

January 14: John 2-3

Chapter 2

Vs. 1-12, The miracle at the wedding at Cana, Jesus' first miracle, is only recorded in John. This is the first example of the "greater things" Jesus promised the disciples would witness as they followed him. Cana is a small town Northwest of Nazareth. Mary is not named in John's gospel, she is only described as the mother of Jesus. For the host, running out of wine for the guests at a wedding would have meant certain social disaster. It's curious that Jesus' first miracle seems to be so "frivolous" as to save the social reputation of the wedding host. At first, Jesus does not seem to want to respond. His mother knows he can help, and urges him to, but Jesus' response in the original language is either "Get off my back" or "This is none of my business." And yet, he obeys his mother and intervenes. The jars for religious ablutions (ritual cleansing of hands at meals) seem larger than necessary for their function, but their size is meant to emphasize the total abundance of God. Jesus turns 120-180 GALLONS of water into wine. And not the bottom shelf stuff, the very best wine. This is what the party looks like when God takes over as host –there is abundance for everyone! In John's view, Jesus (and thus God) is the giver of extravagant gifts to humanity. This connects back to 1:16, "From his fullness we have received grace upon grace." According to vs 11, it was this first sign that inspired belief in his disciples. They saw the signs and those signs confirmed for them Jesus' true identity as God's Son.

Vs. 13-25, In the synoptic gospels, this story takes place in the last week of Jesus' life. Here in John, the cleansing of the temple is Jesus' introduction to Jerusalem. As many as 100,000 pilgrims visited Jerusalem for Passover each year from all around the world. The money changers played an essential role in converting foreign currency to Temple currency so that they could purchase the appropriate sacrificial animal. However, they did take a portion off the top –just like today how currency converters at the Airport charge you more than going to a bank's atm once you arrive in your destination. Jesus was enraged that the money changers had made a lucrative business out of something that was a religious essential for so many faithful Jews. It's strange that the Jewish religious authorities don't seem especially angry about Jesus' outburst, but they want a sign as to why Jesus did it. The sign will be Jesus' own death and resurrection (his body= the temple), but no one understands his words until after the resurrection. Vs. 23-25 sounds cryptic to our modern ears. It means that Jesus was skeptical of those who came to believe "in his name" as if the name of Jesus were some kind of magical incantation. Jesus wants them to see his signs and believe in him as a person, not just as a magical name.

Chapter 3

Vs. 1-21, Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a leader among the Jewish religious authorities, and yet he came to Jesus to gain a fuller understanding of his teaching. His faith was evolving through his experience of Jesus' signs. He confessed that Jesus was a Teacher who had been sent by God, and confessed that Jesus could not perform the signs he did without the presence of God. Nicodemus believed, but came to Jesus by night because he still feared to acknowledge him openly at this point in the story. Jesus makes 2 key statements to Nicodemus. 1. No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born from above/anew. 2. No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. Though Jesus does not say the words "Baptism", from this reference to being born of water and Spirit, the earliest church began to assemble an understanding of Christian Baptism (as opposed to John's baptism which was a baptism of repentance). Baptism is the entry right into the Church, it is God's promise. In Baptism one dies to the old self and is born anew from God's watery womb, the font. This passage is reflective of John's dualistic model of speaking and thinking, which is problematic. What's important is an understanding that life in God's kingdom is life with the Spirit, which may lead one to places one would not expect to go –must as the wind blows where it wills. Nicodemus fails to understand what Jesus is saying, he's too stuck on the impracticalities of a grown person being born from the womb again. Vs. 14, Jesus connects himself on the cross to the lifesaving power of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness, which brought healing and salvation to those who looked upon it. Vs. 16-21 are the narrator speaking directly to the reader/listener, explaining what Jesus' exaltation will mean for us and our world. This is the first "summary" of the gospel as a whole: God gave God's only son for the life of the world, that all who believe in him will be saved. Again, we see John's dualistic worldview: choose to be a child of the light or a child of the darkness.

Vs. 22-36, John the Baptist testifies to Jesus once again. It's curious that both Jesus and John were baptizing (according to John), but in 4:2, that's qualified saying that it was Jesus' disciples and not Jesus himself who were doing the baptizing. This connects back to Jesus' words to Nicodemus: you must be born of water and spirit. John's disciples seem to be jealous that Jesus is drawing a larger crowd than they are, but John makes clear that that's how it should be and that his joy is fulfilled as a friend seeing the bridegroom meet his bride. Vs. 31-36, John summarizes the events of the gospel. Some will accept Jesus' message, others will reject him. Whoever accepts Jesus accepts God as true. Jesus (the one whom God has sent) gives the spirit without measure (another example of grace upon grace).