

RUF Bible Study – John  
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John 2 - Lord of All/Groom/Temple<sup>2</sup>

Have you traveled much in foreign countries? One of the things you immediately notice are the signs. It's fascinating to look and try to translate them. Some are advertisements for various products; it's helpful when they put the thing they're trying to sell right in the ad itself – ah, that's an ad for toothpaste. Got it. Some of them are road signs that don't make sense to you. Where is this telling me to go? How fast is 40 km/h? Some of them are restaurants that serve various unknown foods. You can get cow stomach if you're not careful.

If you stick around long enough, you start to learn what the signs mean. Instead of being there in and of themselves, what they point to means something. That's how signs work, of course.

No one thinks that when you're driving down I-35 from Oklahoma City, when you see a sign telling you Dallas is south, that you're actually *in* Dallas. The sign for Dallas isn't Dallas. But it has to be connected to some reality *of* Dallas, or else the sign would be meaningless.

In John's eyewitness account of Jesus, we read about various signs. John even calls the miracles "signs." When we see these signs, and there are many of them, we need to ask, "What do the signs point to? What do the signs mean?" That will help us as we look to see who Jesus is.

Let's tell the story through chapter two and then go back to see what we can learn about and from the signs.

### ***The Story***

We have two episodes in this chapter. Jesus turns water into wine at a wedding, and Jesus clears the temple in Jerusalem. Both of these are fairly famous and well-known if you've read the Bible at all. Neither would be if you've grown up outside of the church.

In the first story, we find Jesus at a wedding in Cana. This is appropriate since many of the students in our group have gotten engaged (Mitchell and Katherine; Mary Rachel and Andrew; Emily and Levi; Malisa and John). Your ears should perk up here to see how Jesus' wedding experience went. We all love weddings, or you will before too long. They're great parties and places to see friends, as long as the two should be getting married.

Jesus has been invited to the wedding; perhaps it's a friend of his or family member getting married. His mother is there and she seems like she has some responsibility. It's good to note that Jesus was there and supports the wedding and the party. These Ancient Near Eastern weddings were huge town affairs, and they'd last a full week. There was drinking and dancing and talking – they were like a carnival. I imagine Jesus sitting there talking with people over a glass of wine and maybe a cigar in his hand now and then. He plays with the kids. He dances on the dance floor, not caring what people think. People enjoy hanging out with him. They like his joy. He's not judging them for being at the party, but he's right in there with them.

However, something goes terribly wrong. They run out of wine. Mary hears about this and comes to tell Jesus. This is bad for the party, and embarrassing for the groom and his family. In fact, sources say that the bride's family can sue the groom's family if something like this happened. That's how serious it is.

Jesus says to his mom. "Ma'am, my time has not come." He's not being rude *per se*, but he's not interested in being told what to do. This is strange. We'll come back to this for more later, but it's like he's thinking about something else. He is. But for now it sounds like he's saying he's not on the clock yet. He doesn't want to work for free.

Mary tells the servants to do whatever he says. This is a place where Mary transitions from being his mother – the one who bore him, nursed him, changed his diapers, fed and clothed him, put band aids on his knee – to his disciple. She too must follow him. She doesn't get any "special privileges," and we sense a sort of distance in Jesus throughout the gospels. But she knows who he is. She knows. And she tells the party people to do whatever he says, a mark of faith.

Jesus decides to do something. He takes these six huge jars and tells the servants to fill them with water. When they draw out the water, it's been turned to wine.

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For this series, I used commentaries on John from Boice, Skip Ryan, Gary Burge, D.A. Carson and Leon Morris and listened to sermons by as many people as I can find, especially Tim Keller, Ricky Jones, Fred Harrell and Scott Sherman. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

<sup>2</sup> Let me say from the very start here that it's going to be practically impossible for me to keep from plagiarizing from Tim Keller's two sermons on this – Lord of the Wine and Lord of the Whips. Those two sermons have been tremendously influential to me and I've listened to them repeatedly over the past ten years. I've done all my own research and reading, but it just may come out anyway sounding a lot like Keller's sermons.

Now this is very, very cool. It's a big hit at the party. Normally people would put the good stuff out first and bring the cheap stuff out last, when everyone is tipsy or drunk and wouldn't notice as much. The master of the feast says this very thing after he's tasted the wine, unaware of where it came from. Jesus saved the party, and he did so with style.

Let me take just a minute to say that this was obviously wine. In this part of Oklahoma, there are whole denominations that deny that Jesus made actual wine. Ludicrous. It is true that normal every day wine back then was diluted somewhat. But it would be diluted down to around 3% alcohol content, the equivalent of American beer. It would be like mixing wine with Sprite. Tasty. The whole text obviously is intended to tell us that Jesus made real wine, impressive wine, the best wine and a lot of wine (150 gallons of it!).

The Bible associates wine with blessing and joy.<sup>3</sup> We too should enjoy what God has given us. If you're over 21 (since we are to live under the laws of our nation and state), feel free to enjoy wine appropriately. It is a gift to you. But the Bible also warns of the danger of alcohol, reminding of the ways of a drunkard. Wine is to be enjoyed and used appropriately.

Thus Jesus saves the party. That's his first miracle. Strange, isn't it? Normally, you'd think if you were about to take the world by storm and be the most important man that ever lived; if you had the power to do anything you wanted, any miracle, any way; if you could speak with influence and conviction like no one in the world before or since – you'd want to make a more impressive debut. John puts this as Jesus' very first miracle, right after his monumental chapter one, in which he says sweeping, majestic statements about Jesus. Then – Jesus turns water into wine. Not what you'd expect. You don't really understand Jesus. Remember – it's a sign pointing to something.

But first, let's look at the second half of the chapter. As calm, cool and collected Jesus appeared at the wedding party, but he looks to be a wild man here at the temple. If he was the life of the party in part one, he's the part two party pooper.

It's the Passover, one of the big feasts for the Jews, the one that reminded them and pictured for them their miraculous, substitutionary deliverance from Egypt, led by Moses (recounted back in Exodus 12). People swarmed into the city, and they needed to get the right animals for sacrifice. They also needed to change money in order to make those purchases. Like arriving in an airport and exchanging money before you can buy a breakfast kebab at the kiosk.

No real problem here. These people provided a reasonable and helpful service. But they had crowded into the temple itself. Instead of being across the street, or down the corner, most likely they were now in what was called the Court of Gentiles, which was supposed to be a place of prayer, an access point to the temple for non-Jews. That had been effectively eliminated, making the temple now the ultimate in nationalism and religious pride. The mall had moved into the church.

Something happens to Jesus. We'll have to talk about what that is. Instead of saying, "Serenity now!", instead of taking deep calming breaths and thinking of longsuffering, he gets angry and decides to do something about it.

Jesus made a whip of cords. This wasn't an Indiana Jones whip that he carried around tethered to his belt for occasions like this. It wasn't a weapon. It was made of cords or straws. It was a few brushes, or a little straw switch. He couldn't do any damage with it. He didn't physically hurt anyone.

But he did make quite a scene, and people responded to him. Jesus is mad. You can imagine him – can you imagine him doing this? – pouring out the money from place to place, the surprised looks on their faces, languages everywhere, the animals all going crazy. He overturns the tables, upsets the applectarts, pulls the legs out. He creates chaos and pandemonium.

He doesn't want God's temple to be like this. He doesn't want the church to be so commercialized. He doesn't want the temple to look, smell and act like the mall. He wants God's church to be holy and a place where people can come to see, touch, feel and hear the holy.

The rest of the chapter comments on this story, using the word "sign" for us, reminding us that these things are signs and to try to understand them beyond the events themselves.

### ***Jesus' Signs – Who Is He?***

Fair enough. There is the story of John chapter 2. If we're saying these are signs, well then what are they pointing to? That's a great question.

In the first place, we see that Jesus is Lord of the wine.<sup>4</sup> Jesus is in charge here, even at the party. He doesn't go to the party and get sucked into his own little world. He isn't controlled by the party, and he isn't cooler than the party. He *is* the party. Jesus' first miracle is pointing ahead to the real banquet feast in heaven someday, when we will enjoy the full presence of God and each other without sin or cursing. In other words, all parties point to that one.

Jesus' wine is offered freely and with abundance. He made 150 gallons of the best wine possible.

I once went to a restaurant in Tampa that had a wine cellar. After asking about recommendations for good Missouri wines (our wine steward laughed), we took a tour to see the bottles. It was dark, dusty and musty down there. There were wines that sold for \$10,000 a bottle! You could drop \$250 a person in there for a steak dinner and bottle wine without even trying.

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<sup>3</sup> Joel 3:18 – "And in that Day the mountains shall drip sweet wine..."

Amos 9:13 – "Behold the days are coming, declares the Lord, 'when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.'"

Isa.25:6-8 – "On this mountain the Lord of Hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined...He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces..."

<sup>4</sup> Keller terms ahead

So I'm not talking about box wine here. This was the best. 150 gallons. That's the party you want to go to. Are you headed there? Do you feel excluded from that sort of party? Jesus offers, saying Come and eat and drink. Do not tarry till you're better. Jesus longs to save you, to give you a seat at the table, to have you eat and drink with him (do you hear the Lord's Supper language in this?).

(One more thing to note about Jesus' party. John points out that the jars used to fill with water and make the wine were made and used for the rites of purification. There's a sense here that Jesus is renewing and changing things with his acts and words. He is freeing us from the rituals of the law, to be truly able to rejoice at the party instead of worry about all the things we can and cannot do.)

Not only is Jesus the party, he's also the bridegroom. We sense that because Jesus is thinking of his wedding someday. This always happens at weddings doesn't it? When you're at a wedding, you start to think of *your* wedding. I remember doing this, and I know you do it too. Of course you do. When will it be? Who will it be? Will it be him or her? Will it be soon? Will it be ever?

Ah. Your mind goes crazy. You feel like you'd be willing to marry anyone who asked you, you're so overcome with wedding fever. Or you may get incredibly sad, wondering if it will ever, ever happen. You can feel lonely at the weddings. Weddings affect us, and they're intended to. You should think of your wedding when you go to someone else's.

That's what Jesus was doing. He was thinking of his wedding someday. This is one of the big images or metaphors of the Bible. Jesus is the bridegroom, and his church is the bride. In the book of Revelation (also written by John), we read of the groom finally getting his bride on her wedding day, and the feast that ensues, the joy and intimacy. Every other wedding is a foretaste of this one. Every bride and groom pictures this wedding.

But Jesus knows something else. When he thinks ahead to his wedding day, do you know what he thinks of? What do you think of? Every girl pictures the dress she'll wear. Some of you have it all planned out. You're thinking of what your last name may change to, and possibly not going on dates with guys' whose names make bad combinations. You're thinking of what dishes would be good for the apartment you're going to nest in. You're thinking of your attendants – how many, what colors? You're thinking of the honeymoon. You're thinking of sex – finally. Hopefully finally.

Jesus is thinking of death. That's right. His wedding day only comes when he dies for his bride. That's why he says to Mary, "My hour has not yet come." "My hour" is Jesus' term for his death.<sup>5</sup>

All this joy that is going to be yours comes through and because of the suffering of Jesus. All of the intimacy and love that is to be yours as the bride, comes because of Jesus' separation. If you are to taste the joyous, delicious wine, it is only because Jesus has drunk the bitter, awful wrath of God.

This is the gospel for you. That even though you are wicked and wrong, dark and unloveable, mean and callous, hateful and selfish, that God would send a groom for you to love you, marry you, stand for you, protect you and help you.

That would be enough, but there is another sign. Jesus is not only the true feast and the loving husband, but he is also the true temple. This gets us back to the second story, where Jesus cleansed the temple.

Why did he do that?<sup>6</sup> Although he didn't tell the people in the temple why he did it (he just did it without explanation), we get benefit of thinking about it and asking about it afterwards. Jesus arrived at the temple, and something set him off. He was thinking of the whole Old Testament sacrificial system. But he wasn't able to *think* about it, because it was too crazy and commercialized in there. The temple was supposed to be a house of prayer, a place of contemplation.

What was supposed to happen? You came to the temple. You never came to God emptyhanded. You needed to bring something to atone for your sins. So you bought a lamb or a dove, and you presented it to the priest. You should have thought to yourself, "I have done wrong. I deserve punishment. I have not loved God like I should. I have not loved my neighbor as I ought. I have broken the commandments. And yet, this lamb dies, but I get to live." If the temple is a house of prayer, you think, you pray, you meditate on what this substitution means. But they were too busy. It was too loud. Things were too crowded. It had become mechanical, something to do without meaning. That angered Jesus.

The Jews asked him straight up, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" They're looking for a sign.

Jesus says, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." That didn't make sense to the listeners, neither to the Jews or to the disciples. They didn't get it. That's understandable. If you could build a temple in three days, you would be the master architect, able to build anything anywhere.

Think of how long China prepared for the Olympics. Years and years to get ready for an event that lasted two weeks. They're building a structure on OU's campus that has been in the works for over two years. What is the hold up? It took two full weeks to replace the tile in my house's kitchen. The temple had been in progress since Herod's time, for over 46 years. How could anyone think of building it in three measly days?

They didn't get it, and we shouldn't blame them. They didn't really understand Jesus, so it shouldn't be a surprise if we don't always understand him either. He was speaking of his body. He is the new temple. The temple is a sign. It points to something else. It isn't the thing – it points to the thing. And the thing is Jesus. The temple was merely the sign to Dallas.

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<sup>5</sup> 7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; 17:1

<sup>6</sup> Keller stuff

Dallas had arrived! The people were saying to Jesus, “Dude! You act like you own the temple.” Jesus was saying, “Own it? I am the temple.”<sup>7</sup>

Remember in chapter one when John the Baptist said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!” That is temple language. He is the Lamb of God. He is the temple.

They understood this when he was raised from the dead. Then things started to make sense to them. Again, this points to Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. Just as his being the feast and the groom are made sense of in light of his death and resurrection, so is his being the new temple now understood because of the same. We’re able to understand Jesus better, to follow him more, to “get him” because of his death and resurrection.

### ***What That Means For Us***

The first application is fairly simple. Jesus cares about the little things in your life. He saved this guy from social embarrassment. That isn’t what the story is about, but that did happen. Jesus cares about your parties. He cares about your fraternities and sororities, your tests, your dates, your car, your jobs. So go to him and ask him to help you.

But the deeper meaning and application is: Do you “get Jesus”? Let me ask it this way – is he Lord of the Wine for you? Jesus had authority there. It’s not like Mary wore him out, pestering him over and over again to do a miracle. Please, Jesus, please. Just this once, Jesus. I need you to do this, Jesus. C’mon Jesus. And Jesus finally relented, tired of dealing with her.

No. He was Lord of the wine. He sets the agenda with his blessing. He gives generously, in his timing, but it’s connected with his life, death and resurrection.

This isn’t a text about how to have a great wedding. Though if you do want a Biblical wedding, there obviously will be wine (and I’d say dancing too, though I guess I can’t prove that). Jesus did bless this wedding with his presence, although he was thinking about his wedding.

When you think of your wedding, this true story means that someday you will be more fulfilled than you ever dream. If you are happily married someday, that will be a tremendous blessing for you, but it’s only a sign of things to come. Don’t think the sign is the thing itself or you will become tremendously unhappy and unsatisfied. If you are in a bad marriage, think of the future blessing you will have when all of your dreams and hopes will finally be fulfilled in Jesus. This is just a taste, a bad taste, but the full feast is yet to come. Take heart. If you aren’t married, and aren’t for a long time or never will be, then know that this is not your final status. You too will be married in fullness. The heartache you have will not last forever, for your deepest longings will be filled. This passage gives us hope in the gospel for whatever our situations are. We don’t have to clamor for other lovers, but we can allow Christ alone to be our first and only love, freeing us to truly love others.

This text also teaches us to respond to Jesus’ authority like Mary did. If Jesus is Lord of the wine, we should start saying to ourselves and to others, “Do whatever he tells you to.” We don’t always know what he’ll do. Mary didn’t. We can have an idea, but it is so often a surprise to us. It may be death to the water in our lives, but will bring life to the wine.

Can you say, Whatever Jesus wills? Is he Lord of the wine in your life? Do you seek the blessings Jesus gives you?

Is he also Lord of the whips? Jesus has authority in the second part of the passage too. He is not controllable. He is not tame. He is angry. He is unhappy with unholiness. He is frustrated and fired up when people make his church like the world. He opens a can on them, and you can almost see the fire in his eyes.

The point isn’t for you to be like Jesus here. I’m not suggesting you go into OU and start causing a ruckus, that you walk around the tailgaters and overturn their be-logo-ed tables.

The point is – Is Jesus overturning some of your tables? You may like the part of Jesus that turns water into wine. That sounds pretty awesome. That is the Jesus who adds things to you, who gives you blessings, who “sets your table.”

You’d take some of that. But what about the whips? The part of Jesus that has authority and exercises it this way? That feels threatening. You may have to give up some things. Jesus may take away some things? You may not be in control after all.

Jesus may take some things away that you love. He may set your table and he may overturn your table? Has Jesus done something like this in your life?

You may need to give up your pornography. You may need to give up your gambling. He may overturn your table of sex with your girlfriend. He’s going to tell you that oral sex really isn’t okay, neither is premarital sex. You can’t have him in your life and then just do whatever you want. He won’t be “added” to your schedule that way. He may come into your life and seem to wreck some things. Jesus starts to put his finger on things in your life and says, “This has got to go.” He has the authority to do that, and you should feel him, feel the weight of that authority.

Yep. That’s right. It’s because Jesus is a real person. He’s not one-dimensional. You don’t really understand him yet. Just like any person you get to know in a deep way, he won’t always do what you want him to do. If you’re having that dynamic with Jesus, then maybe you’re having a real relationship with him. If not, then maybe he’s not real in your life after all. Let him be both, let him be who he is. John intentionally puts these two stories together so we’ll know who Jesus is. John could have left this whips part out if he wanted us to think Jesus would never do this. But he did do it. He does do it.

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<sup>7</sup> direct from Keller

Giving over to Jesus who is the Lord of the wine and Lord of the whips means finding out who he really is and following his ways and teachings, believing in him, that he came and lived and died and rose again and that that truth matters for your very soul.

Are you so busy that you don't stop to think about what Jesus as the temple means? Are you doing this and that, working for God, busy in the church, doing ministry, so occupied that you never think about Christ's love for you, his sacrifice for you, his "temple-ness"? He didn't die to give you a busy schedule. Being the Lamb of God means he makes you right for a relationship with God. It's a relationship of resting and joy, of wine and goodness, not of continual working to please God.

I want you to have a healthy fear of Jesus. I'd like to hear how he's overturning your tables. How you're wondering what he's going to do in your life. I'm reading a book, *Jesus Mean and Wild*, by Mark Galli. On the front cover there's a quote from John Ortburg: "I want to know this Jesus, though he scares me a little." On the back, it says, "God loves you and has a difficult plan for your life." Jesus isn't tame. He's not just going to sit there and let you do whatever you want. He can make a cord of whips and bring some pain and confusion into your life. Because he loves you and knows what's best. You may not get it at the time, not for a long time, maybe not ever. But he has the authority to do it. You have to see that. Just because you don't understand the reason doesn't mean there *isn't* a reason.

Jesus has the authority. And he has the love.

I've gotten to do a lot of weddings over my seven years of being an RUF campus minister. It's a privilege and blessing of ordination, one that I love dearly. I've presided over weddings that cost \$30,000 and others that cost \$300. As I stand up there next to the groom, I can see his nervousness. I can see the bead of sweat trickle down his neck. On the one hand, he's scared out of his mind. He's supposed to take care of her now. He's supposed to be "responsible." She going to move in with him and rearrange his life. Gulp.

On the other hand, his neck is craning to see her like he's never seen her before. She's never spent this much time on her dress, her hair, her makeup, her shoes, the people around her, the lighting, the flowers – it's all to make her look stunning.

And, I bear witness to this, she always, always does look beautiful. I don't care if the dress is designer from Spain or a hand-me-down, rented or borrowed or \$50 from Wal-Mart. Every bride is beautiful on her wedding day.

You long for that. God isn't an impersonal idea, or a many-headed beast or a deistic concept. He became a person, and he died for his bride so she could be presented to him, blameless and spotless in her wedding day. Life is going to change. Now that's a sign.