

One of the reasons I believe in God is because I think that the stuff in the Bible associated with Jesus actually happened.

Over the last several weeks, I re-watched the *Lord of the Rings* movies. One of the unmistakable things that you notice in the movies is the ways in which a character is in dire straits but, ultimately, finds an escape route— like Galdalf’s return at Helm’s Deep, the arrival of the Riders of Rohan on the Plains of Pelennor, when Sam and Frodo, after destroying the one ring, are saved by eagles before the lava of Mt. Doom envelops them. (View the online sermon to see photos of these scenes.) Tolkien has a phrase for this in his stories. He calls it a “eucatastrophe,” which means “good catastrophe.” It’s a term that he uses to describe a sudden and favorable resolution of events in a story. When all hope seems lost, victory breaks through.

I’ve always hated that about the *Lord of the Rings* stories. They always felt too unrealistic. Too sentimental. Too naïve. “Yeah right; that’s not how life works,” I would think.

But this Christmas season had me thinking: we just celebrated the *ultimate* eucatastrophe. We believe that the stuff associated with Jesus in the Bible actually happened—that God became man, so that man might have life. The power of evil was too great to be resisted by us enfleshed creatures. We needed divine help. God came rushing to our help, the “uncontrollable Mystery” stepped foot on the “bestial floor,” as Yeats put it.

I believe in God because I believe *that* happened.

We’re in this series called *In the Flesh*, looking at the Gospel of John and what we’ve learned thus far is that Jesus is the Word of God who has come and “dwelt” among us, that “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:4-5). That’s a eucatastrophe if I’ve ever seen one!

All the writers of the New Testament talk about the *eucatastrophe* that is the coming of Jesus. They all tell us (I’ll echo the words of the Apostle Paul here) that with the coming of Jesus, “The old is gone, the new has come!” A new age has dawned.

It is in John 2, our text for this Sunday, that we see the beginnings of the difference that that newness makes. With the advent of Jesus in John 2, we’re going to look at two stories that display two themes and then make two applications. So, two stories with two themes. It’s a 2x2 in John 2. You’re welcome.

Here’s story #1:

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.” “Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.” They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, “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.” What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. (John 2:1-11)

Now for story #2:

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people 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 courts, 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! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.” The Jews then responded to him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. (John 2:13-22)

So, we have two stories: Jesus turning water into wine and Jesus cleansing the temple. What might John have for us in these verses?

Here’s theme #1: **authority**. Let’s think for a moment about authority.

I was driving down Southport Road the other day during some sort of construction work when I met a friend. I call him Southport Road Traffic Guy (view online sermon to see photo). Here he is on Southport Road conducting traffic, guiding and directing hundreds of cars, and enforcing the law. What’s amazing is that we all listen to this guy. We all stop when he says stop, and we all go when he says go. Why? It’s so obvious. It’s because he wears this neon green jacket that says, “I’ve got the authority of INDOT behind me.” And behind INDOT? The city and Holcomb. And behind the city and Holcomb? The authority of the United States federal government. And behind the federal government of the United States of America? The consent of the governed! So, you mess with that traffic boy, you’re messing with the good and proud people of the good ole’ U-S-of-A! Good luck driving past him. He’s got the authority which means this: he’s got the right, the responsibility, and the power to tell you to stop and to tell you to go.

Now, here’s the thing: that guy is going to leave work and take off his coat—and all that authority goes out the door. He goes from “Southport Road Traffic Guy” to just “guy.” And really all human authorities are like that. They’re all limited in scope, limited in time. Not so with Jesus.

In John 2, Jesus comes with a new, *all-encompassing* authority. I know this because Jesus’ authority extends first of all to his mother. Remember when Mary looked at Jesus and said, “They have no more wine”? Jesus responded seemingly oddly with, “Woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come.” The “mother of Jesus” had just gone to “woman” and Jesus distanced himself from her. What’s the deal? Well, here’s what scholar D.A. Carson notes about this passage: “Jesus...has embarked on his ministry, the purpose of his coming; his only lodestar is his heavenly Father’s will...Everything, even family ties, had to be subordinated to his divine mission. She could no longer view him as other mothers viewed their sons; she must no longer be allowed the prerogatives of motherhood...She, like every other person, must come to him as promised Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Side note: we see Jesus’ authority displayed simply in the miracle. He changes water into wine, which is also amazing.

In story #2, Jesus went into the temple and made a whip of cords, and he drove everyone out—the people, the sheep, and the oxen. He poured out the coins and overturned the tables. He said, “What are you doing? Get these things out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house of worship into a market!”

Jesus was then approached by the Temple authorities, who said, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?” Jesus responded by saying, “You want a sign? God’s temple will be torn down and then it’s going to be rebuilt in three days.” Jesus is saying, “Here’s how you know I’ve got the authority: I’m going to die and I’m going to be raised to life three days later.”

Now, here's why all this matters: John is telling us that with Jesus’ breaking in, Jesus brings the in-breaking of a new authority.

Jesus doesn’t get this authority because he’s clothed in a green vest or because he has the consent of the governed—no, Jesus has his authority because he is God and because he is doing the will of his Father. It’s an authority even mothers must humble themselves to, it’s an authority to which nature bends the knee, it’s an authority that demons cower from, it’s an authority that gives sight to the blind and makes the deaf hear and causes the lame to walk.

Here are the implications of that: 1) We have to ask: will we / are we bending the knee? “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to ME,” says Jesus. Philippians 2 says we will one day; we might start now. But 2) it brings profound assurance. (Listen to the online sermon for the illustration from John Dickson, “Who owns the room?”) No matter what room you walk into, Jesus has the authority there. And you better believe that if not now, then one day he will exercise HIS right, HIS responsibility, and HIS power to right all wrongs and bring about justice and goodness on the earth.

Jesus has the authority!

So, that’s theme #1: **authority**. Here’s theme #2: **abundance**.

I remember one time going to Chick-fil-A and ordering a twelve-count nugget. The Chick-Fil-A employee said, “Are two sauces enough?” First of all—WHAT? What do YOU think? Second of all, never in my life had I been so aware of my scarcity mentality. Two? I need *at least* 7.

But then the same thing happened the week before Christmas when I went to Panera (literally) four days in a row for lunch. I always want to eat healthy, so I always desire to get the apple as my side. But I know that the apples are way too small. So, what do I do? I get the baguette because I don’t want to be hungry!

Here’s the point: I love abundance; I hate scarcity. We live in a culture that prizes abundance, a culture that hates scarcity. We love our material abundance, our financial abundance, our square footage abundance—you name it. All of that stuff makes us “fat and happy,” makes us feel secure.

But despite all of this abundance, we are more plagued by scarcity than ever before. Don’t raise your hand, but how many of you have thought any of the following in the last twelve months:

- I don’t have enough or make enough
- That’s a risk I can’t take.
- The glass is half-empty.
- I can’t forgive again.
- This will always be with me.

Sadness, loneliness, suicidality, and more have infected our society. People are hurting. We're not fat and happy. Spiritually, we're bulimic and depressed! Maybe you're one of those people. Maybe you're thinking, "I sense a scarcity in my bones that I can't shake."

I have good news for you: what this story points us to is that with Jesus breaking in, there's an inbreaking of a new abundance! Scarcity does not get the last word.

We see this in story #1. Jesus repurposed the jars used only for "ceremonial washing," and he co-opted them for another purpose—to bring wine good enough to make the master of the banquet say, "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!"—wine that is better quantitatively and qualitatively!

We also see abundance in story #2. Jesus' cleansing of the temple points to how his body fulfills all that the temple meant: the presence of God, the center of all true worship, and the place where the ultimate sacrifice for sin would take place.

So, what does this point us to? Quite simply, it points us to what scholar Richard Wilbur calls "the sweet excess of the kingdom of God."

What this means is, in God's kingdom you get freed from works of the law, you get assurance of salvation, you get an inheritance, you get forgiveness, you get rest for your soul, you get the wellspring of joy, you get deliverance from sin, you get an identity rooted in the love of God, you get purpose for your life, you get peace that surpasses understanding, you get a new family, you get someone who will never leave nor forsake you!

I wonder, though, if there's not some today who have been sipping on old wine and don't even realize it? And now you're starting to *feel* it. *There's a scarcity in my bones and I can't shake it.* But it doesn't have to be that way.

Someone once told me that you don't have to tell yourself: "Today, I am enough. I can get my provisions." No, you have to say: "Today I have God, and HE has the provisions."

Isn't that the truth? "Today I have God, and he has the provisions." What would our lives look like if we lived that way? Can I challenge you to live in light of that this week? "Today I have God, and he has the provisions." God's abundance is here.

So, a 2x2 from John 2 today. Two stories, two themes: authority and abundance. We can rest assured because Jesus owns every room you'll ever walk into. He has the authority. We can live in not the land of scarcity, but the land of plenty, because Jesus' kingdom is a kingdom of abundance. "Today I have God, and he has the provisions." (This, by the way, is the reason I trust his authority).

A little over a year ago, I remember reading James K.A. Smith's book *How to Inhabit Time* and feeling struck when he talked about the Sankofa bird (view the online sermon to see the photo). Apparently, it's an important symbol of the Akan religion in Ghana. If you notice, the head is turned back over its shoulder, looking to the past. But its body is moving forward. In its mouth is either a seed or an egg, symbolizing new life to come. The point? The bird symbolizes how important it is to have awareness of how your past informs your future.

When I read that, I immediately thought: "That's a perfect illustration of our life in Christ!" What I've realized is that, as Christians, you and I must always be looking into our spiritual past:

- Looking at Jesus' **incarnation**: the eucatastrophe, the dawning of a new age!
- Looking at Jesus' **life**: the inbreaking of a new authority, a new abundance!
- Looking at Jesus' **death**: the means by which his authority/abundance come to us!
- Looking at Jesus' **resurrection**: the vindication of Jesus' authority and abundance!
- Looking at Jesus' **ascension**: the instantiation of Jesus' authority and abundance!

We must carry these forward with us into our present lives, into our *future* lives.

As I said at the beginning, with the coming of Jesus, "The old is gone, the new has come!"

- When chaos is all around me: "**The old is gone, the new has come.**" Authority.
- When I feel unlovable: "**The old is gone, the new has come.**" Abundance.
- When I'm going through the ringer: "**The old is gone, the new has come.**" Authority.
- When I feel spiritually dry: "**The old is gone, the new has come.**" Abundance.
- When I'm tempted by old habits: "**The old is gone, the new has come.**" Authority.
- When fear grips my heart: "**The old is gone, the new has come.**" Abundance.

Jesus has the authority. Jesus brings the abundance.