

Signs of the New Creation John 2 (03)

Introduction – What is the purpose of a sign?

Signs in John's Gospel

1. There are **seven** signs in the Gospel of John
2. The **purpose** of the signs is to reveal the glory of Jesus
3. The (miracles) signs are not primarily for humanitarian purposes
4. The seven signs point to the "**hour**" of Jesus' glory (= cross, resurrection, ascension)
5. The signs of Jesus reveal a pattern of **fulfillment** and **replacement**
6. John 2:1-11 is **not primarily** teaching us about the definition of marriage
7. The wine miracle reveals Jesus **abundantly** bringing messianic joy
8. The water transformed to wine points to the **new creation**
9. John 2 contains one important Old Testament quotation from **Psalms 69**
10. The temple cleansing contains much prophetic **symbolism** (especially of judgment)

A Unified Theme in the 'Cana Cycle' of John 2-4 (2:1-4:54)

D.A. Carson points out a thematic unity in this 'Cana cycle' of John. These three chapters teach us the truth of **2 Corinthians 5:17**, "*The old has gone, the new has come!*" Carson quotes C. H. Dodd insightfully, "The three chapters present the replacement of the old purifications by the wind of the kingdom of God, the old temple by the new in the risen Lord, an exposition of new birth for new creation, a contrast between the water of Jacob's well and the living water from Christ, and the worship of Jerusalem and Gerizim with worship in Spirit and in truth." This quote summarizes beautifully the theme of John 2-4.

I. Jesus Initiates New Creation Restoration (2:1-11)

A. Jesus performed signs to reveal God's glory (2:1-5)

1. The signs of Jesus recall the signs of Moses (Exodus)

- a. T. Desmond Alexander writes, "There can be little doubt that the most important theme running through the book of Exodus is that of knowing God." He further describes this as knowing God through **personal experience**.¹
- b. Many of the themes in Exodus **reappear** in the New Testament. Out of all four Gospels, John demonstrates the most connections to Exodus (and the OT). Alexander goes on to note that the beginning chapters of Exodus and the beginning chapters of John's Gospel both show an interest in signs. Listen carefully to what he writes, "**While the 'signs' performed by Jesus are all positive in nature, in marked contrast to the signs of 'judgment' in Exodus, it is surely noteworthy that the signs in both books have something in common. The water into blood and the death of the firstborn in Exodus are replaced in John's Gospel with 'signs' of hope: water turned into wine and a firstborn raised from death.**" This comparison between the signs of Moses and the signs of Jesus reveal the superior nature and meaning of the seven signs revealed in the Gospel of John.

2. All signs point to the climax of the "hour" of glory (2:1-5)

- a. Jesus, his disciples, and his mother are invited to attend a wedding (Jewish weddings celebrations lasted one week). Imagine all the food you would need to provide for the guests in attendance. When John tells us that the wine ran out you can imagine the **social embarrassment** and **shame** this would have caused. [Note – it is very possible that this problem of running out of wine was kept private. This whole miracle scene gives the indication that only a few people witnessed this wedding crisis as well as the miraculous turning of water into wine by Jesus. If this is accurate, it helps us to understand how Jesus progressively chose to reveal His glory]. In the Old Testament and Judaism wine is often an important symbol of God's blessing, abundance, rejoicing and the coming messianic age. This helps us to imagine how big this wedding crisis was. Just as the miracle here in John 2 symbolically points to the new creation, so too the lack of wine probably reveals that the old Jewish dispensation was incomplete and

¹ T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, chapter 13 "Who is the LORD?"

about to pass away. Jesus is the bringer of messianic joy who fills up the depleted resources of Judaism [this miracle happened on the 7th day of Jesus' first week of ministry].

- b. In John's Gospel the **meaning of "hour"** (or 'my time has not yet come') is a key reference which continues to point us beyond the miracle-signs that Jesus will perform. The meaning of "hour" when Jesus said, "*My hour has not yet come*" points forward to the cross [**Note:** "hour" has a double meaning in John: the hour of the cross and the ascension of Jesus. Both reveal God's glory]. This phrase makes us anticipate something greater Jesus is preparing to reveal. **Kostenberger** says, "**The framework of the entire Gospel refers to the moment at which God is fully glorified in him: the hour of his death, which for John constitutes also the moment of Jesus' exaltation** (his "lifting up", 3:14; 8:28; 12:32)." This is what all of the signs in John are pointing forward to and prepares us for.
- c. Jesus was not rebuking his mother. This is seen in her response of faith at the end of verse 5, "Do whatever he tells you." This expression is similar to Pharaoh's words about Joseph in **Genesis 41:55**, *Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph. What he says to you, do."* When Egypt had no food God used Joseph to solve the problem and when this wedding had no wine, Jesus provided what they did not have.

B. Jesus Supplies Messianic Joy (2:6-11) [Wine: symbol for messianic age]

1. The wine's quantity reveals the abundant provision of the new age (2:6-8)

- a. The timing of Jesus is perfect. The host will not be embarrassed. Yet at the same time, this miracle points to something far beyond the kindness of Jesus to meet the needs of a problem at a wedding long ago (**Salvation is not merely humanitarian efforts**). It seems intentional that John does not tell us **HOW** Jesus performed this sign. All we are told is that Jesus ordered the servants to fill the six large water containers used for Jewish purification rites. The servants obeyed and Jesus transformed water to wine. **F.F. Bruce** writes, "The filling of the jars to the brim indicates that the appointed time for the ceremonial observances of the Jewish law had run its course; these observances had so completely fulfilled their purpose that nothing of the old order remained to be accomplished." **D.A. Carson** explains, "the sheer quantity of water turned into wine then becomes **symbolic** of the **lavish** provision of the new age." **C.S. Lewis** described this as a miracle within the old creation yet it was a parable of the new creation. His point in saying this is important when he goes on to say, "**Christ has come into the world to fulfill and terminate the old order, and to replace it by a new worship 'in spirit and truth' which surpasses the old as much as wine surpasses water.**"
- b. We already mentioned that the Old Testament prophetically announced that the coming messianic age would be characterized as a time when wine would flow liberally (Isaiah 25:6; Jeremiah 31:12-14, 21; Hosea 14:7; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13-14; also 2 Baruch 29:5; 1 Enoch 10:19. The New Testament has the same view, Matthew 22:1-14; 25:1-13).
- c. **The Eucharist is our** participating in the messianic joy of the new creation (now) even though we still live in the old creation. The Eucharist prepares us for the future marriage banquet feast of the Lamb (Isaiah 25 and Revelation 19).

2. The wine's quality reveals the superior nature of new grace (2:9-11)

- a. The fact that the master of the feast did not know that a miracle had just been performed makes him a **credible and objective witness** to not only the superior quality of the wine Jesus miraculously made from water, but to the glory revealed in what Jesus did. Again **D.A. Carson** sees the great significance of these verses when he writes, "John's point is simply that the wine Jesus provides is unqualifiedly superior, as must everything be that is tied to the new, messianic age Jesus is introducing." In another place he writes, "**What is perhaps most noteworthy is not how many of the themes and institutions converge on Jesus, but how they are so presented as to make Jesus 'fulfill' them and actually replace them.**"
- b. The new wine points to the newness of the new covenant grace in Jesus Christ. This miracle very possibly points to an important parallel in the next chapter about being born from above. Just as the water was transformed into wine, so too sinners need to be transformed from spiritual death to spiritual life by the power of the Holy Spirit.

II. Jesus is Zealous for True Worship (2:13-25)

A. Judgment is at the heart of the temple cleansing (2:13-17)

1. The temple cleansing announced the coming Day of the Lord (2:13-16)

- a. **Take note** – the time when Jesus chose to cleanse the temple was the Passover. This will become more significant throughout John. The incident of the temple cleansing is not simply Jesus becoming angry because some people were exchanging money in the temple. This was not the main issue. The main issue was that the people were using the part of the temple that should have been devoted for Gentiles to conduct their business. In other words, Jesus drove out the money changers and sellers in the temple because the money changes and sellers were using space God reserved for Gentiles. This may be why Jesus said, “Do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.” The actions of Jesus were symbolic because it pointed towards judgment and restoration of worship.
- b. The temple had become more about business and taking of profits than worship and giving of praise. The Old Testament prophesied in part of this: **Malachi 3:1; Zechariah 14:21**. The temple cleansing was a prophetic and symbolic action whereby Jesus denounced worship that was not pure and calls people to worship God from the heart (Ezekiel 10:15-19; 11:22-23). **Popular Jewish expectations** were that Messiah would come to the temple, perhaps announce his Kingship over Israel and then deliver the nation from her oppressors. Jesus is the King of Israel and He did come to their temple, but it was never His intention to overthrow the Romans and establish national supremacy. But Jesus was not trying to generate ethnic pride. Jesus was inaugurating the Day of the Lord, but not according to popular expectations.

2. The temple cleansing powerfully foreshadowed the cross (2:17; Psalm 69:9)

- a. *Background: Davidic Typology (2:17; 15:25; 19:24, 26). Before the coming of Jesus, there was a Jewish expectation that the Messiah would come, purge, and reconstitute temple worship resulting in national independence (*Pss. Sol.* 17:21-22, 36; Mark 14:61).
- b. Verse 17 is an Old Testament quotation from **Psalm 69:9**. This helps us to better understand the purpose for the temple cleansing. Zeal is important, but without knowledge, zeal will remain incomplete (Proverbs 19:2; Romans 10:2). God is shown to be zealous for his holy name (Isaiah 59:17; Ezekiel 39:25). It is important to note **what** John says and to understand **why** John says this. **First**, the disciples remembered this, but did not fully understand the significance of this until after the resurrection. **Second**, John is quoting from Psalm 69:9. Why would John quote from Psalm 69:9 at this point? What purpose does it fulfill in revealing who Jesus is to us? What was the original context of Psalm 69? **David wrote Psalm 69 as a cry to God to save him from all of his enemies.** He begins the psalm by crying out, “*Save me, O God!*” David was a **righteous suffering** and reveals that his own brothers (countrymen) have turned against him. Remember in the John’s Prologue in chapter 1, *He came to his own but his own people did not welcome him?* Sound familiar? The zeal for true worship which consumed Jesus was forgotten by so many others.
- c. Notice the disciples recalled what David said, but in seeing how Jesus fulfilled David’s words John does not write, “I was consumed with zeal for your house” but “*Zeal for your house will consume me*” The tense is future, which again provides a clue to sometime after the temple cleansing. The clue to the cross is found in reading the rest of what David said in Psalm 69, **and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.** Yes, the temple cleansing revealed God’s judgment and here the temple cleansing points forward to the judgment that will fall upon Jesus at the cross. John does not quote this part of Psalm 69, but Paul does in **Romans 15:3** and gives it this interpretation. **Kostenberger** clarifies, “**John portrays Jesus as one who was consumed with passion for God’s glory and driven by a desire to remove from his people any obstacles to proper worship.**” The only way this can be fulfilled is if Jesus goes to the cross and pays the price of judgment and like David, Jesus had an abundance of enemies that plotted his downfall (5:18; 11:53). John will quote from Psalm 69 again in his Gospel in relation to the cross (15:25).
- d. The difference between David as a righteous sufferer and Jesus and the righteous sufferer is this: while the Old Testament psalmist expected deliverance from his

enemies and salvation from their wrath, God allowed his wrath to fall on Jesus for the sake of humanity's salvation. [This Davidic typology will climax at the cross]. The cleansing of the temple foreshadows the desire of Jesus to see a new temple built where people can freely worship God. This takes us to our next point.

B. Jesus fulfills the temple's purpose for the nations (2:18-25)

1. Unbelief blinds people to the reality of God's glory in Christ (2:18)

- a. **D.A. Carson**, "True to the Jews' spiritual blindness, they had missed the sign performed right before their very eyes." [The word "Jew" or "Jews" often has a restricted meaning in John, referring to the Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus]. This was not the time to ask this question. The response of the Jews who objected to Jesus failed to stop and consider the meaning of Jesus' action that day. They should have engaged in self-examination and repentance. This reveals they were not concerned with true worship. Jesus had just revealed his messianic authority and they completely missed it.
- b. In John's Prologue we already studied the verse which **anticipates the unbelief** that will **unfold** throughout this Gospel. *He came to his own and his own people did not welcome or receive him*. But the unbelief in this Gospel runs deeper. The more Jesus reveals His glory the stronger the opposition of unbelief becomes from some people. John is revealing that many of the Jewish people of Jesus' day are sadly fulfilling an ancient pattern of unbelief that began long ago at the time of the Exodus and continued to the prophets (Isaiah) and to the days of Jesus. So the first part of John's Gospel called "**The Book of Signs**" will end, "*For this reason they could not believe* (12:39; 10:26)." **Carson** makes an important point about this phrase. He writes, "Unbelief is not thereby blamed on God in a predestinarian sense, but is rather described as a punishment from God. God's judicial hardening is not presented as the capricious manipulation of an arbitrary potentate, but as a holy condemnation of a guilty people who are condemned to do and be what they themselves have chosen." The question of these Jews reveals they remain unconvinced that Jesus is the Son of God. They chose to remain in the blindness of their unbelief. When Jesus cleansed the temple he was symbolically pronouncing judgment and alluding to the future destruction of the temple. But Jesus was not simply describing the future destruction of the temple by the Romans in A.D. 70, he was speaking about the imminent destruction and reconstitution of the temple of his body. This takes us to our next point.

2. Jesus announced the New Temple anticipating worldwide worship (2:19-25)

- a. Note something important in verse 19 about what Jesus said. Here is a classic example of **irony and misunderstanding** in John. The word "temple" has a double meaning. The Jewish opponents of Jesus interpret the meaning of temple literally as a reference to the physical structure that Herod the Great had refurbished. This is clear from how they respond when they told Jesus, "It took forty-six years to build this temple" how could anyone rebuilt it again in just three days! **They respond to Jesus' prophetic announcement with hardened unbelief.** They thought Jesus had lost his mind and was speaking like a crazy man. **But Jesus was raised and the temple was destroyed!** (Kostenberger, Matthew 24:1-2). Interestingly, the Gospel of John was probably written after the destruction of the earthly temple, yet John never laments this loss. The opponents of Jesus understood everything Jesus said to them in a completely literal manner. They understood Jesus to be asking them to destroy a building called the temple. But John insightfully points out that Jesus was not speaking literally of the old temple, He was prophetically referring to a greater temple – the New Temple of his body!
- b. Verse 21 is one of the first verses in John preparing us for a major new development in how we understand the Bible's concept of temple. This is just the beginning of how John will develop this theme, but it is an important beginning. Although the temple cleansing may not be a sign proper, John is already pointing ahead to a major development of our understanding of the meaning of temple. These verses are building on the drama of 1:14 from the Prologue, *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth, and 1:51, And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."*

- c. If the Old Testament is to be fulfilled there must be a permanent substitute for the old temple. If worldwide worship is to be a reality, then the meaning of temple must expand into all nations. These are some of the many implications of what it means to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. These verses are more pieces of evidence which leads to the inescapable conclusion that Jesus is now the center of worship for true worship. If Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word who is equal with God yet distinct from God the Father, who became flesh (a real human being) is the center of worship. Just as the temple was the center of religious life for Judaism, Jesus is the center of worship for Christians.
- d. **What Judaism claimed about Jerusalem and the temple as focal points for all creation, John claims for Jesus** (Kostenberger). The temple cleansing was a symbolic statement of the approaching death of Jesus on the cross, but it was also an announcement that the focus of worship was preparing to shift to Jesus Christ. The temple must be done away with because Jesus' messianic mission is universal, encompassing all the nations of the world. **Jesus is the New and Final Temple for the nations of the world.** John will develop these universal themes of God's grace and the implications for why we are told to announce the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ to every person in the planet.
- e. **When I first read verse 23,** I was encouraged and thought of the purpose of John's Gospel (20:30-31). It sounded like they believed in Jesus, but several scholars pointed out to me, that Jesus knew their faith was not genuine (this reveals another Johannine irony – two different meanings for “believe”). Jesus is God and he knows everything you are thinking about (reminds us of **Jeremiah 17:10, I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind**). He knows if you truly believe in Him or not. Is your faith in Jesus real?
- f. This is the second reference to the Passover Feast in John (2:12, 23). John tells us when Jesus cleansed the temple, not simply to tell us the time of year Jesus performed this symbolic act, but to point to the fact that Jesus will be the new Passover Lamb and the new temple. He will fulfill and replace both. **One author** (Walker quote from Kostenberger) concludes: As a result, if any of his readers felt bereft of the Temple and of the spiritual focus provided by Jerusalem, John would have encouraged them not to mourn the loss of the city, but rather to see what God had done for them in Jesus. John does not bemoan the loss of the Jerusalem because the presence of God was not withdrawn (taken away). In Jesus God gives more than the Temple had ever given. Jesus stands in the place of everything Israel lost and everything you need for salvation (paraphrase). **Kostenberger**, “In fact everything previously associated with Jerusalem was now available in the person of Jesus, mediated by the Spirit.” All of this requires a new allegiance to Jesus. **In Christ, the story of Israel has now become the story for the nations.**
- g. **In Revelation**, John was overwhelmed by a vision in heaven. Then we read of the Lamb that was slain, now triumphant. *For you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, [10] and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth* (Revelation 5:9-10). **Revelation 15, [3]** *And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! [4] Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."*

Is your life a sign of the new creation? 2 Corinthians 5:7