

John Chapter 2

This chapter can be easily divided into three sections :

1-12 The marriage at Cana

13-22 The cleansing of the temple

23-25 Dealing with profession at Jerusalem.

On the face of it, these three incidents should rank amongst the most blessed in human experience. Firstly the marriage is the happiest of all events, then the temple at the Passover feast, the most blessed place on earth, then in Jerusalem, we meet those who have believed in the Lord Jesus, surely the most blessed people on earth. But as we look into each incident, we see that all is not as it should be – because of human weakness and failure.

So what is each scene trying to tell us? There is indeed a lesson to learn from all three. Miracles and other incidents in the gospels but be examined for the instruction they can give us. Indeed John describes the miracles in his gospel as signs – written that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing we might have life through His name. So what are the lessons of John chapter 2?

The first clue is in the last verse of the previous chapter :

51 And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

The Lord is speaking to Nathaniel about things to come. It is surely a reference back to Jacob's dream in Genesis 28 when he saw a ladder set up on earth whose top reached into heaven and Jacob saw the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. It is a picture of the millennial kingdom when heaven shall rule over the earth. Angels, who are the messengers of God, shall bring the instructions of heaven down to earth. But John 1:51 takes us one step further – the angels are now spoken of as ascending and descending upon the Son of man, the Lord Jesus. Following hard on the heels of this statement, we come to the events of John chapter 2.

The opening phrase gives us another clue – "And the third day". I believe the first day takes us back to chapter 1, verse 29:

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

The emphasis on this day is on the work of the Lord Jesus as the Great Sin Bearer. The emphasis is also on Israel. John the Baptist defines his ministry in verse 31:

And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.

John has come to bring the Messiah to the attention of Israel. In this section from verse 29 to 34, we are looking at the Lord and Israel in the days of His flesh.

The second day begins at verse 35 :

Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!

The "next day after" is not later on the first day but on the morrow, on the day following. That is how this expression is usually translated – on the morrow, on the next day. Now we are taken up with the Lord in Person and two of John's disciples leaving him to follow Jesus. The section down to the end of the chapter has to do with

the Lord calling His disciples. They go to dwell where He is – in the bosom of the Father. It is a picture of the church of this age. It is Christ in glory.

Now, in John 2, we have the third day. I believe it is a picture of the Lord in the millennial kingdom, back on earth amongst His earthly people. The first occasion is the marriage in Cana. It would speak of the joy of the Lord and His people as the kingdom commences. A marriage carries with it the idea of future prospects and future blessings. That is why when Babylon is judged in Revelation 18, we read that the voice of the bridegroom and the bride shall be heard no more at all. It is under the judgment of God – it has no future.

23 And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy

Verse 1 ends with , “And the mother of Jesus was there”. She is not called “Mary” in this chapter, but rather the mother of Jesus. I believe she is representative here of the nation of Israel. See Romans chapter 9:

5 Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

Mary is at the feast, and Jesus and His disciples are called. It is the Lord being received by the nation. But soon verse 3 tells us that there is a problem. They run out of wine. Wine in scripture always speaks of joy. It is wine that maketh glad the heart of man. Man’s joy however is short lived. Mary tells her Son what the problem is – “They have no wine”.

Mary in return receives what appears to be a rebuke. “Woman what have I to do with thee”? Mary is indeed in scripture the blessed virgin. She is called “blessed” three times in Luke chapter 1 – once by Gabriel, once by Elisabeth, and once by herself. We must be careful to give her the place that is due to her – but no more than scripture allows. But she seems to be slightly out of touch in Luke chapter 2 when she rebukes her twelve year old son. “Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing”. And she is out of touch certainly when she comes to meet her firstborn son along with her unbelieving sons. “Behold thy mother and thy brethren are without”. She seems to have been influenced by her unbelieving sons to come on that occasion. The Lord replies that those who do His will are His mother and His brethren. It is good to see His mother with these self-same brethren gathered with the disciples in Acts chapter 1, but Acts 1 is the last mention of her in the Bible – surely a significant omission.

The Lord continues in verse 4 – “Mine hour is not yet come”. There are many occasions in John’s gospel when “hours” are mentioned, but the “hour” is not always the same. Sometimes it has to do with His death, as in John chapter 7:

30 Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come.

Sometimes, as in John 17, it is the hour of His glorification :

1 These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:

But in John 2, it is the hour of the millennial kingdom that is in view. Although John 2 is a preview of the millennium, then was not the time for it.

In verse 5, however, Mary is undeterred by the seeming rebuke. She continues, “Whatsoever He saith unto you do it”. Was this faith on Mary’s part, or simply a demonstration of a mother’s pride in her son? Perhaps the latter would be nearer the truth. The advice of course was sound, and whatever He says to us, we should do it. John 14 goes even further and says that keeping His commandments is a proof of our love to Him:

21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

In verse 6, we learn something about the waterpots which were standing nearby.

And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.

The details are of interest to us. We are told that there were six pots. Six is seen in scripture as man's number. Hence Adam was made on the sixth day in Genesis chapter 1. In Revelation chapter 13, the number of the Beast is 666 – it is the number of a man. It is man at the height of his arrogance and rebellion against God. Then we read of the purpose of the pots – they were for the purifying of the Jews. They had to do with the ceremonials of the Law. Finally, we read of their capacity – two or three firkins apiece. They speak of the limitations of mankind and the limitations of the Law. The servants filled them up to the brim.

In verse 8, The Lord gives a further instruction, "Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast". It is generally assumed that the servants drew out the wine from the waterpots but can I make another suggestion? Could the wine not have come from the well rather than the pots? The Lord does not tell the servants to "pour out" but to "draw out". To "draw out" is the same word as is used by the woman at the well in chapter 4. "Sir, Thou hast nothing too draw with". If the wine came from the well, it would fit in more with the typical teaching of this incident - that man and the Law are limited, but the well provided by the Lord in His millennial joys will be ceaseless and abounding.

When the ruler of the feast tastes the wine provided by the Lord, he sends for the bridegroom to rebuke him :

Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.

Notice he does not say, "Thou hast kept the best wine till now" but rather the "good wine". The things associated with the Lord Jesus do not even stand comparison with worldly things. The Lord's wine is "good" and cannot be compared with any other. The same thing is true of Mary's action in Luke chapter 10 when she sits at His feet to hear His words. "Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her".

Thinking of ourselves in the present, what joy can the Lord bring to us in this present age. In Luke chapter 10, we read of the joy that filled the hearts of the 70 disciples sent out by Him. They returned with joy saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject unto us though Thy name". The Lord points them to an even greater joy – "Rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven". Thus we have the joy of service followed by the joy of eternal salvation. But then we have the Lord's joy – the joy of divine revelation. If the word of God is precious to us, we too could know something of this joy.

We make one final comment on this section before we move on. This is the first miracle recorded by John in his gospel. John says, "He manifested forth His glory and His disciples believed in Him". This is the purpose of all His signs in John's gospel – that men might believe in Him. The first miracle was like His last in this gospel. When He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead, the Lord said to His disciples, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby".

We come now to the second major incident in this chapter – the cleansing of the temple. There will be a temple in Jerusalem when the Lord returns again to the city. It

will have been polluted by what the Lord calls "the abomination of desolation". Paul writes about this in II Thessalonians chapter 2. The man of sin will sit down in the temple of God showing himself that he is God". The Lord will return to His temple to purify it.

John chapter 2 is a preview of that event. Verse 13 sets the scene :

And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem,

Notice it is the Jews' Passover, no longer described as the feast of Jehovah. The Passover was immediately followed by the Feast of unleavened bread. The Jews should have been busy purging the leaven from their houses and their persons. Instead they had corrupted the feast by their hypocrisy and disobedience.

"Jesus went up to Jerusalem". When one reads the first three gospels, one would think that the Lord spent very little time in the city, but John presents a very different impression. No less than 14 of the 21 chapters of John describe events that took place in Jerusalem.

What the Lord finds there is disturbing. It is like a market place. Worshippers from afar could come to the temple and buy their sacrifices on the spot. Even more conveniently for them, if they came with foreign currency, it could be exchanged on the spot. Everything speaks here of expediency. There is no exercise required on the part of the worshippers – no going out to the field and finding the best lamb from the flock. Here it had all been done for them. A great deal of what passes for worship in Christian circles today is little short of expediency. One can come along and listen to the minister or pastor and let him conduct the "worship". No effort is required by the congregation – it is easy Christianity. It is probably true that the assembly is the hardest place to be a Christian, especially as numbers dwindle. There is no hiding place – our attendance or lack of it is noticed. Brethren are expected to contribute – we need to come with a heart and mind prepared to pray or to worship.

It is obvious from verse 15 that the Lord first came to the temple, looked around, went out, made His scourge of cords, then returned. He did not fly off the handle as we might have done, neither did He go away and just "let the matter drop". He was angry but His anger was under control.

Notice also that He made a scourge of "small" cords. It was long enough to drive out the animals but short enough so as to inflict no suffering upon them. He poured out the money and overthrew the tables, but said to them that sold doves, "Take these things hence". He thought of the gentleness and meekness of the doves and saw to it that they came to no harm.

Verse 16 ends with, "Make not My Father's house a house of merchandise". It had become a market place. Note that this cleansing of the temple is at the beginning of John's gospel. He returns three and a half years later according to Matthew and the others and found it worse than before. It was then "a den of thieves". He spoke to the Jews in Matthew 23 and called it "your house". Here in John 2, it is still My Father's house". When we come to John chapter 14, the Lord describes His Father's house as a place in heaven and no longer as a place on earth.

His disciples took note of His actions and remembered it had been written of Him in Psalm 69:9, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up". Do we have a care for the house of God, the assembly?

The Lord's actions in the temple quickly cause questions to be asked of Him. "What sign showest thou unto us that thou doest these things?" What authority did He have? The Lord gives them a sign in verse 19:

Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise

it up.

In this verse, the Lord uses a different word for temple than that used in verses 14 and 15. The first word used covers the temple building and all the courts that surrounded it. But in verse 19, the Lord used the word NAOS which could be translated as "sanctuary". The temple building was the dwelling place of God. But the Lord now speaks of Himself as the sanctuary of God. In John 14:10 He speaks thus of Himself – "The Father which dwelleth in Me". In Colossians 2:9 we read that "In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily". Christ is the sanctuary of God.

Some years later they would ask Him again for a sign, and He gives them the sign of Jonah. "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so shall the Son of man be three days and nights in the bowels of the earth". It is the sign of His death and resurrection.

The sign is misinterpreted however by the Jews. "Forty six years was the temple in building". Would He build it in three days. When Solomon built the first temple, it took him only eleven years to build it. The temple of John chapter 2 was still the temple of Zerubbabel which had been refurbished by Herod the Great. 46 years suggests that the rebuilding of the temple had not been a major priority for Herod and the Jews or that it demonstrated the weakness and poverty of the nation at this period of time.

Does God have a sanctuary today? The temple in Jerusalem remains in ruins, but He does still have a sanctuary. In I Corinthians 3, Paul writes:

16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? 17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

The word here for temple is the same word used by the Lord in John 2 – it is the NAOS, the sanctuary. The words for "defile" and "destroy" are the same and mean to corrupt or defile. Holiness in the sanctuary is of vital importance – God will judge those who corrupt it.

Where else do we read of this temple or sanctuary in the New Testament? We find it in I Corinthians chapter 6:19:

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

The temple in Jerusalem was the dwelling place of God. In I Cor 6, the temple is not the assembly in a corporate sense but each individual Christian. We have a divine person dwelling within us and we are obliged to keep this

The Jews however did not forget His words in John chapter 2 and indeed three and a half years later, they accused Him of threatening to destroy the temple building, whereas He spoke of the temple of His body. Sadly His words had been forgotten by His own disciples who were slow to grasp the reality of His resurrection.

Verses 23 to 25 bring us to the third and final section of the chapter – the Lord's reaction to some who professed to believe in Him. While He was on this visit to the city, He did many miracles, as a result of which many believed in His name. The Lord's reaction to some of these people seems rather strange, "But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men". There was evidently much empty profession here. The same is true in John chapter 6 when many followed Him after He had fed the 5000 in the wilderness. "Ye seek Me, not because ye saw (perceived) the miracles, but because ye did eat the loaves and were filled". But the Lord in John 2 displays His omniscience. He knew all men. His omniscience is much in evidence in the first few chapters of John. Hence His knowledge of Nathaniel in chapter 1. It is one of the qualities of deity.

Notice He "did not commit Himself unto them". We are most used to the idea of us committing ourselves unto Him, rather than the other way around. We committed our lives to Him when we were saved and again when we were baptized. In Romans chapter 12, Paul tells us that we are to present our bodies a living sacrifice to God. It is a lifetime of commitment. In II Timothy, Paul looks back on his life and says about the Lord Jesus, "He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day". But He has also committed Himself to us. He has promised to be with us – "Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the age". He will never leave us or forsake us. He has committed Himself to keep us. "None shall pluck them from My hand". He has promised to return for us. "I will come again and receive you unto Myself".

This final picture in John 2 is typical of the profession that will exist in Israel when He returns to the nation. Many shall say unto Him then, "Lord, Lord, open unto us". Many will claim to have served Him. "Have we not prophesied in Thy name and in Thy name have done many wonderful works", But He will answer them, "I never knew you".

Thus the chapter gives us three previews of this day of His return. The joy of His return, His return to His temple, and His return to His people. Sadly, where men are involved, there is always weakness and failure.