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*“A religious awakening in our lives is never the end of the story. Spiritual awakening permits growth if one continues in the Word.”*

### **SIGNS OF GLORY**

Chapter two describes two separate incidents that mark the beginning of Jesus' active public ministry. First, Jesus changes water into wine (2:1-11), and then He works to change a desecrated area into a place of true worship (2:12-25). Both actions are signs of who Jesus is and what His life on earth is all about. The chapter builds on the words of John 1:51 where Jesus promised Nathanael that He would see “greater things.” Two greater events call people to faith.

### **A SIGN OF JESUS' GLORY CREATES FAITH – JOHN 2:1-11**

Jesus' miraculous ministry begins at a joyful celebration in the Gospel of John. It is as if John wants to emphasize the joy in serving Christ. In contrast, Mark and Luke emphasize Christ's victory over Satan's power with the first miracles that they describe in Mark 1:21-28 and in Luke 4:1-13.

Like a painter, rather than a photographer, John portrays only what is necessary to set forth the glory of Jesus. The mother of Jesus is never named in the Gospel of John — we can only speculate why she remains anonymous. We learn from Luke 1:27 that her name is Mary. Perhaps the description of her relationship to Jesus honors her more than would a mere name. We also do not know how many disciples are with Jesus although chapter one suggests that Jesus attends with five disciples.

The story is also remarkable when we realize how much we are not told. We don't know who is getting married. We don't know why there was a shortage of wine. Were the hosts too poor or the guests too bibulous? Only the implications of the stewards observation (2:10) tell us that the celebration was drawing to a close.

Careful reading of the preliminary dialogue of Jesus and Mary raises some puzzling, even troublesome, questions. Mary's statement to Jesus (2:3) must imply the presence of faith. Jesus' response is framed in idiomatic language

that is not harsh like the translation into English suggests. To address His mother as “woman,” can be an address of respect and love. In chapter nineteen (vs. 26 and 27) it seems to be synonymous with “mother.” Angels and Jesus use the word with respect when they talk to Mary Magdalene (20:13 and 15). Plutarch, an ancient Greek writer, uses the same words to address his wife in a tender letter of consolation after the death of their twelve year old daughter. The United Bible Societies’ translation guide suggests that the address be dropped since it could be misinterpreted. Today’s English Version therefore deletes Jesus’ direct address to His mother. I suggest the word be translated simply, “Mother” to eliminate the cross-cultural translation problems. Beside the address, the two statements of Jesus generate a great deal of thinking and debate. “What have you to do with me?” is a rather literal translation of a Greek expression. The Greek words ought to be translated, “Why do you involve me?” or simply, “What’s up?” Frankly I do not like, “You must not tell me what to do” (TEV) or, “I can’t help you now “ (Living Bible). I prefer the Jerusalem Bible’s, “Why turn to me?” The context does not indicate that Mary feels rejected.

The second statement, “My hour is not yet come” also confuses readers. The key to interpretation lies in correctly understanding the word “hour.” Jesus frequently uses that word in John’s Gospel to speak of the time for His suffering and death. (7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). Jesus’ statement therefore means, “It is not yet time for me to die.”

John 2:4 is a translator’s nightmare and my comments expose only the tip of the linguistic iceberg. Nevertheless, I suggest that the verse be translated, “Mother, why do you involve me? It is not yet time for me to die.” Therefore, Jesus teaches or warns His mother that easy miracles are not God’s ultimate solution to life’s problems. Jesus knows that the more clearly He manifests His divinity the more forcefully unbelievers will attack even His humanity.

Regardless of how we interpret Jesus’ reply to Mary, she directs the servants to obey Him. Mary then disappears from the story. The drama now focuses on massive stone water jars used to hold water for ritual purification, filling the jars with water, tasting and evaluation of the new wine. As if to illustrate different reactions to a miracle,

the story closes with the steward surprised at the bridegroom’s time schedule for serving vintage wine, but the disciples believe (2:10).

Although a miracle has occurred, great faith is not created. The servants knew where the wine came from but we are not told that they believed (2:9). The steward remains ignorant of the miracle and pursues trivial comments about unusual ways of serving different quality wine (2:10). We gain no information about the bridegroom’s, or even Mary’s knowledge and response. Only two things are important: the sign manifests Jesus’ divine glory and His disciples believe on Him (2:11).

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*“Jesus offers new meaning for old, bad religious habits.”*

#### **JESUS THE REFORMER – JOHN 2:12-25**

The scene shifts to Jerusalem at Passover time for the second event of Chapter two. The Gospel tells us in a subtle way that Jesus reforms religious practices. Jesus offers new meaning for old, bad religious habits. Frequently in the Gospel of John, Jesus injects new life and meaning into the traditional Jewish festivals. For example, He brings new meaning to the Sabbath (John 5 and 9), the Passover (John 6), the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:1-16), and the feast of Dedication or Hanukkah (John 10:22-42). The Passover notation (2:13) again underscores the truth of John 1:17-18; Jesus uniquely reveals the Father.

Jesus’ action takes place in the temple which is actually a large open plaza around the building of the Holy of Holies. This inner courtyard was used for sacrifice and prayer by Jewish people and into which no Gentile was permitted to enter. The Temple area was roughly 500 yards long by 300 yards wide. Even today the area not only holds the Dome of the Rock, a huge mosque, and numerous tourists, but also has park-like areas and schools.

The buying and selling of animals and the changing of money were practices intended to aid worshippers. Pilgrims from distant foreign countries could not bring sacrificial animals with them. Even Jesus, and His group, probably did not bring a Passover lamb with them on their

three day walk from Galilee. The merchants provided the necessary animals for devout pilgrims wanting to worship with Old Testament sacrificial practices. Money changers were also important because regular coinage usually displayed an image of the Roman Caesar or honored some Roman deity (Matthew 22:20; Mark 12:16; Luke 20:24). It was sacrilegious to offer such coins to the One and Only God who forbade the making of idolatrous images (Exodus 20:4-5; Deuteronomy 5:7-9). The money changers helped pilgrims using Greek, Roman, or other coins to exchange their money for currency acceptable for the work of the Lord. The problem arose because what was intended to aid worshippers became an impediment to worship. Probably the money changers cheated the people and selfishly made huge profits.

Jesus reacts to the business activities in the temple area by doing three things. First, He takes a whip and drives out the larger animals (2:14-15). Second, He overturns the banker's tables and spills their coins (2:15). Finally, Jesus spoke to the people selling pigeons (2:16). He tells them, "Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade." Their customers would be poor people (Leviticus 12:2-8; Luke 2:22-24). Perhaps the words reflect a special love for people who were no doubt being overcharged. Jesus' words point to His relationship with the Father. Jesus proclaims His sonship as well as His love.

Two reactions meet Jesus' decisive action. The disciples believe (2:17 & 22), but others question His right to act (2:18). How typical of human behavior to question credentials rather than confront an issue! How tempting to avoid a problem by saying, "What right do you have to tell me what to do?"

Jesus, like a good rabbinic teacher, answers their question by making them think. Had Jesus replied with a sign of power, people might have worshipped the power and wanted to use it for their advantage. John is probably referring to that human weakness in 2:24-25. Jesus knew that the basic motivation (or 'heart') of people is selfish and self-serving (Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21). Had Jesus replied by claiming unity with the Father, people would have stopped listening and started charging Him with blasphemy (John 6:66). Therefore, to encourage

further thought, Jesus gives a cryptic reply which forces the people to show if they have a spiritual or material perspective. The people immediately show that they understand Jesus' words only in a material sense. They assume that Jesus must be talking about the temple area surrounding them even though Jesus' cleansing action disrupted worship practices there. They think of a temple made by human hands but Jesus is inviting them to think of a God-given temple.

The words of the unbelievers demonstrate one reaction to the cleansing of the temple. The people don't understand, question Jesus' right to act, and are unable to grow spiritually. The disciples exemplify another reaction. On the basis of Scripture (2:17 & 22), and Jesus' words (2:22), they believe and are open for spiritual growth. John points out that spiritual understanding is not immediate. Jesus' remark about the temple is not understood until Jesus fulfills His prediction with His own resurrection. Besides teaching that the resurrection of Jesus is vital for understanding Christ's deeds, we also learn that waiting may be a part of faithful learning.

In a practical political sense, some people probably wanted Jesus to follow-up His temple cleansing with a call to arms to overthrow the power as well as the practices of the religious and even political establishment. They saw the signs and believed that Jesus was the one to lead them out of bondage. Jesus did not "trust Himself," that is, "commit His cause" to them because they needed to grow into a faith based, like that of the disciples, on the word of Scripture and the message of Jesus.

### **SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

Jesus' attack on religious practices lacking religious zeal call people to examine their basis of faith. Religious habits may replace zeal or personal faith and service to God. Cleansing the temple calls us to drive out and overturn practices, even defensible religious practices, that keep us from worshipping God in spirit and truth. The story also calls us to spiritual growth. The cleansing is not the end of Jesus' ministry. A religious awakening in our lives is never the end of the story. Spiritual awakening permits growth if one continues in the Word.

**PERSONAL APPLICATION – JOHN 3:1-36**

*Open my heart to Your Word, Lord Jesus. Make me attentive to the news of your Gospel and rid me of all resistance to Your leading. Lead me to peace of mind and heart. Amen.*

John 3:1-15

1. List some facts we are told about Nicodemus in verses 1 and 2.  
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2. Why, do you think, Nicodemus came to Jesus?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. For what reasons do people come to Jesus today?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Study verses five through eight. Think about them and explain what these verses mean to you.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Now consider the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7-10) and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Condense these references into two or three sentences.  
\_\_\_\_\_

John 3:9-15

6. Compare Jesus' teaching about himself (3:10-15) with Nicodemus' original observation that Jesus does great things (vs. 2). State your idea of the relationship between faith and miracles.  
\_\_\_\_\_

John 3:16-21

7. Read in unison verse 16 placing your first name in the place of the "whosoever" (KJV). Does this give new meaning to this verse for you? Why?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Read again verses 16-21. List the contrasts or choices and the reference verse in which they are found.  
\_\_\_\_\_

John 3:22-30

9. A discussion arose between John's disciples and a certain Jew (or Jews). What was the argument about and why?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What anxieties or "arguments" are created in your personal faith or your congregation when people leave and go elsewhere?  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. How does John the Baptist describe Jesus and his relationship to Jesus?

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11. How can John's words serve as a model for our own relationship to Jesus?

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12. What do John's words say about jealousies that trouble Christian fellowship today?

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John 3:31-36

13. Discuss the meaning of verses 31-33.

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14. What does v. 34-35 tell us about Jesus? (Also see Matthew 12:18, Luke 4:18, Acts 10:38)

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15. How does John 14:26 help us understand Jesus' promise in 3:34?

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16. What does 3:36 mean to you and how do you apply it to your life?

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