

Jesus' Ministry Begins

This past week, my favorite baseball player died, Yogi Berra. He was arguably the greatest catcher the game has ever seen, having played in more World Series than any other catcher and having been voted an All-Star in 15 consecutive seasons. Some of you know that as great a player and coach as he was, he is possibly more famous for things he said. He had a way, or we might say, a different way with words.

For example, it was Yogi who said, "That guy bats from both sides of the plate. He's amphibious." Or, speaking of his kids, he said, "No, I'm not going to buy them encyclopedias! Let them walk to school like I did." Or, when a Yankee game was interrupted by streakers running across the field, a reporter asked him after the game if they were men or women. Yogi said, "I couldn't tell. They had bags over their heads."

It was Yogi who also said, "You can observe a lot by watching." All of the gospel writers were eyewitnesses of the life of Jesus Christ. John, as we said last week, was first a disciple of John the Baptist and then became a follower of Christ when John introduced him to the Lamb of God. In chapter one, John gave us a description and definition of Jesus through seven of His titles or names. Now, in chapter two, he shares two "observations" of Jesus, two events. They happen to take place in chronological order. One is His first miracle and the other is an action that Jesus used to teach and to prophesy. So, let's take a look at these events because "you can observe a lot by watching." First, we see...

I. A Miracle that Revealed His Glory

Jesus didn't performed any miracles before this one. That's what verse 11 says. This proves that the stories of Jesus doing miracles as a boy are false and the books that record them, called the Gnostic Gospels, are frauds. You should not trust what is written in them as Dan Brown, the author of *The Da Vinci Code*, does. They aren't Scripture because they aren't true.

John 2:1 says, "*On the third day a wedding took place...*" meaning three days after Jesus appointed Nathanael as His disciple. So, this is the very next thing Jesus did. He was invited to a Jewish wedding with His disciples. Probably, at this time, it was just the first six. His mother was also invited. Since His father is not mentioned, he was probably dead by this time.

Now, what do we observe is going on at this wedding, relationally? As is true for all of us at a gathering like a wedding, Jesus is in the center of a web of relationships. Here's what I mean: He's a guest to the host, He's a son to His mother and He's a Master to His disciples. ¹ But watch now what happens because Jesus reveals His glory through each of these relationships.

First, He's a son to His mother. Now, He's obviously a grown son. He's thirty-something years old. A mom of a thirty-year-old should have a different relationship with her son than when he is three years old, right moms? (Say, "Yes.")

But let's really observe this difference. The wine runs out and Jesus' mom says to Him:

They have no more wine. (v. 3)

Please note, she doesn't say, "Jesus, you've gotta do something!" No, she just states the fact. However, running out of wine in that culture was like greeting the guests in your underwear. It was a complete embarrassment. And Jesus replied:

Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come. (v.4)

To us this may sound like an abrupt response, even a put-down. But it isn't. William Barclay says that in our vernacular, Jesus is saying, "Don't worry, mom. I see what's going on. Leave it to me. I'll take care of it." And Mary responds by saying to the servants:

Do whatever he tells you. (John 2:5)

What does her response to the servants tell you? It tells me that she has the highest respect for her son. She doesn't roll her eyes and say to the servants, "Look, I'm his mother. I know how irresponsible he is. He's going to get distracted and forget all about this, so, here's some money - just go buy some more wine!" No. I don't think Mary knows what Jesus will do; remember, He'd NEVER done a miracle before. But she trusts Him. If He tells her to back off, then she's going to back off and trust that He will do what's best.

Moms of adult children, is that how you treat your young adults - as adults? You say, "Well, no because they don't always act like adults!" And how will they become responsible adults if you are always bailing them out? You need to trust your young adults just as Mary trusted Jesus.

Secondly, let's observe Jesus' relationship with the host of the wedding. As we all know, Jesus has the servants fill up stone water jars with water and then He turns it into very expensive tasting wine. We all know that. But what else is to be observed here? Did you notice that no one knows that Jesus did this except Mary and Jesus' disciples? The master of the banquet, probably the father of the bride, says to the bridegroom (who's obviously paying for the banquet):

Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now. (John 2:10)

So, everyone else at the banquet gives honor to the bridegroom on his wedding day for being so generous. The bridegroom doesn't even know that Jesus did this! In reality, Jesus went from being a guest to being a secret host. How does that change this story for you?

Jesus didn't do this food miracle to make Himself famous. He did this food miracle just to bless the bride and bridegroom. Even if they never knew He did it, He did it to bless them, to prevent their wedding day from becoming an embarrassment. I like to think that maybe weeks later, the bridegroom in a quiet moment one evening turned to his wife and said, "You know honey, when I saw all those guests coming to our wedding, I thought, 'Wow. I don't think I got enough wine!' But you know what? Somehow, it didn't run out. And it tasted a lot better than when I bought it. Isn't God good?"

The third letter in our B.L.E.S.S. outreach strategy is "E" for eat. This isn't about just having a quick lunch with one of your Focus-on-Five friends. This is about

using food as Jesus used this wine – to bless someone’s day, maybe even secretly to make them consider that maybe there really is a God who is on their side and wants them to have a good day every once in a while. Did you ever think food could be used by God to do a thing like that?

And all of this accomplished something else as well. It caused the disciples, who DID see what Jesus was doing secretly, to get a whole new definition of what it meant to be a leader. So, years later when they started getting big heads about being leaders of the “Jesus Movement,” they might think back to this day, the day Jesus did His first miracle. And they’d remember that Jesus didn’t lead by making sure everyone saw Him do a miracle and sang His praises. No, it was the day that they saw His glory, but it wasn’t something seen by everyone else, just those who had eyes to see. And they’d remember it was THAT day that their faith in Him went really deep.

After the wedding they all left Cana, went to Capernaum for a few days and next went to Jerusalem where we must observe a strikingly different event. The first event was a secret act that revealed His glory. The second event was...

II. A Public Act that Revealed His Heart

Every year, devout Jews were required by law to go to Jerusalem for three feasts: Passover (Deliverance), Pentecost (New Grain) and Tabernacles (Harvest). Part of the celebration of Passover was for individual worshippers to present sacrifices at the Temple. If you were wealthy, you presented a sheep or goat. If you were poor, you presented a dove. But think about this: a lot of the people were coming a great distance. Can you imagine transporting an animal? They didn’t have mini-vans. So, for the people’s convenience, the Temple authorities offered animals for sale. But they refused to take Roman currency. It had to be converted into “Temple currencies” and there was a fee for doing the currency exchange.

There was nothing inherently wrong about any of this except for where they were doing it and the usury – the charging of interest. It wasn’t illegal to lend money to someone, but it was illegal to charge interest on it if you were lending to a fellow Israelite. The Temple authorities got around this by saying that they weren’t charging interest; this was just a fee for changing the currency. Apparently, Jesus didn’t agree. Listen:

In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!” (John 2:14-16)

Now, let me pause and point out that John is saying that this happened at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry while the other gospel writers say it happened at the end, after Jesus’ Triumphal entry. Who’s right? They both are. This happened twice. Why would Jesus do this twice? In week one, what did we say John was emphasizing in this book? He’s emphasizing that the “glory of God has returned.”

Just by what is happening in the Temple, it is quite clear that the glory of God was absent. When Jesus, the embodiment of the glory of God returns, what is the only

logical thing for Him to do? He cleans house! And at the end of His ministry, He does it again. Why?

When Liz and I leave on vacation, Liz does an interesting thing. She cleans the house. Why? So that we leave a good impression on any burglars that visit while we're gone? No, because she fully expects to return and she would rather return to a clean house than a dirty one. Jesus knew He was going to see the Father and I think He knew that the Father would ask Him, "Did you clean the house before you left?" Besides, Jesus fully expects to return.

The Temple authorities heard about this and since they thought that they were in charge of things, they came to Jesus and asked, "Who do you think you are?" Literally they say:

What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this? (John 2:18)

Don't you love it? They say, "Do you have the proper forms to do this? Show us your papers!" And Jesus responds:

Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days. (John 2:19)

The authorities, of course, don't get it because they don't 'get' Jesus. They're not looking for His type of a Messiah. They know a Messiah is coming but they're looking for politician, a mover and shaker who will deliver them from political oppression, who will end this "Rome fascination" and let them make their own rules. They're looking for a guy with military experience, someone who knows how to negotiate from a position of power. This guy is not that! This guy's coming after us for our piddling little currency fee. He's not concerned about Rome. He's fixated on the Temple! His priorities all mixed up. He can't possibly be our Messiah!

That's what the Jewish authorities' first impression of Jesus was. But what about normal people? What impression did this Temple event leave on the average Jew who witnessed it? Watch this...

[Play video - "The Temple Cleansing" 3:43 Skit Guys]

What are you counting on to make it through life? The next election? Your next promotion? Your own wisdom and strength to power through? The Jewish authorities didn't see what many of the worshippers saw. John records it:

...many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. (John 2:23)

Whatever the struggle or challenge or darkness is that you are facing right now, it will not be solved by some political or financial or legal solution. Do you know why they won't be enough? Because even if you win a political or a financial or a legal battle, you still won't be safe inside. It won't remove the fear. But if you put your soul into the hands of Jesus, then even if you lose politically, financially or legally, inside you will be at peace. And isn't that what you're really looking for? Let's pray...

ⁱ I got the idea of Jesus having multiple relationships from Warren Wiersbe commentary, though he had a slightly different point from that fact. *Be Alive (John 1-12)* David C. Cook eBook, Wiersbe