

Gospels class 14-Jesus turns water to wine, cleanses the temple
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Good morning/afternoon,

We'll continue today with our study of the Gospels. In recent classes we've talked about the mission of John the baptizer, of Jesus being baptized, of His temptation in the wilderness, and last time we talked about Him calling His first disciples. We're now up to John chapter 2, so that's where we'll begin today with the story of Christ's first miracle.

John 2:1-11

2:1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

This is the third day from the last day mentioned. It's about a two-day walk to Cana from Bethsaida, and nothing is recorded about those intervening days. One of the days is presumably the weekly Sabbath, as John seems to be recording the first week of Jesus Christ's ministry.

Cana mentioned here was likely **Khirbet Kana, several miles north of Nazareth**. It's called "Cana of Galilee" because there was more than one Cana.

2 Now both Jesus and His disciples [obviously not all 12 at this time, just these five] **were invited to the wedding.**

3 And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."

In that time, wedding celebrations or feasts lasted about a week. And obviously this has been going on at least several days, because the wine has run out. And this was the biggest social occasion for this pair of newlyweds. It was a big community celebration, and essentially the whole town was invited. And if you didn't provide enough to keep everybody fed and happy, it was considered a huge social disgrace. And Mary picks up on what is happening and realizes there's a social disaster in the making. So she tells Jesus.

4 Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come."

This sounds like a rather rude response, but it's actually a Hebrew idiom translated awkwardly into Greek. The literal wording is "What to Me and you?" It essentially means, "Why do you involve me?" or "Your concern is not mine." Why does He say this? He answers when He says, **"My hour has not yet come."** As we'll see later, Jesus was careful at times as to when and how He revealed who He was. This is just the first week of His ministry, and He isn't as open at this point as He later will be.

But His mother clearly doesn't take His response as rude, as we see from what she says:

5 His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."

So she didn't know *what* He would do, but she knew He would do the right thing.

6 Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece.

So we're talking about 120-180 gallons of water, or what today would be roughly 800 bottles of fine wine. Why did Christ supply them with so much more wine? Probably because the wedding feast would go on several more days, and that's how much more wine they would need for all the guests.

Let's talk for a minute about these **stone vessels containing water**. Here are some that have been excavated and put back together, so this is what they looked like. You can see that some of them are quite large. This has to do with Jewish ideas of ritual purity. We know from Jewish writings from around this time that stone vessels were considered to be immune from becoming ritually impure. So the Jews of that day went to great effort and expense to produce stone vessels for ritual handwashings.

These would be filled with water, and the people would use these smaller vessels that look like coffee mugs to dip water out of the large vessel and pour it over their hands to ritually wash before eating. These stone vessels were only used in the first century, and their use ended when the Romans put an end to the Jewish rebellion and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D.

If, as some Bible critics would have you believe, the Gospel of John was written a century or two later than it was and by somebody else entirely, how would someone writing a century or two later know about Jewish purification rituals and their use of stone vessels? As we see from this example and many others that we'll come across, only someone writing who actually lived while those vessels were in use would know about them and their purpose. So this is more evidence that the Gospels were written in the first century by those who personally witnessed these events firsthand.

So back to the story in verse 7—

7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim.

8 And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it.

9 When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom.

10 And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!"

11 This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

As we noted in an earlier study, verse 11 says this was the "beginning of signs," or miracles, that Jesus did. Some of these fictional gospels or stories about Jesus performing miracles as a child are just that—fictional stories.

Going forward, as we discuss the actions and teachings of Jesus Christ, I'd like to introduce a new element into our thinking. I'd like us to think of **four key questions for us** as we read the accounts in the Gospels. Those four questions are:

1. What does this teach us about the nature and character of God? (The Father and Jesus Christ)

2. What does this teach us about the way God interacts with His people and mankind?

3. What does this mean for your relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ?

4. What does this teach us about Satan, the adversary of God and mankind?

Why ask these questions as we study the Gospels? Because *this is the whole point of all of God's Word*—that we learn about God's nature and character, that we learn about how He interacts with us, what this means for our relationship with the Father and Jesus Christ,

and that we learn about our adversary. This is why God has given us His Word.

So in line with this, when we study the miracle of turning water to wine in Cana, what do we learn by asking these four questions?

Let's take the last question first: What does this teach us about Satan, our adversary? Not much, because he isn't a factor here. Satan isn't mentioned, nor is there mention of him using people or circumstances to oppose Jesus Christ.

So what does this tell us about the nature and character of God the Father and Jesus Christ, what does it tell us about how they interact with God's people and mankind, and what does this mean for our relationship with Them?

What does this story of Jesus turning water to wine teach us? I jotted down a few points to take away from this, and maybe you have some to add.

- **God is kind and considerate.** He blessed this couple getting married and their families with a miracle just to keep them from being embarrassed on possibly the biggest social occasion of their lives. That's the background of what's going on here. For the wine to run out on the biggest social occasion of their lives would've been a huge social blunder in that culture and it would've taken them years to live down, if ever.

So what does this mean for your relationship with God?

He will be kind and considerate toward you. God is a loving Father who wants to give you every good and perfect gift, including eternal life as part of His family in His Kingdom. And Jesus Christ gave the ultimate gift, surrendering His divinity and great glory and majesty with the Father, so He could come to earth to show us how we should live and to give His life as a sacrifice for us that we might have our sins covered and receive that gift of eternal life.

- **God is generous and giving.** How much water was turned into wine? About 150 gallons, or around 800 bottles. That is an enormous amount for a small village of maybe 200-400 people. He could've created just a fraction of that, but He didn't. He was very generous and made this a wedding celebration no one would forget for a long time.

What does this mean for your relationship with God?

He will be generous and giving toward you. We could cite many, many scriptures here but won't for lack of time. But we know that everything God does toward us and for us is for our good. We know He gives us His law as a blessing to us. We know He gives us His Word, the Bible, as a blessing to us. We know He gives us His Spirit as a blessing to us. And we can go on and on with everything He gives us.

- **God meets our genuine needs.** A need was there, and He took care of it. He didn't have to, but again He did it because He is kind and considerate and generous and giving.

What does this mean for your relationship with God?

He will meet your needs. He may not give you all of your *wants*, but He will meet all of your *needs*. And there is a difference.

- **God is a God of quality.** He produced the very best wine, not Ripple or Mad Dog 20-20

or Two-Buck Chuck. He miraculously made the best wine, as they recognized.

What does this mean for your relationship with God?

He wants us to be a people of quality. He wants you to be a person of quality. He wants you to become perfect as God in heaven is perfect, as Matthew 5:48 tells us. He wants us to recognize quality and excellence and make that a part of our lives.

• **God wants us to be happy.** Here Jesus performed a miracle so that a celebration could continue on for several more days and not have to break up and have everyone go home.

What does this mean for your relationship with God?

He will help us to be happy. Again, He is kind and considerate and generous and giving. He gives us His Spirit. And what fruit should that Spirit produce in our lives? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. If you are utilizing God's Spirit, nourishing it and helping it to grow within you, one of the fruits that should come from that is joy, or happiness. We should be thankful and happy for all that He gives and has given us.

• **God wants to be involved in your life,** even in the details. He performed this first miracle to prevent this newlywed couple from being embarrassed and humiliated in front of their community. Again, He does this because He is kind and considerate and giving and generous.

What does this mean for your relationship with God?

He will be involved in your life if you let Him. He wants to be involved in your life. He called you to be His son or daughter. He called you to be part of His Church. He made the first step, calling us while we were still sinners. He wants to spend all eternity with you. But He won't force it. You have to accept Him into your life to be a part of it.

• **God is involved in the small things.** This didn't take place in front of thousands of people in Jerusalem. It took place at the wedding of a couple at a small village in Galilee.

What does this mean for your relationship with God?

He will be involved in your small things if you let Him. How many times has God been involved in the small things in your life? We could probably talk about that for hours—the times He's protected us from harm, from embarrassment, the times He has answered prayers, the times He has blessed us and we didn't even know about it until later, and on and on it goes. But again, we have to *want Him* to be involved and *let Him* be involved.

Anyone want to add any others you might've thought of?

Again, **keep these four questions in mind** as we go through the Gospels. As you read through these accounts, and not just here but in everything you read in the Bible, if you ask yourself these questions you'll find that you'll learn a great deal more about God and how He deals with you and all of us, and you'll find it very enlightening and encouraging. So write down these questions and ask them as you read God's Word.

So back to John 2:12 to finish up this portion—

12 After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days.

We'll talk a great deal more about Capernaum in the future. **For now I'll just show you** where it is on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, not far from Bethsaida. We'll talk a lot more about this in the future. Notice that John says they "went down" to Capernaum. This is because Cana is up in the hills, and Capernaum is down at lower elevation on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. So obviously this is written by someone who knows firsthand the geography of the land and mentions this just in passing.

I want to do a digression here to cover a couple of things that I wasn't sure when to cover in these studies, and this seems like an appropriate place before we get further along. Notice here that Jesus' stepfather Joseph is nowhere mentioned in any of these events. The last time we read of Joseph was when Jesus went to Jerusalem for Passover with Joseph and Mary at age 12. Jesus is now 30. Sometime in those 18 intervening years Joseph must have died, leaving Jesus, who was the firstborn son, as the new head of the household, with four younger brothers and several younger sisters to help take care of. This thrust Jesus into a new situation where He learned things He couldn't have learned otherwise.

Let's analyze this from the perspective of Jesus being our High Priest and intercessor. **Hebrews 4:15** tells us—(NRSV)

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.

We know that we have an elder brother and High Priest who is able to help us in every circumstance because *He's been there*. He knows what it's like. He's gone through it Himself. How did Jesus learn a lot of the basic things we go through in life every day?

With Joseph dying while Jesus is a young man, this is how, though not married, *Jesus learned family responsibilities*. He became the family breadwinner. He learned what it's like to be responsible for keeping a family clothed and fed—for seeing that the younger brothers and sisters made it off to school on time—to see that they were all dressed and ready for Sabbath services—to see that there was food in the pantry—to set and stick to a family budget—to see that the bills were paid on time—to be sure that all of the many details of overseeing a family and household were carried out correctly and responsibly.

Jesus Christ needed to learn all the kinds of experiences and problems we go through in this life so we could have a High Priest who, as it says here, is able to sympathize with all that we go through in this life. Without a wife and children of His own, He became not just an older brother, but a kind of surrogate father to His younger half-brothers and half-sisters. And so although He was never physically married, in this way He was able to experience all these kinds of things that we go through in this life.

In the same way He also would've learned much about another major aspect of life other than family—that being the work world. He would've learned what our work and employment experiences are like by assuming management of the family business and being responsible for providing for a large family, dealing with customers, training other employees, making and living up to contracts, dealing with quality control, working with debtors and collecting on bills, focusing on management and planning and all the other

many details that go with owning and operating a business.

He had to learn to deal with all these things and to experience firsthand these things that the rest of us have to learn and go through on our jobs. There's a great deal to learn here about basic human relationships and interaction that He wouldn't have learned any other way. This is how I think He spent those 18 missing years from age 12 to age 30—I think He most likely spent much of that time essentially raising up a family, bringing up His younger brothers and sisters and learning important lessons in life that He wouldn't have learned otherwise. He had to go through this to be our high priest and intercessor. He wouldn't have learned them any other way.

As part of this digression, let's also take a closer look at what the occupation of Joseph and Jesus likely was.

Matthew 13:54-55—

54 And when He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, “Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works?

55 “Is this not *the carpenter’s* son?

And **Mark 6:3** says of Jesus Himself—

3 “Is this not the carpenter . . . ?

The word translated “carpenter” in both places is the Greek word *tekton*. It means “builder” or “craftsman.” When the King James Version translators saw this Greek word meaning “builder,” they substituted “carpenter.” Why did they do that? Because all the builders in England that these translators knew worked with the most common building material in England, which was wood. And every translation since has followed their lead.

But in Judea and Galilee of the first century, **the common building material was stone**, which you see to this day. Builders were people who worked with *stone*, not wood. **Wood was quite scarce and would be used for rafters** and doors and doorframes and tools, as we see from this photo of the inside of house constructed in the first-century style. But wood was much too scarce to build houses out of wood. The walls of houses were made out of stone or mud brick **covered with plaster**, as shown here, made of pulverized stone mixed with mud and straw and other materials. There are stone **quarries all over that area** because it's all limestone, which is a very good building material.

Let's notice another passage over in **1 Corinthians 3:10—**

10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder [architekton] I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it.

Paul here describes himself as a “master builder,” and you can see this same word *tekton* in the word translated “master builder.” A master builder doesn't build a foundation out of wood, he builds it out of stone. You'd never use wood for a foundation because it would rot away in a few years. So this is a clear indication that a *tekton* was someone who worked with stone rather than wood. (And if you didn't catch it, this is where we get our English word *architect*—the original meaning was a master builder.)

Let's look at another passage in **1 Peter 2:4-5.**

1 Peter 2:4-5—Notice that Peter is writing this, and Peter probably knew Jesus better than any of the disciples, being the one who was right there with Jesus all the time. Look at what Peter says:

4 [We are] Coming to Him [Jesus Christ] as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men [as a stonemason would reject stone that he thought was unsuitable], but chosen by God and precious,

5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

So Peter is saying that we, as members of the Church, are like stones being built up into a **spiritual house**. So who's the stonemason building the house with us as stones? Jesus Christ is the stonemason!

Nowhere in the Bible do we see an analogy or metaphor of Jesus Christ building with wood. But we do see the **metaphor of Him building with stones** with *us* as the stones and Him as the stonemason. I think Peter uses this specific metaphor because that's what Jesus Christ was—a **stonemason**, one who built using stone. This means He was a rugged, strong man—**one with strong hands and strong muscles** from a lifetime of hard work. And I think that plays out in the next story we'll be covering, which is when He drove the moneychangers and animals from the temple. And *nobody* stood up to try to stop Him. They didn't want to take on those strong hands and strong muscles.

Any questions?

Now we'll move on to the next event in the Gospels, which is the cleansing of the temple.

We'll pick it up in **John 2:13-22—**

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

14 And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business.

15 When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables.

16 And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!"

We talked a little about the corruption of the priesthood and the Jerusalem religious establishment when we discussed John the Baptizer. So what's going on here that causes Jesus to react in such a forceful manner? To understand that, we need to understand some of the historical background that isn't mentioned in the Gospels.

When the Romans made Herod the Great "King of the Jews" in 37 B.C., about 60 years earlier, the Romans and some of the Jews saw this as a good moneymaking opportunity. So the Romans started **selling the office of high priest to the highest bidder**. In the approximately 60 years leading up to this time there were no fewer than 28 different high priests—an average of a new high priest every other year. Of course, God's instruction was that the high priest was to be of the line of Aaron, brother of Moses, and he was to serve in that position for a lifetime appointment until he died. So the system God intended was totally corrupted by this time.

So those involved in this scheme had a good thing going, at least for themselves. Herod and his Roman backers got the money from the highest bidder and no doubt a lot of that money made its way back to Rome and into the hands of the Emperor. And the Jews who bought the office of high priest had a good thing going, because whoever bought it then controlled what went on at the temple and could make a lot of money. Here's an

illustration of a priest's house that was discovered and excavated in Jerusalem after the 1967 war. And it was more like a palace than a house—the owners lived very well indeed.

And what was going on at the temple? We see here in John's account specific mention of the money-changing and the selling of animals for sacrifice—doves, sheep and oxen. So what's happening here with these activities? **Let's talk about the money-changing first.** People came to the temple from all over the known world. We see that in Acts 2, where people came from the Parthia and Mesopotamia to the east, from Asia Minor to the north, from Egypt and North Africa to the south and southwest, from Arabia to the south and southeast, and from Rome to the west.

And when they came to Jerusalem, **they brought their own local coins.** The Roman Empire had its own standard coinage, but some of these areas had their own coins. So just as if you traveled to another country you'd have to change your dollars for the local currency at a moneychanger, the same thing was taking place here. You'd change your local coins for the official temple coin, which was the Tyrian half-shekel, chosen because it had a highly pure silver content.

Here's what the Tyrian half-shekel looked like—it was minted at Tyre, on the Mediterranean coast in what is today Lebanon. On one side was the god Melkart, and the reverse side had an eagle. There's a copy of this coin in the bags of coins I'm passing around. The coins at that time were made of gold, silver, bronze and copper.

It was required that every Israelite male pay what was called the “temple tax” once a year for the upkeep of the temple and such things as purchasing animals for the offerings, wood for the fires, temple repairs and the like. We find this back in **Exodus 30:11-14—**
11 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

12 “When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number, then every man shall give a ransom for himself to the LORD . . .

13 “This is what everyone among those who are numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (a shekel is twenty gerahs). The half-shekel shall be an offering to the LORD.

14 “Everyone included among those who are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering to the LORD.

Since the Jews weren't allowed to mint their own coins by the Romans, the priests determined that **the Tyrian half-shekel** was the coin to be used for the temple tax that each adult male would pay. So they would come to Jerusalem with their local coins from wherever they lived, and they had to change those coins for Tyrian shekels to make this offering. And what happened then? Frankly, the moneychangers would charge exorbitant rates for **changing people's coins into Tyrian shekels.** Instead of a small markup of maybe three to five percent, their fee according to some sources was up to about 100 percent.

A similar thing happened with the animals mentioned here. People would come to Jerusalem with an animal they had raised, **such as a lamb,** to offer as a sacrifice. And the animal had to be without blemish. So the priests who were a part of this Jerusalem religious establishment would inspect the lamb and say, “this lamb has a scar on its leg, or it has this wart on its back, or one ear droops a little,” and they would reject it. “So you'll have to buy one of our lambs with the official temple seal of approval. And yes, it

costs five times as much as the going price for lambs, but that's a small price to pay for the privilege of honoring God with a proper sacrifice." So they would rip people off.

And these businesses were concessions controlled by the high priest and his friends and family. **Annas is one of the high priests mentioned** in the Gospels. He was one of these individuals who had bought the office of high priest, which he held from A.D. 6 to A.D. 15. He made himself very wealthy from it. So wealthy, in fact, that he made it more or less a family franchise. He was followed as high priest by one of his sons, a son-in-law—who is the Caiaphas mentioned in the Gospels—then four more sons and eventually a grandson, so this was the family business for a long time. Josephus describes Annas as “a great hoarder up of money,” which tells us something about his motivation and character.

So by this time the office of high priest and the Jerusalem religious establishment had become totally corrupted by this system. They would sell these concessions for moneychanging or selling sacrificial animals, and they would get a cut or a kickback from these businesses. So the priests, who were supposed to lead the people to God and be examples of righteousness, were complicit in actually ripping off the people who came there to worship.

That's why Jesus, when He cleansed the Temple, called it a den of thieves—because it had become an organized and established system built around stealing from the people who came to worship at the temple. And when Jesus comes along and begins to threaten their power, what do they do? They conspire to discredit Him, and when that doesn't work, finally they will plot to murder Him so they can hold onto their power and source of income.

Question: John places the cleansing of the temple at the beginning of Christ's ministry; Matthew, Mark and Luke place it in the last week of Christ's ministry. How do we reconcile this? The most obvious answer is that it happened *twice*—once at the beginning of His ministry, and again at the end. You might say that at the beginning of His ministry He's firing a warning shot across the bow, and at the end of His ministry He knows what they're planning and that they're going to kill Him, so He just piles it on to make it very clear what their motivations are and to make it absolutely clear what *they* stand for and what *He* stands for, and the great gulf between them.

So after this happens, in **verse 17**—

17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.”

And as we might guess, this is a *remez*, a hint or clue to look back to something else written earlier in Scripture. This is a quote from **Psalm 69:9—**

9 Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up,

And with this being a *remez*, let's see what the message is that John is giving us with this. First notice that Psalm 69 is a *prophetic Psalm* about the Messiah's suffering during the crucifixion. We find portions of this Psalm quoted in the Gospels, such as:

4 Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head . . .

(quoted in John 15:25)

21 They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. We see this fulfilled in Matthew 27:34; Mark 15:23, 36; Luke 23:36.

So let's notice the context of this statement about the zeal for God's house eating Him up and see the rest of the message John is giving us with this *remez*.

6 Let not those who wait for You, O Lord GOD of hosts, be ashamed because of me; let not those who seek You be confounded because of me, O God of Israel.

7 Because for Your sake I have borne reproach; shame has covered my face.

Do you see that prophetically this is Jesus crying out to the Father during the time of His crucifixion?

8 I have become a stranger to my brothers, and an alien to my mother's children;

9 Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.

10 When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting, that became my reproach.

11 I also made sackcloth my garment; I became a byword to them.

12 Those who sit in the gate speak against me, and I am the song of the drunkards.

13 But as for me, my prayer is to You, O LORD, in the acceptable time; O God, in the multitude of Your mercy, hear me in the truth of Your salvation.

You can read the rest of this Psalm on your own, but the entire Psalm is a messianic prophecy describing the last hours of the Messiah as He is imprisoned and then crucified awaiting death.

Why does John include this *remez* about the crucifixion here, at the beginning of Christ's ministry? Just as John earlier showed the conflict and tension between John the baptizer and the Jerusalem religious establishment, I think what John is doing here is showing the conflict between Jesus and the Jerusalem religious establishment and how that would ultimately play out—in Jesus' crucifixion and death as foretold by David in this Psalm a thousand years earlier. I think that's the point John is making—he's pointing the reader *backwards* to Psalm 69, but also *forward* to what's coming at the end of Christ's life when this prophetic Psalm would be fulfilled. So it's an unusual *remez*, a backward *remez* that also points forward prophetically.

18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"

19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

20 Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"

Herod had begun building the temple complex in 20 or 19 B.C., and it was still being built and expanded at this point 46 years later. In fact, it would still be worked on and expanded until just a few years before it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., about 40 years later.

21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

So in rabbinical fashion He gives them a cryptic answer to make them think. Obviously He wasn't referring to rebuilding this huge temple complex in three days, so He was challenging them to think. But they obviously didn't get it.

22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

So we'll wrap it up here for today. Any questions?