

John 2:13-23

Last week our focus was on Jesus' sign (or miracle) at a wedding feast. John takes something simple that is also impossible for any human to do in order to demonstrate that Jesus must be divine. The miracle of turning water into wine also shows how weak and pathetic humans are: if we cannot do this simple thing, how much authority or power do we have, really?

Now that John has showed Jesus able to do what no human can do, the story moves on. Jesus takes the disciples along with his mother and brothers back to Capernaum. This seemingly insignificant detail shows that Jesus now treats his disciples like family. We will revisit this theme when Jesus does, ultimately, what no human is able to do. (Chapter 19!)

2:13

In Jewish writing, people always go “up” to Jerusalem. Even though Jerusalem was in the south of the Promised Land, people are always described as “going up” to the holy city. Jerusalem did sit in a geographically elevated position, but “going up” can also be seen as mirroring the “going up” that people would have had to do in order to enter the temple complex (all those steps!). Like going up the steps to the temple complex, “ascending” to Jerusalem was a spiritually humbling experience, a time for meditation, reflection, and confession.

Notice that Jesus is both differentiated from and included with “the Jews.”

2:14

These animals were all used in various atonement/sacrificial rites. The selling of these animals was logistically pragmatic (who wants to travel with pigeons or oxen for hundreds of miles... on foot?). They provided a valuable service for the faithful pilgrims who were coming to do their religious duties at the temple in Jerusalem.

2:15

A lot is made about Jesus' emotional state in this verse. He appears angry, or at least full of testosterone. This is the verse people use to prove that Jesus is not a sissy. (I prefer the 40 days of no eating or drinking in the desert, personally, but to each his own.) And while this activity would not have been undertaken by

someone who was weak or insecure, there is more to the text than John showing Jesus is manly. And what it DOES show is something, I believe, much more interesting AND, I know, much more relevant to you and me!

The money-changers, like those who were selling different animals, provided a service for the people who had come from far away. One of the requirements for the pilgrims coming to Jerusalem was to pay a “Temple Tax.” This tax had to be paid in local currency. Pilgrims from far away counted on being able to exchange their foreign currency for local. They were counting on the service the money-changers provided in order to do their religious duties. The problem was two-fold:

1. The money-changers were known for ripping people off with a very unfair exchange rate.
2. The money-changers had made Gentile worship of God virtually impossible, as they had set up shop in the Gentile Courtyard area of the temple complex.

Now, all of that is true, but the question is: how much OUTSIDE information does John want us to bring to his gospel? If we let John be John, then we come across a very negative view of both those who sell and the money-changers. He wants us to see them as people who deserve to be removed from the temple area. And while there were positive aspects to the services they provided, there were also more than enough negative reasons to remove them. (Over-charging, horrible “exchange rates”, prohibiting Gentiles from worshipping God, etc.)

2:16

We wonder why John singles out the ones who sold pigeons. After all, these would have been the lowest-profit items, selling for far less than oxen and sheep (previously mentioned). John does not tell us, so I’ll offer two possibilities.

1. John is saying: “Look, even the people who weren’t making a ton of money on their selling got blasted by Jesus!” If these guys got in trouble for what they did, imagine how bad it was for the people who sold oxen and sheep!
2. The people who would have to buy pigeons would be the ones too poor to buy sheep or oxen. In a twist that sounds more like Luke, John comes down on people who made money off of the poor. Had they loved their neighbor, they should have given the poor pilgrims pigeons for their sacrifices.

2:17

John recalls Psalm 69:9 by bringing to mind the thoughts of the disciples. And, for the first time, the disciples of Jesus are beginning to see in Jesus a fulfillment of Old Testament scriptures.

The zeal Jesus had for the Lord's house led Jesus to remove the sellers and money-changers, but it didn't stop there. It led him to BECOME the house of God. He is the place where God dwells and where atonement is made. In the Jesus-temple there is no need to bring money, no need to deal with rip-off artists, and no need to bring a sacrifice. In which temple would you rather go? The one with those buying-selling and money-changers, or Jesus?

2:18

The only "sign" so far in the gospel was the turning of water into wine. The reader of the gospel already knows that Jesus has the authority and the ability to do what he just did. The "Jews" (a designation, not for all Jews, but for a group that is particularly hostile towards Jesus throughout the gospel) don't know what the reader of the gospel already knows. They are that group John spoke of in 1:5 → they have not understood, comprehended or overcome Jesus. They are the darkness in which the light shines.

2:19

The sign Jesus points to is the last sign he will perform in the gospel of John. Often this verse gets interpreted symbolically. And, in doing so, there becomes only one point Jesus is making. However, if taken more literally, this verse carries a dual meaning that is significant!

The first thing to take away from this verse is a prophecy Jesus makes about his death and resurrection. This, the last "sign" he will give is also the most important! He speaks of his death and resurrection in terms the Jews clearly do not understand. Again, they are in darkness and cannot comprehend the light (or overcome it).

The other thing to take away from this is... well... obvious. JESUS IS THE TEMPLE! Metaphoric? Perhaps, but even a metaphor has some degree of correspondence to reality. What is it about Jesus that corresponds to the TEMPLE? Stone? Nope. Basin and laver? Nope. Built under Herod's reign? Not so much. So what is it about the Temple that corresponds to Jesus?

- The Temple was the place where God dwelt.
- The Temple was where people came for atonement.
- The Temple, in various ways, was open to all people.

2:20

And, predictably, the Jews have no clue what Jesus is talking about. Darkness.

2:21

Just in case you missed it, John connects the dots about Jesus' cryptic statement.

John wants to make sure you understand that Jesus is making a prediction about something that is going to happen to him. He'll add more details in the following verse...

2:22

John, again, makes sure that you know what he is talking about. John also teaches us about what is going to happen to Jesus: death and resurrection. He wants you to know that these events are signs that Jesus has authority to do what he did **HERE**, driving out those who buy and sell in the temple. Why? Because he is the only thing that can be used for atonement **BECAUSE** of the sign he will give the Jews: death and resurrection!

Not only did the disciples remember what Jesus says here after he rose from the dead, but they also believed the Scripture and the word (singular) that Jesus spoke. (Old and New Testaments anyone?)

John will focus later on how faith in Jesus is passed-down. The apostles were eyewitnesses. They got to see everything happen as it happened. Seems like it would be easy for them to believe. But what about those of us who came along later? How will we come to the same faith as the apostles? John gives us an answer here: the Scripture and the word Jesus spoke. Old and New Testaments. The Word of God. The book you brought with you to our study!

2:23

John assigns faith to the seeing and receiving of the signs he performed. Faith-and-sight is a theme that runs through the gospel. This theme is designed to create a little fear in the mind of the person who has not seen Jesus. "If faith comes from seeing and I have not seen, how will I believe?" Because John is good at suspense, he lets the cat out of the bag slowly. In the prayer of Jesus (John 15-17), he says that there are going to be people who believe in him down the road. But the cat fully escapes the bag in 20, where Jesus talks with Thomas and says that there will be those who believe without seeing. These people are blessed. (And are the ones reading John's Gospel!)