

"Jogging Through John," Week 2
A sermon preached at Heritage Presbyterian Church
Reverend Henry T.C. Sun, Ph.D.
6 September 2026
John 2:1-11
John 3:1-21
 $750+4000 = 4700$

John 2

¹On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. ⁹When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

John 3

¹Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God;

for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” ³Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the

world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.

I. Introduction

We are in week 2 of our current sermon series "Jogging Through John." Last week, I mentioned that this is important because the Revised Common Lectionary rotates through three years of readings and each year the focus falls on Matthew, Mark, and Luke but never focuses on John. We introduced the gospel of John by looking at its division into four parts, the main ones being chapters 1-12 or the Book of Signs and chapters 13-20, which are commonly called the Book of Glory. Most importantly, I mentioned that the depiction of Jesus in the gospel of John will not be in 1000% alignment with the depiction of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, commonly called the Synoptic Gospels. Much of the material in Matthew, Mark, and Luke is not present in John, and vice versa. In addition, the part of John 2 that we did *not* read, the cleansing of the Temple, occurs as one of the earliest events of Jesus' ministry in the gospel of John, but happens at the end of Jesus' ministry during Holy Week in the Synoptic Gospels. That chronological difference is so clear that some have wondered whether Jesus might have cleansed the temple twice, on two separate occasions, instead of once (see, e.g., [Contradictions: When Did](#)

[Jesus Cleanse the Temple? | Answers in Genesis](#) or [How many times did Jesus cleanse the temple?](#), both accessed 3 September 2026)

though most scholars see this as one event placed in a different setting in John's gospel (see e.g.,

Ramsey Michaels NICNT 158, "each Gospel knows of just one cleansing and leaves the reader in no doubt as to when it took place.

The reader of John's Gospel has every reason to assume that Jesus purified the temple just once, and that he did so very early in his ministry. There is no hint in the text that the Gospel writer is correcting an earlier, different chronology. Rather, he purports to give an

independent, first-time account of the event"; BKBC 3:49, "I believe that John is giving his own account of one cleansing"; McHugh new ICC 1:202, "Few exegetes now maintain that the variations in the Gospel accounts are evidence of two different incidents, because there is general agreement that in all four Gospels the order of the narratives is often determined not by the chronological sequence of events in Jesus' life, but by other, literary, considerations"; Brown AYBC 1:117, "That we cannot harmonize John and the Synoptics by positing two cleansings of the temple precincts seems obvious. Not only do the two traditions describe basically the same actions, but also it is not likely that such a serious public affront to the Temple would be permitted twice"; Beasley-Murray WBC 38-39, "There is reasonably widespread agreement now that: (i) the event happened only once, not twice (at the beginning and end of the ministry of Jesus); (ii) it took place in the last week of the life of Jesus; (iii) the Fourth Evangelist had no intention of correcting the timing of the event, but set his account at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus to highlight its significance for understanding the course of the ministry"; ZIBBC 2A:23 does not make an explicit choice between two cleansings or one ["It is not impossible, as some scholars suggest, that two temple cleansings framed Jesus' ministry—though the elite priests surely would have been eager to silence Jesus after the first one (7:25). No one expected ancient biographies to follow chronological sequence, however, and writers could rearrange material to present points more clearly"]. It is worth noting that John's rhetorical tactic of emphasizing how badly Jesus is misunderstood is present in this narrative when Jesus says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" in verse 19 and the Jewish leaders (literally οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, "the Jews," but since Matthew, Mark, and Luke refer specifically to the chief priests, scribes, and elders, this is certainly a reference to the Jewish leaders; see the online NET note) think he is referring to the destruction and rebuilding of the temple itself instead of alluding to his death and resurrection. As I mentioned last week, this will be a frequent element of John's rhetorical strategy.

Still, as interesting as these questions are for a Bible nerd like me, our main focus is on the narratives about the wedding at Cana in chapter 2 and the conversation with Nicodemus in chapter 3, so let's see how those two narratives play out.

IIA. Pivot to John 2

(slide2) The importance of this first miracle in John's gospel is underscored by the conclusion in verse 11, which says "Jesus did this, *the first of his signs*, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him." That's an important detail for two

reasons. First, this miracle is acknowledged as the first of Jesus' signs, or miracles. More importantly, the effect of this miracle is that "his disciples believed in him." The miracle itself is a well-known story to the church. A wedding is taking place, and Jesus' mom, Jesus, and Jesus' disciples are invited to attend the ceremony according to verses 1 and 2. Is the reference to Jesus' disciples a reference to all twelve of his followers? That is unclear since this passage follows the calling of Andrew, Simon, Philip, and Nathaniel at the end of chapter 1 and it is therefore possible that these are the only four disciples envisioned by John. Everything was going fine until the wine runs out and Jesus' mom passes that information on to Jesus in verse 3. That in itself is an interesting linguistic phenomenon, because it is common knowledge amongst linguists that statements can be a polite way of asking someone to do something without using imperative language, like when mom says, "Your bedroom is a mess" or when Dad says, "The lawn needs to be cut." Even though Mom isn't saying, "Clean up your bedroom" and even though Dad isn't saying, "Go and cut the lawn," that is clearly what they intend the child to do. So it is with Jesus' mom. Telling Jesus that "They have no wine" is her implicit instruction to Jesus to do something about it, and telling the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" in verse 5 means that she expects Jesus to do something, though what that something is isn't made clear (see the online NET comment for a careful and succinct discussion of this point) and even though Jesus hasn't performed any public miracles yet. Luckily, there were 6 stone water containers close by, and Jesus tells the servants to fill them with water. How much water? Each container contained somewhere between 20 and 30 gallons of water (literally μετρητάς δύο ἢ τρεῖς, "two or three measures," where each "measure" is roughly 20-25 liters), so we're talking somewhere in the area of 150 gallons of water. That's not necessarily something that would be a quick and easy task without faucets and hoses

because people would need to get the water from some nearby stream or lake, dump it in the containers, and then go get some more. In addition, because these are stone containers they are probably full of dust and little rocks that settle at the bottom, but each time more water is added, the water gets agitated and wouldn't necessarily be pure and filtered for drinking. However long it took to complete that task, it was completed, with John saying that the containers were filled "to the brim" in verse 7. What does Jesus do next? He commands the servants to draw some of the water and take it to the chief steward (τῷ ἀρχιτρικλίνῳ) the person primarily responsible for the ceremony itself. When the chief steward tastes the water that was just drawn, he says "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now" in verse 10. As you see on the slide behind me, the consequence of this miracle is that his disciples - whoever they were and however many there were - **believed in** him (the Greek construction - pisteuo + eis is one that was most likely created by the NT authors since there is virtually no evidence that this construct existed prior to the writing of the Greek New Testament. The similar Hebrew construction in Gen 15:6 is translated with pisteuo + dative case, not the prepositional phrase used in John 2:11). Interestingly, the language of "believing in" Jesus is one of the favorite expressions in the gospel of John (see, e.g., John 2:11; 4:39; 7:31, 48; 8:30; 10:42; 11:45; 12:42) but is rarely used in the other three gospels (see, e.g., Matt 18:6 || Mark 9:42 [both use the phrase τῶν πιστευόντων εἰς ἐμέ]; Matt 27:42 uses the phrase πιστεύσομεν ἐπ' αὐτόν which the NRSV translates as "believe in him" as does Luke 24:25 [τοῦ πιστεύειν ἐπὶ πᾶσιν οἷς ἐλάλησαν οἱ προφῆται] which the NRSV translates, "to believe all that the prophets have declared"; Mark 1:15 uses the phrase πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ which the NRSV translates "believe in the good news"). That will be the main theme of the Book of Signs: convincing people who don't believe in Jesus to believe in Jesus based on what he does and what he says.

IIB. Pivot to John 3

(slide3) That leads us to our second passage from John 3, Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. This chapter introduces a question that is not obvious to most readers of the New Testament. We know that Jesus was a Jew, and John 3:1 tells us that Nicodemus was a Pharisee. They met under the cover of night in verse 2a, and Nicodemus addresses Jesus as a rabbi, "a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God" in verse 2b. Jesus responds to Nicodemus' statement by saying, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above" in verse 3, which Nicodemus completely misunderstands - just like the Jewish leaders did when Jesus cleansed the temple - according to verse 4 when he asks, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus then corrects Nicodemus' misunderstanding about being literally born again by crawling back into their mother's womb as an entrance requirement for seeing, that is getting into according to verse 5, the kingdom of God. I'm sure that all of us are familiar with this part of John's gospel, either because we've read it before or heard it preached dozens of times in the past.

Here's the problem with this conversation that preachers don't always mention and isn't evident to someone just reading the Bible on their own. The Greek word that Jesus uses for being born from above is the Greek word *ἄνωθεν*, and the standard dictionaries of ancient Greek recognize that this word can be translated either as "above" or "again" (see Louw-Nida 67.55 ["again"]), where the lexicon specifically notes, "In Jn 3:3 *ἄνωθεν* involves a play on the two distinct meanings of the word, namely, *ἄνωθεν* 'again' and *ἄνωθεν* 'from above'," citing 84.13 for the translation "from above"; see also BDAG 92; LSMJ 169). That is the word play that allows for the misunderstanding by Nicodemus, and that's not an uncommon situation. Even today, people often misunderstand what other people are saying because they interpret word A in one way while the speaker means something different. The problem is that

this word play isn't possible in Hebrew or Aramaic because there is no single word in either of those languages that can be translated "above" or "again" (see the discussion here

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/NerdyLanguageMajors/permalink/7133414970094444/>], accessed 4 September 2026 and especially the comment by Brown AYBC 1:130, "we know of no Hebrew or Aramaic word of similar meaning which would have this spatial and temporal ambiguity," supported more recently by Thompson NTL 79, "This wordplay depends on multiple meanings of the Greek *anōthen*; there is no equivalent in Hebrew or Aramaic"). That means that one of two things has to be true.

Either Jesus and Nicodemus were having this conversation in Greek, which means that Jesus and Nicodemus were both bilingual, or John has "created" quote unquote a conversation between a Pharisee and a Rabbi that did not happen the way it is depicted because the misunderstanding that Nicodemus has is only possible in Greek. Scholars are deeply divided on this question (see, e.g., this comment "Jesus probably knew enough Greek to understand it. But he wouldn't have spoken it as his first language. He also wouldn't have used it in his daily conversation or taught the crowds in Greek" [[What Language Did Jesus Speak? | Zondervan Academic](#), accessed 4 September 2026] and compare it to this one, "The 'growing mass of evidence' has now become a convincing witness to the wide use of Greek in Palestine even among the members of the inner circle of disciples who followed Jesus" [[Did Jesus Speak Greek? | Bible Interp.](#), accessed 4 September 2026]), and if Pastor Ryan from Trinity Church were with us this morning, I am sure that he and I would have a looooong conversation about what is going on here! I am not in a position to confidently resolve this question, but it is definitely one that is worth informing you about.

(slide4) That being said, the rest of the passage is straightforward. In an apparent allusion to being baptized both with water (see ZIBBC 2A:28, "Converts to Judaism were said to become 'as newborn children'; their conversion usually included immersion in water to remove gentile impurity. 'Born of water' thus could clarify for Nicodemus that "born from above" means conversion, not a second physical birth") and with the Holy Spirit, Jesus makes clear his message in verse 5 when he says, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit," and juxtaposes this with the statement

that "what is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit" in verse 6. What does Jesus mean when he contrasts flesh with the Spirit (see also John 6:63, "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" and compare Isaiah 31:3, "The Egyptians are human, and not God; their horses are flesh, and not spirit")? That appears to be an allusion to the two different realities in which humans live. There is an earthly reality full of sin, evil, hypocrisy, greed, and oppression and there is a spiritual reality in which there is neither male nor female, rich nor poor, slave nor master, powerful nor powerless. This spiritual reality is identified as the kingdom of God, the kingdom that the church is supposed to manifest in its day to day ministry and service so that it can serve as a witness to everyone. Note again what I mentioned last week: there is a strong contrast being drawn between flesh and spirit and between being born of flesh - which applies to everyone - and being born of water and Spirit - which is the path chosen by some, but not by all.

(slide5) And here John is in perfect alignment with the Synoptic Gospels. When it comes to the kingdom of God, you are in or you are out, which may remind you of the song from Disney's Aladdin and the King of Thieves (1996) that has that same wording as its title! If you want in, you get baptized in water and by the Holy Spirit. Nor can we predict who gets in and who doesn't. That's the point of verse 8, where the word "wind" is the same word translated "Spirit" and Jesus says, "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Everyone and anyone can choose to enter the kingdom of God without needing to meet any social, racial, political, wealth, or moral prerequisites. But that is not to say that anyone who enters the kingdom of God can do anything they want to do. Scripture is clear that while anyone and everyone is eligible to enter the kingdom of God, God has expectations for those of

us who make that choice, and if we fail to live up to those expectations around, say, forgiving others and bearing good fruit, we are at risk for being removed from the kingdom.

(**slide6**) The passage closes with what is perhaps the most famous verse in the entire Bible, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the word might be saved through him" (John 3:16-17; note that there is no scholarly agreement on whether verses 16-21, or 14-21, were originally spoken by Jesus or are a narrative reflection on what Jesus said by John; see, e.g., Haenchen *Hermeneia* 197 [Johannine], Bernard *old ICC* 1:117 [Johannine]; BKBC 3:54 [Johannine] versus Brown *AYBC* 1:149 [Jesus], Ramsey-Michaels *NICNT* 200 [Jesus]. A good online discussion of this problem may be found at [Who Spoke the Words of John 3:16? – Equip the Saints](#), accessed 5 September 2026]). Despite what some pastors say and what some people with political power do, the incarnation of the Son of God as Jesus of Nazareth was an attempt to **save** the world, not judge it; to **redeem** the world, not to condemn it; to offer a path that leads away from sin to freedom, mercy, and grace. The words here are echoed in 1 Timothy 2:4, where we read that God our Savior "~~who~~ desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth," in 2 Peter 3:9 which tells us that the reason the Lord is patient with us all is because he does not want "any to perish, but all to come to repentance," and in 1 John 2:2 which affirms that Jesus "is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." Similar affirmations are made in Romans 5:18 and 1 Corinthians 15:21, both of which create an analogy between the first Adam in Genesis 3 and the second Adam of the New Testament and proclaim that just as death came to all through the first Adam, so life comes to all through the second Adam. That does not necessarily mean that everyone everywhere will accept the gospel, believe in Jesus, and be baptized in water and by the Holy Spirit. But it does mean that salvation and redemption

is available to everyone, whether they are white or black, immigrants or citizens, rich or poor, native speakers of English or second language learners.

III. Pivot to Today

So what does all of this have to do with us? Both of these passages are focussed on getting people to believe in Jesus. That happens specifically in John 2 when Jesus turns the water into wine and his disciples believed in him. Now we might not be able to change water into wine, raise people from the dead, or turn every failing student into a mathematical wizard, but we are still able to lead lives that will encourage the faithful to remain faithful and invite unbelievers to follow Jesus. Every act of gracious kindness and empathetic compassion says something to someone, especially in a society which seems to major in blaming others for everything that is wrong with the world today. There are (obviously) examples of people doing the wrong thing, and just like Jesus and the OT prophets called out such people for their sinfulness, evilness, and oppression of the powerless, so should we. Just yesterday, I read a breaking news story alleging that a political candidate hired someone to plant drugs on his political opponent while he was "out of town" ([see GOP candidate gets busted allegedly trying to plant drugs on his political rival | FOX 13 Tampa Bay](#) accessed 5 September 2026). Tommy Tuberville, GOP senator from Alabama and former head football coach is running to be elected as Alabama's governor even though it is being argued that his legal residence has been in Florida for the last few years and thus he does not meet the legal residency requirement to become Alabama's governor ([see Tuberville 'constitutionally ineligible' to be Alabama's governor, court filing claims - al.com](#), accessed 5 September 2026). And a woman who has gone on record stating that women should not run for or hold public political office is now running for a seat in the Arizona senate during the November midterms ([see Biggs' daughter said women](#)

[shouldn't hold public office. But she's running for AZ state Senate](#), accessed 5 September 2026). Assuming that these

allegations and news reports are factually correct and therefore true, these are the kinds of behaviors the church should call out as evil and sinful. But that does not entail that we label all women as political hypocrites, all former football coaches as unconstitutional law breakers, and all political wannabes as drug-planting criminals. The church and society as a whole is moving away from a single person's sinfulness to generalizing a single person's sin to the sinfulness of everyone who shares their ethnicity, gender, wealth, and political positions. That is something the church must learn again to avoid even as it remains committed to calling out evil and oppression by our leaders.

(slide8) This is reinforced by the universality of the invitation to enter and become members in and with the kingdom of God in John 3, a proclamation that is echoed throughout the New Testament. Everyone we meet is or can be a brother or sister within the kingdom of God and should therefore be treated as such. They may not be willing to hear and accept the gospel today, tomorrow, or next week. They may not be willing to listen to us because we have called out their bad behavior. I have a student who is constantly late and disruptive in my fifth period class and who has been removed from my class and placed in a different classroom for the rest of the school year. On Wednesday he came to class late and was disruptive as he normally is, but this time I saw what I thought was a vape pipe on his belt, called site safety, and had him taken to the principal's office, and it turns out I was actually right about seeing a vape pen attached to his belt 😞. I suspect that if I shared the gospel with him next week, he might not listen to me because he views me as an opponent who doesn't let him do whatever he wants to. But even though he might not hear me, someone else - a different student perhaps - could,

and thus I am not relieved of my responsibility to speak as clearly as I can through what I say and what I do about the importance of hearing the gospel, believing in Jesus, and becoming a member of the kingdom of God.

So let's all give thanks to God for the incarnation of his Son Jesus, the forgiveness of our sins, and the opportunities that we have to share the gospel and help people believe in Jesus. There are still many, many spaces available in the kingdom. Let's do what we can this week to get one of them filled by someone who needs to hear the gospel and to believe in Christ and thus be saved.