

John 2: Miracle at a wedding and confrontation at the temple

In these two contrasting stories Jesus helps the celebrations at a wedding and goes head to head with the heart of the religious establishment.

What do you think it would be like to spend an hour with Jesus?

(1) Two days later there was a wedding ^a in the town of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, (2) and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. (3) When the wine had run out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They are out of wine." ^b (4) "You must not tell me what to do," Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."

(5) Jesus' mother then told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." (6) The Jews have rules about ritual washing, and for this purpose six stone water jars were there, each one large enough to hold between twenty and thirty gallons. (7) Jesus said to the servants, "Fill these jars with water." They filled them to the brim, (8) and then he told them, "Now draw some water out and take it to the man in charge of the feast." They took him the water, (9) which now had turned into wine ^c, and he tasted it.

He did not know where this wine had come from (but, of course, the servants who had drawn out the water knew); so he called the bridegroom (10) and said to him, "Everyone else serves the best wine first, and after the guests have drunk a lot, he serves the ordinary wine. But you have kept the best wine until now!" (11) Jesus performed this first miracle in Cana in Galilee; there he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him. (12) After this, Jesus and his mother, brothers, and disciples went to Capernaum and stayed there a few days.

^a Throughout the Bible marriage is a metaphor for the relationship between God and his people.

^b This would have been a social disaster for the host.

Would you invite Jesus to your wedding? Why?

Why do you think Jesus' mother involves him?

^c In the Bible wine is a metaphor for God renewing his relationship with his people.

What is needed from the servants to see the miracle?

Why do you think the writer brings together the old rituals with a symbol of God's renewal?

What do you make of Jesus producing 150 gallons of wine for wedding guests already pretty merry?

Why did the guests not realise the quality of Jesus' wine?

Why do you think the writer notes this?

What does the writer say is the significance of the miracle in (11)?

What is the response of the disciples? What would this have meant?

The structure of the story can be shown as follows:

- Invitation (1-2)
 - The time has not yet come (3-4)
 - Command (5)
 - The old rules and rituals (6)
 - Obedience (7-9a)
 - Saving the best until last (9b-10)
 - Miracle and belief (11-12)

How does this help us to see the thrust of the story?

What stands out to you from this account about Jesus?

(13) It was almost time for the Passover Festival ^a, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. (14) There in the Temple ^b he found people selling cattle, sheep, and pigeons, and also the moneychangers sitting at their tables. (15) So he made a whip from cords and drove all the animals out of the Temple, both the sheep and the cattle; he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and scattered their coins; (16) and he ordered those who sold the pigeons, "Take them out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" (17) His disciples remembered that the scripture says, "My devotion to your house, O God, burns in me like a fire."

(18) The Jewish authorities came back at him with a question, "What miracle can you perform to show us that you have the right to do this?" (19) Jesus answered, "Tear down this Temple, and in three days I will build it again." (20) "Are you going to build it again in three days?" they asked him. "It has taken forty-six years ^c to build this Temple!" (21) But the temple Jesus was speaking about was his body. (22) So when he was raised from death, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and what Jesus had said.

(23) While Jesus was in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival, many believed in him as they saw the miracles he performed. (24) But Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew them all. (25) There was no need for anyone to tell him about them, because he himself knew what was in their hearts.

^a The Passover festival celebrated God rescuing God's people from slavery. The writer sees this as an illustration of what Jesus would do.

^b The temple was the spiritual, political and economic heart of the nation, where the people believed that God dwelt. The sacrificial system was corrupt, exploiting the worshippers.

Why was Jesus so outraged by what he saw?

How do you feel about his response?

What does this tell us about Jesus?

What did the disciples conclude about him?

^c Herod the Great rebuilt the temple to strengthen his own claims to power. The temple and kingship were bound together in Jewish thought.

Why were the Jewish authorities so upset?

How do you think they would have felt about

Jesus' response?

What are the implications if Jesus was speaking of himself as the new temple?

How did the disciples come to interpret what Jesus had said?

How did the people respond to Jesus?

How did Jesus respond to the people?

How do you feel about this?

What do we learn about Jesus?

The structure of the story can be shown as follows:

Jerusalem Passover
Disciples remember scripture
Challenge
The sign
Disbelief
Disciples believe scripture
Jerusalem Passover

What do we learn about Jesus in this story? How did he view the religion he encountered?

What do you make of Jesus in this passage?

Why do you think the author put these two stories back to back? How do they enrich our picture of Jesus?