

WATER TO WINE

John 2:1-11 (No. 12)

Treasuring Christ Church – Pastor Boyd Johnson

October 30, 2016

John 2:1-11

2 On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴ And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. ⁹ When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

INTRODUCTION

The event that takes place in this passage comes at the end of a momentous week in the life of our Savior. This week is the launch of Jesus’ public ministry in this Gospel. The days of John the Baptist are essentially over. John the Baptist had been proclaiming that the Messiah would come and that all must repent as they prepare their hearts for his arrival.

But now the Messiah has come. The Light is shining. The Glorious One has come. The Lamb of God is preparing to make his sacrifice on behalf of the flock of God. And we know from the opening 18 verses in chapter 1 that Jesus is a man, but he is no mere man. Jesus is also God. He is as much God as the Father is God. No part of Jesus was not God. He was fully God and fully man.

So far, we’ve only heard the testimony of others affirming Jesus’ deity. But we haven’t seen any demonstrations of his deity. Up until this point in the Gospel, the only things Jesus has done is walk around. But now we begin to see his deity on display. Throughout the rest of this book, the Apostle John (who wrote this Gospel) will prove that Jesus is God through both Jesus’ words and his works. We’ll see that Jesus himself claimed to be God. And we’ll see that the works that Jesus did manifest his divinity. The main way John shows that Jesus is God through his works is through a number of signs that Jesus performs in this Gospel.

The Scriptures talk about miracles and wonders and signs. (All three of these terms are found in 2 Cor. 12:12.) Each term describes the same idea with different aims.

Miracle—a dramatic display of power of God

Wonders—expresses the response of man to the miracle

Signs—points to the significance of the miracle; there’s a message in/behind the miracle; the sign points to the truth that’s greater than the miracle itself. It gives explanation to the miracle performed.

Spurgeon said these miracles are like parables. They not only impress, but instruct. They are sermons to the eye. There are about 7 to 9 signs in this book, depending on how you count. We don’t have time to list them right now. But these weren’t the only miracles that Jesus did. John 21:25 concludes the book with: “there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” That is, Jesus’ miracles were frequent. In the roughly three year span of his ministry, his miracles were perhaps daily occurrences. From time to time, we get glimpses of the extensiveness of Jesus’ ministry in verses like:

Mt 4:23: " And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people."

The ones preserved for us in the Gospels are just a tiny fraction. And evidently they are the only ones in God’s infinite wisdom that we need to know about. These are sufficient for the Holy Spirit’s purposes as we read about Jesus.

So as we come to chapter 2, the first of these signs is told with the purpose of demonstrating Jesus’ deity. John wants you to know that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ who has come. So let’s look at this very first sign that points to Jesus’ deity. We’ll see this play out in four parts.

I. THE SETTING (v. 1-2)

Verse 1 says, “On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee.”

Now that tells us that Jesus had arrived for one of the most momentous events in this town. He arrives and a wedding is going on. “The third day” tells us this happened three days after the last event in chapter 1—three days after Nathanael’s conversion.

And Jesus and his disciples—who are now at least Peter, Andrew, John, Philip, and Nathanael—arrive in the little town of Cana in Galilee. As I told you last week, this was Nathanael’s hometown. It was probably located about 9 miles north of Nazareth, where Jesus grew up. Cana is only mentioned in John in the New Testament and nowhere else. It doesn’t appear to have been a very significant town. But it becomes significant because Jesus chooses to do two miracles here (the other one will be in chapter 4 when he returns) and he does his *first* miracle here. Cana would be no more than a village. The population would be numbered only in the dozens, not the hundreds. It must not have been well-known. Every time it’s mentioned it’s termed “Cana of/in Galilee” as if the region needed to be specified because most people wouldn’t know where it was.

So here is Jesus with his disciples in an obscure village, not far from where he grew up, and a wedding is going on. In a village like this, a wedding would be the event of the year. Everyone knew everyone. If you lived there, you no doubt knew at least one of the spouses since they were kids. And since villagers would travel from village to village in the ordinary course of life, people from other villages would know the wedding couple as well. Which is why Mary, Jesus’

mother, is there. (v. 1b: “and the mother of Jesus was there.”) She lived in Nazareth, again not too many miles away.

And so when a wedding happened in one of these little villages, the whole village celebrated with the newlyweds and it drew friends and families from other towns and cities too. Verse 2 tells us Jesus was invited to the wedding too, as well as his disciples. Hey, why not? Everyone is feeling good! It’s a party! Bring your friends!

Now Jewish weddings in those days were in some ways better than our weddings. We do weddings in a half-day and there’s food and dancing (so long as you’re not Baptists) and cake. But you go and 24 hours later it’s all done and you’re back on the plane. But in those days and in that culture, the wedding lasted up to 7 days. It was 7 days of a wedding party. You came and brought presents to the wedding. And the groom in turn threw a party—days and days of good food, good wine, and celebration.

Now, for us, before a wedding is usually an engagement period. Jewish weddings didn’t have an engagement period, it had a betrothal period. Which isn’t really the same. Betrothals were much more serious: betrothals had legal significance. When you became betrothed, you could only break it off by a divorce. So it’s as if the couple is married, except that they don’t live together and the marriage hasn’t been consummated. During this betrothal period, the groom built a house or added on to his father’s home, prepared the home, prepared all the provisions and details of the wedding celebration and demonstrated that he was ready to care for his bride.

On the wedding day, the groom would march with his friends, often at night by torchlight, to his bride’s house and then take his bride in procession to his home. There, the wedding banquet was held and continued, as I said, up to 7 days. So it was quite a production, quite a spectacle, and everyone celebrated with the couple. And in the village of Cana, a wedding celebration is underway as Jesus and his disciples arrive.

II. THE SHORTAGE (v. 3-5)

Everything was going great. But then a problem hit and it turns out the problem was a big problem.

Verse 3, “When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine.’”

Now this is unusual. You didn’t let the wine run out at the wedding. This isn’t normal. So when you read, “*When* the wine ran out...” don’t understand that as a common occurrence. There’s two reasons why this was a major problem. One, when the wine ran out, no one had anything left to drink. Water purification in those days wasn’t what it is today. If you drank water by itself, you could get sick. Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:23: “(No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.)” So they drank the juice of fruit, including grape juice turned into wine, because it fermented and was safer to drink.

But on other hand, if you were really thirsty, it would be easy to get drunk on wine too. And getting drunk is a sin. The Scriptures condemn drunkenness. For example:

In the OT: Pr 20:1: “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.”

In the NT: Eph 5:18: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery”

So there was a danger either way. If you were thirsty, you could drink water, but you might get sick. On the other hand, you could drink wine, but you might sin by getting drunk. Sickness one way. Sin the other. What were good Jews to do?

Answer: they diluted the wine with water so that getting drunk would be difficult and the fermentation would lessen the chance they'd get sick. Diluted wine would be less risky than straight water alone. So the fermented grape juice—the wine—was diluted to between 1/3 and 1/10 its strength with water. The wine of today really wasn't like the wine of those days. They had a name for undiluted wine, “strong drink.”

Isaiah 5:1 warns: “Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening as wine inflames them!”

It took a while to get drunk on diluted wine, but undiluted wine (strong drink) didn't take long at all. To drink strong drink was considered barbaric. So the first reason running out of wine is a problem at this wedding is that they ran out of what everyone drank.

But a second reason that's less obvious is that it could actually open up the groom to legal liability. In other words, he could be sued for it. There was a strong sense of reciprocity to weddings in those days. The guests arrived with presents and the groom was required to shower the guests with a magnificent feast. This was more than a mere expectation. Failure to do so could be litigated in court. If you didn't bring a gift, you could be sued. If the groom didn't provide a grand feast, the groom could be sued. (the feast had to meet a certain standard) So when the wine ran out, this is more than just an embarrassment, this is a situation with legal liability.

But even if no one would sue, it was still highly embarrassing and reflected poorly on the groom. He had a year to prepare for this and one of the most basic provisions was not adequately provided for. It would reflect poorly on the groom's ability to provide for his bride if he neglected such a staple to the wedding feast. If he can't take care of the feast, how can he take care of his new family? So this is a disaster. The joyous occasion was about to become sour.

Why the groom ran out of wine, we're not told. But regardless, it should not have happened and something had to be done. So Mary told Jesus about it. Evidently, not everyone knew yet. Why is it that Mary approaches Jesus? We're not told. Perhaps she knew the groom well and felt some responsibility to try to help and rectify the situation. So she goes to Jesus.

Now, up to this point, Jesus hadn't performed any miracles. What he does here will be his first of many. But his first. Verse 11 calls it his “first.” Despite what I said earlier that Jesus did lots of miracles, that's after this one. Before this, he did none. Don't get the idea that Jesus grew up and impressed all his friends on the playground with making pigeons out of clay, or something. That's not the case and heretics made things up about Jesus' childhood. But before now, he did

no miracles. He was like you and I, except without sin, which would have been amazing enough.

So Mary doesn't come to Jesus because she wants a miracle. She goes to Jesus for the simple reason that he's her oldest son. The last we ever hear of Jesus' earthly dad, Joseph, is when Jesus was 12 at the temple. After that, the Scriptures give us no mention of him. He's strangely absent. Except that perhaps it's not so strange since the life expectancy wasn't great for men of those days. But as the eldest son, Jesus would have made sure his widowed mother was taken care of. (And by the way, young men, take care of your mamas. Follow Jesus' example. I train Elias with a view toward taking care of his mama if something happens to me. When I go on a trip like this last week, I always tell him, take care of your mom and sissy while I'm gone, because I'm training him for perhaps the day when that could be true).

Now, look, imagine Jesus is your oldest son and there's a problem in the house. Who do you think she went to when there was a problem? As John MacArthur quips, "Jesus never had a bad idea in his life!" He's the wisest son to ever live. He's the most righteous son to ever live. When there's a problem, go ask your brother Yeshua. Jesus is the one you go to and so Mary went to him.

She doesn't ask him a question, but it's as if she's saying, "The wine ran out, what do we do? Do something." Jesus' response is not what his mother anticipated, either in what he says or what he ends up doing.

Verse 4: "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come."

People often want to know why he called his mother "Woman." It's not as cold in Greek as it sounds in English. It's not disrespectful or rude or impolite or harsh. But it is abrupt. It's a term of respect, but not of closeness. He doesn't call her mother. He uses a term that one might use with someone you didn't know (like, Ma'am? Lady?). By the way, he addresses her the same way as he hangs on the cross and says, "Woman, behold your son" (Jn 19:26).

Regardless, referring to his mother this way is without parallel in ancient Jewish or Greco-Roman literature. This isn't the way anyone addresses their own mother. There's a reason why he's distancing himself. He says, "Woman what does this have to do with me?" Literally the phrase is "what to me and to you?" This was a Hebrew idiom, an expression. It's to say, "what is common to you and me? What do you and I have in common concerning the matter at hand?"

Again, it's not rude, but it is abrupt and unusual. Everywhere it's used in Scripture, it serves to distance the two parties and is a kind of mild rebuke. His mother needs to understand something: Now that he's entered his public ministry, their relationship going forward is different. He is on a divine timetable. His agenda isn't going to be set by anyone else, not even his mother. From now on, his compass, his lodestar is the will of his heavenly Father.

He'll say later on:

Jn 5:30: "'I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me."

Jn 8:29: "I always do the things that are pleasing to him."

Mary has her purposes for him doing something about the wine. But Jesus has a different purpose. He does in fact do something about the shortage of wine. But his agenda is different. She had to learn that everything was subordinated to his divine mission—even family ties. This is the only time in any of the Gospels that Mary makes a request of Jesus. But there will be no more requests. She is now like every other person—she must come to him as the Lamb of God, the Promised Messiah, her Lord and Savior, and not the boy she raised. His relationship with her going forward will be viewed in light of the cross. She was a sinner in need of redemption. Unless he dies, his mother goes to hell. She needs the same forgiveness for her sins as everyone else does. She has no inside track. No special grace. No unique standing with the Father. Her son must go the cross according to the divine timetable, or she will die in her sins with no sacrifice. As Jesus told her even when he was 12 years old, "I must be about my Father's business"—meaning his heavenly Father. Because of his mission, his family would no longer be those who grew up with, but those who follow him.

In Matthew 12, Jesus is teaching and it says:

Mt 12:46-50: "While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

So everything is different now that his ministry has launched. He will only do what will accomplish his Father given mission—to fulfill his calling as the Lamb of God. He goes on, (v. 4) "My hour has not yet come." Here is another glimpse into his divine mission and why he responds the way he does to Mary. If you trace this phrase, "my hour has not yet come" through the Gospel, what you find is that the hour refers to his time of crucifixion. It's to say that the time of his death was not yet. Early in the Gospel, the phrase is repeated just as it is here. The hour is in the future. For example:

Jn 7:30: "they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come."

Jn 8:20: "These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come."

But beginning in chapter 12, the phrase turns and there the hour has come, the time has come. Jesus is anticipating the imminence of his crucifixion. For example:

Jn 12:23: "And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

Jn 12:27: "'Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour."

Jn 13:1: " Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."

Jn 17:1: " When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,"

So Jesus is on a divine schedule. He won't do anything until it's the right time. And by telling Mary this now, he's previewing what's to come. He's on the Father's time table now and he won't allow the influence of others to dictate his time. Mary responds in v. 5 with the best advice anyone can give you when it comes to Jesus, "His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'" Listen, beloved, do whatever Jesus tells you to do. It's not hard to figure out what Jesus is telling you—you need only open this book.

Just do what he says and your life will turn out better in every respect, in every situation. Mary, here, is yielding to Jesus' authority and directs the servants to do likewise.

So from the setting, to the shortage, and now to the third part to this story. . . .

III. THE SIGN (v. 6-10)

Verse 6: "Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons."

These stone water jars weren't for drinking, they were for "rites of purification." The Jewish rites weren't Old Testament laws, they were Jewish traditions. Mark helps us understand their custom in an apparent conflict between the Pharisees and Jesus' disciples:

Mk 7:1-4: " Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.)"

The Jews would ceremonially wash many things: utensils, pots, cups, their hands. Not for cleansing purposes, because they were using water. But it was ceremonial washing. So at a gathering like a wedding, the Jews would have jars for ceremonial washing. No house would need 6 jars, so these were probably borrowed and it gives you some indication of the size of this wedding banquet. There were a lot of people.

Each jar held 20-30 gallons. If you went to the hardware store and bought a 30 gallon drum, it would come up roughly to your hip. So that's a lot of water and these jars are large.

Verse 7, "Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim." They filled them all the way up—all the way to the brim. That's a key detail because John wants you to know that when you see what happens—when Jesus turns this water into wine—it will clearly be a miracle because there was no more room to secretly add wine to the water.

Then verse 8, "And [Jesus] said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it." So off go the servants to take what they've drawn out of the pots to the master of the feast. The master of the feast was like the headwaiter. He's the master of the

banquet. A kind of master of ceremonies that helped the groom. He was in charge of catering, supervised the serving of food and drink and had servants under him carrying out his orders.

Now at this point, the miracle has already happened. The miracle occurs in the whitespace between v. 7 and v. 8. Sometime between filling the jars to the brim with regular water and the servants drawing out some to take to the master of the feast, Jesus changes the water to wine. He doesn't say anything. He doesn't go over and do anything to it. By a sheer act of his will, he transforms the water to wine. This is sovereign authority on display.

He wills it. It happens. And bends the so-called rules of nature in the process. He executes an act of creation in their midst. No one can do this unless he is God. Who holds the power to create something out of nothing? God alone. The miracle is subtle, yet it is powerful.

Verses 9 and 10 are written as testimonies to prove the miracle. How do we know it is really wine?

vv. 9-10: "When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.'"

If anyone would know wine from water and good wine from bad, it would be the master of the feast. He tastes it and never suspects it was water before. The servants knew. They knew they filled the jars with water. They are witnesses to what Jesus did. But the master doesn't know what happened. He just knows it's wine. And not just any wine: The best wine. This is the best wine ever created.

The custom early on in the marriage feast was to serve the better wine and then later on serve the worse wine—people wouldn't care as much. But here's how we know this is the best wine ever made. When the master tastes it, he says it's even better than the good wine they started with. The order of the wine has been flipped on its head. This is even better than the best stuff they had to begin the wedding.

Isn't that just like Jesus? He gives the best gifts. Here is the wedding gift Jesus brought to the banquet—the best wine anyone had ever had. And not a little—but 120-180 gallons of the best wine. He's turned a liability of the groom (the shortage of wine) into an asset (a surplus of the best wine).

Now why does Jesus do this?

IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE (v. 11)

Here's is the Holy Spirit's divine commentary on what just happened and why we should know about it.

v. 11: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him."

This wasn't just a raw display of power. Jesus did this miracle as a sign. It has a purpose. The purpose was to manifest (display, make visible) his glory. His perfection as the God-man was on display by changing the water to wine. The miracle itself points to a deeper reality—this is truly God in the flesh. This sign revealed his glory. It shows us who Jesus is in all his splendor and beauty. And the sign had yet another purpose: it was designed for people to believe in him. To truly come to understand who Jesus is. His disciples believed in him.

Here, I don't think that means they believed in him for the first time. I think they were converted in chapter 1. But I think this tells us that their trust in Jesus grew. Their eyes were opening to the reality of who stood before them. And their belief in Jesus grew. Not belief that he existed. Of course he did. He was standing in front of them. But belief in who he was and is and for what purpose he came to earth.

CONCLUSION

What sign could be more Godlike than to do what only God can do? The first disclosure of God in the Scriptures is that God made something out of nothing. His first act recorded was an act of creation in Genesis 1. And Jesus' first miracle is an act of creation. Here, the glory of Jesus is revealed so that we would believe in him.

As one writer says, his glory “was not revealed at the imperial palace in Rome. Or at Herod's temple in Jerusalem. Or at the colonnaded Acropolis in Athens, But *here*, in an impoverished village of Cana, nestled away in an obscure corner of Galilee” (Ken Gire). This is where Jesus chooses to reveal himself. With no pomp and circumstance. Nothing flashy. He comes and blesses the groom abundantly while demonstrating his deity.

Do you see the splendor of the King in turning the water to wine? Do you see the glory of his deity in this story? How might this story bolster your faith? How might it increase your faith?