

*New Life for Everyone*

**John 2:1-3:21**

John Breon

Have you ever wanted to change, but you lacked the power to overcome the stuff that separates you from God, yourself and those around you? Have you felt dissatisfied with the way your life is going? Do you just know there must be more to life with God than going through the motions? Do you believe that the church could be full of so much more life than it is?

John records Jesus' first sign revealing his glory and follows it with the accounts of Jesus cleansing the temple and his conversation with Nicodemus. These three episodes are related. They have similar themes and provide context for each other. They reveal the power of Jesus to give new life.

Turning the water into wine reveals Christ's glory; it shows something of who he is. It displays his transforming power and signals the coming of the Messiah's reign. It's one of those "ladder moments" Jesus had told Nathanael and the others about. He told them they would see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man, Jesus himself (1:51). Jesus was fulfilling what Jacob dreamed of way back in Genesis. The signs Jesus performed show that he is the meeting place of heaven and earth, he is God the Word in the flesh. Turning water to wine is the first of those signs that John records. Clearing the temple demonstrates Christ's authority and shows that the old system was corrupt and inadequate. The conversation with Nicodemus draws out the meaning of the new life represented by turning water to wine, it shows the need for change and newness, and shows how we can connect with the source of new life.

Jesus displays new life in new wine, a new temple and the new birth. And, as he tells Nicodemus, this new life is for everyone who will receive it.

## Water into Wine (2:1-11)

Jesus and his disciples went to a wedding. The church's marriage ritual takes this as a sign that Jesus blesses and approves of marriage. We can also see marriage as a parable of conversion and new life.

When Nancy and I got married, my brother Steve performed the ceremony. We'd asked him to read some Scripture. When he announced that he would be doing that, a young child in the congregation sighed loudly. One of Nancy's brothers was known for his pranks at weddings. Sure enough, he gave my best man a substitute ring. When Steve asked for the ring, Dennis handed over this ring with a huge purple stone. All we could do was laugh.

In Jesus' culture a wedding was a party, a week-long festival. To run out of wine would be a disgrace for the host.

Jesus' mother may have had something to do with the food and arrangements for this feast. She let Jesus know the need, apparently feeling he could do something about it. And although it wasn't yet time for Jesus' glory to be fully revealed, he was willing to let it be previewed. Mary's words to the servants apply to all disciples of Jesus: "Do whatever he tells you." If we're willing to do that, we'll be amazed at the transformation Jesus brings.

The water jars held water for ceremonial washing of feet and hands. Jesus tells the servants to take some foot-washing water to the head of the feast for him to drink. The miracle is that they did!

But somewhere between the water jars and the master of the feast a transformation took place. And somewhere in our lives a transformation needs to happen.

The head of the feast said, "You have saved the best till now." May we always say that to God. Life in Christ gets better and better and there's always freshness and vitality in him. It's easy to get bogged down. We can just plod along in the same old way, doing the same old thing. But Jesus offers something new. He's always doing something new. He has power that creates and re-creates. We can rejoice in the new life and all the new things Jesus gives.

John says this “sign” revealed Jesus’ glory and, “his disciples put their faith in him.” The faith that prompted them to follow him is deepened and strengthened.

This incident shows us some important things about Jesus and his mission. That water was provided for purification as set down in Jewish law and custom. It represents the whole Jewish ceremonial system that Jesus replaces with something better. Jesus fulfills the old order and replaces it with a new relationship with God. This sign is like a parable of the new creation and it signals the beginning of the new order—the age of Messiah.

Those water jars held about 150 gallons. That’s a lot of wine. One of the expectations of Messiah’s kingdom was an abundance of wine. Through this miracle Jesus is saying that Messiah is here.

The kind of extravagance shown here is characteristic of God’s kingdom. Abundant love and grace are lavished on God’s people.

### Cleansing the Temple (2:12-22)

This next scene doesn’t have the atmosphere of a party. It’s more confrontation than celebration. Jesus’ action here shows the need for something new because the old was misused, corrupt and no longer fulfilling its purpose.

Malachi 3:1-3: “...suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple. ...But who can endure the day of his coming? ...he will purify...” Jesus, the Lord, comes to his house and they’re not ready for him. He says, “Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!”

When the leaders demand a sign from Jesus to show his authority to act this way, he tells them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” They misunderstand what Jesus says. They think he’s talking about the actual temple building in Jerusalem. But he’s referring to his own body, which will be raised from the dead three days after his crucifixion. Jesus’ zeal for God’s house will “consume” him—it will bring about his death. From this moment on, the Gospel is in the shadow of the cross. But resurrection lies beyond the cross. Jesus will be raised.

Jesus replaces the temple. He is the dwelling place of God. And Jesus also creates a new, spiritual temple—the Church. We are God’s temple where God dwells through the Holy Spirit.

I can remember when I was pretty young my family would sometimes go for a drive and stop at a country church. I remember getting into the pulpit and pretending to preach. I was playing church. There were times when our kids played church. They sang and pretended to read Scripture and do children’s time and preach.

That’s fine for kids. But I don’t want to play church anymore. If we just play church, Jesus’ action at the temple judges us.

Do we narrow and limit God’s purpose? What is the purpose of the church? Why has God called us and redeemed us and given us his Spirit? If our system, our way of doing things, limits God to us and our little circle, Jesus may come and upset our way of doing things. He wants to purify and cleanse us and help us open up to everyone who needs the Good News.

### Conversation with Nicodemus (2:23-3:15)

Nicodemus represents the best of Israel. Jesus calls him *the* teacher of Israel. He was a Pharisee and a member of the ruling council.

Jesus tells him he must be born from above, by the Spirit. This new birth was symbolized in the turning water into wine. The old system was passing away and to enter the new order—the kingdom of God—Nicodemus had to be born of the Spirit of God. So must we.

The wind is blowing. The Spirit of God is moving, bringing renewal in our lives and the church. Wind blows from high pressure to low pressure—the point of least resistance. The Spirit of God moves to “low pressure”—to the point where we give up resisting God and yield to him.

Toward the end of this passage, Jesus explains how a person can be born anew, from above. New birth through the Holy Spirit comes as a result of Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection and ascension (Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John, Anchor Bible*). Jesus—the Son of Man—was “lifted up” on the cross. We find forgiveness for our old life and rebirth into new life as we look to Jesus, come to him, and trust in him at the cross.

Nicodemus also needed new birth to open his eyes to God's universal offer of salvation. We need new birth to open our eyes to see the vast scope of God's plan. "For God so loved *the world* that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (3:16). This new life is for everyone. It's for the world. It's for you. Let's receive it. Let's celebrate it. Let's share it.

Adam Hamilton is the pastor of a church that reaches thousands of unchurched people and introduces them to life in Christ. Once when I was visiting with Adam, he told about one evening when his youth director wanted to get together to talk about the plans for the next phase of the church's building. This was some years ago. So Adam and Dan met late one evening for appetizers at a nearby bar and grill. As Adam pulled out the drawings of the building, a woman nearby noticed and asked what that was. They told her they were the plans for their church building. The woman wondered what kind of church they were from that the pastor and youth director would be sitting in a bar going over building plans. She came over to their table and started asking questions about God, the Bible and church. An hour later, she left and they tried to start their conversation again.

Then the woman working at the bar came over and started talking. She said she didn't want to monopolize their time like the other woman had, but she too had some questions. She said that she had gone to church some as a child, but had gotten away from it. More recently, she'd been a witch in a nearby coven for some time. But she was discovering the emptiness of that life. Adam and Dan talked with her for nearly an hour, answering questions and inviting her to come to their church.

The next Sunday, Adam talked about this experience in his sermon. After the last service of the morning, that woman and her husband and little boy stopped to talk to him. Adam said he hoped she wasn't embarrassed by his telling her story. She told him she was thrilled that he had really listened to her that night at the bar. She and her family started attending church regularly. A few weeks later, Adam baptized her as a sign of the new life Christ gave her and of her commitment to Christ. Not long after that she told Adam that she had quit her job at the bar. She didn't

think that was the kind of place she should work. She began keeping children in her home. Her husband wondered about the change in his wife, but he kept coming around to see what it was all about.

Now, Adam is very smart and outgoing. Church of the Resurrection is in one of the fastest growing areas in the country. But those things alone don't account for an experience like this or for the church's growth. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can produce that kind of change in people's lives and that kind of growth in the church. Obviously, we're in a totally different setting than that church. But the same Spirit of God who's at work there is here.

The same Holy Spirit that Jesus spoke of is here, like the wind blowing where it will. We can't force the Spirit to move. We can't predict the Spirit's moving. But we can open up and let the Spirit of God blow through our lives, through our church. Jesus is here, in the presence of the Holy Spirit. He will give new life, he will cleanse his temple, as we look to him and put our trust in him.

Do you need the new life Jesus gives? Is your way of relating to God proving inadequate? Do you want a fresh start, a new beginning, new eyes to see God's kingdom? Do you need a new vision of this life in Jesus being for everybody? Do you need to renew your commitment to sharing it with those around you and with the world? I invite you to Jesus who gives new life. Come to him, look to him, believe in him, put your trust in him, renew your faith in him.

Rushing wind, blow through this temple  
Blowing out the dust within  
Come and breathe your breath upon me  
I've been born again

Holy Spirit, I surrender  
Take me where you want to go  
Plant me by your living waters  
Plant me deep so I can grow

Jesus, you're the one who set my spirit free  
Use me, Lord, glorify your holy name through me

Every day you're drawing closer  
Trials come to test my faith  
But when all is said and done, Lord  
You know, it's been worth the wait

Jesus, you're the one who set my spirit free  
Use me, Lord, glorify your holy name through me

Rushing wind, blow through this temple  
Blowing out the dust within  
Come and breathe your breath upon me  
I've been born again

(Keith Green, *The Keith Green Collection* 1981)