripture with authority and the power of His miraculous acts convinced them that He was the Christ, the Son of God (Mark 1:22,27). In his opening remarks of this Gospel, John declared the way people became children of God was by believing in Jesus's name and receiving Him (John 1:12).

Later, John reiterated the negative application of this principle. People who refused to believe remained condemned and were lost (John 3:18). The purpose for John's Gospel was to help people receive eternal life by believing in the name of the Son of God (John 20:31). During this week, many believed by putting their faith in Him as the Messiah, though Jesus was discerning about who really trusted Him (2:24-25).

Believers should worship Jesus as the Son of God. His death and resurrection convince us that He alone is the Christ and is worthy of worship. If we truly have experienced saving faith, the natural response requires us to praise Him with our voices and glorify Him in our lives.

(In PSG, p. 35) **How does the resurrection serve as a sign of Jesus's glory and authority?**

KEY DOCTRINE

God the Son

He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. (See John 20:16,27.)

BIBLE SKILL

Examine Old Testament passages quoted in the New Testament.

John pointed to Psalm 69:9 when the disciples reflected on the removal of the merchants and money changers. Read Psalm 69 and note other places the psalm is quoted in the New Testament. How do the other quotes relate to the point being made in John 2 if any? How does reading Psalm 69 give a deeper understanding of the events taking place in John 2?

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