

# WEDDING AND WINE

## **John 2:1-11**

*And it will come about in that day  
That the mountains will drip with sweet wine,  
And the hills will flow with milk,  
And all the brooks of Judah will flow with water;  
And a spring will go out from the house of the LORD,  
To water the valley of Shittim. (Joel 3:18).*

John presents us with seven signs (nine if we include the resurrection and the giant catch of fish in the last chapter). This is not to say that these are the only miracles that Jesus ever did. John does not claim his list to be exhaustive. In fact, he says quite the contrary...

*Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:30-31).*

Notice what John calls these miracles. He refers to them as signs. What is the purpose of a sign? It is to point and direct information to you. The miracles presented in this book are designed to point you to Jesus, that you might hear his claims and that you might believe.

With that, let's turn to John 2 where we see the first sign.

*And on the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there (John 2:1).*

In the hills of Galilee lies a small, obscure village. Within this village lives a young man. He is in love. One day, he walks to the house of the girl whom he loves. He speaks to the girl's father of his love for her and indicates his desire to marry her. Once the father has given his assent, they negotiate the purchase price that is to be paid to the father.

Several weeks pass. On a prearranged day, the families of the prospective bride and groom meet together with certain friends at the home of the bride's father. In the presence of these witnesses, the groom publicly announces his betrothal as he gives his bride a ring. They both drink from a cup over which the betrothal benediction is pronounced, symbolizing that this covenant of their marriage has been established.

The bond of this betrothal is such that it will only be broken by death or divorce. However, the bride and groom will not yet live together as husband and wife. Instead, there will be a period of waiting as the young man returns to his house and the young girl remains in her father's home.

Twelve months pass. Finally the day arrives for the Huppah -- the actual wedding. The day begins with feasting and celebration in the house of the groom. All of his friends and family have gathered together within his house.

After most of the guests have arrived, the groom and several friends leave the house and lead a procession to the home of the bride's father. The bride now comes out of her father's house. She wears a veil and is richly dressed and adorned with jewels. Once she has joined the procession, they turn their steps back to the house of the groom where the friends of the bride are waiting outside. When the procession arrives at the groom's house, the entire assembly enters within with the bride and groom.

Now the rejoicing begins in earnest. Love songs are sung in honor of the couple and a feast is served for the guests. This wedding feast can continue for anywhere from three to seven days as the guests rejoice with the newly married couple. It is on such an occasion that our passage opens.

## **THE WEDDING**

*And on the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; 2 and Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the wedding. (John 2:1-2).*

Can you picture the scene? The sun has risen in the east, splashing the Galilean countryside with in its golden bands. Down the narrow road come Jesus and five disciples. They are new at all of this. This is their first week on the job. They are not really sure what they have gotten into, or even where they are going.

Where would you go to start a ministry? The Jordan River? It was good enough for John the Baptist and he has shown it to be a receptive area. How about the local synagogue? Get the people into the right frame of mind to hear some spiritual truths. Read them some of the Scriptures of the coming Messiah and then announce that He is here in their midst.

Or perhaps the Temple? The center of all Jewish worship. The site of the sacrifices and the regular prayers. The place where we celebrate the Passover and the Feasts of Pentecost and of Tabernacles. Jesus could stand in the Temple and declare that God had come to Tabernacle among men.

Where are they going to go to begin the ministry which will change the world? To a wedding. A wedding??? Why would Jesus go to a wedding? Doesn't He have work to do and principles to teach and a gospel to be proclaimed? Why would Jesus take time out of His new ministry to attend a wedding?

I think it was to show us a certain aspect of that ministry -- an aspect that involves celebration. You see, we Christians are prone to one of two extremes.

The first is that we do not take the Kingdom very seriously. It is relegated to sometime that we do once a week. Jesus never said that the Kingdom is something that you do. It is something that you are. Because it is an eternal kingdom, it never ends. When you go to work on Monday morning, you remember that you have two bosses and that the more important one is the Lord. When you raise your children, you are raising His children. When you cook and clean the house, you are doing it as unto Him.

The Westminster Catechism asks the question: What is my chief end? It is to glorify God. There are times when we need to get up off our chief end and get serious for God. There is another extreme to which Christians are sometimes prone. It is found in the rest of the catechism answer. The chief end of man is to...

- (a) Glorify God...  
And
- (b) To enjoy Him forever.

I think that this is the lesson that we learn from the setting of this first miracle. It is that we are to be people of joy. Jesus was not invited to this wedding because of all the miracles He performed. He had not yet performed any. He was not invited because of His mighty deeds. He had not done any deeds outside of the carpenter's shop. He was not invited because of His teaching. He had not taught anyone.

He is at the very outset of His ministry. The disciples who are with Him have known Him less than a week. He is unknown to the public at large. He is merely the village carpenter. And not even from this village. He is from a little out of the way hamlet known as Nazareth. But He is invited to a wedding. I think that He was invited because Jesus knew how to rejoice at a party. I think they invited Him because they liked Him.

Think about that. People actually liked having Jesus around. I like the way that Max Lucado puts it when he reminds us that the Holy One wasn't "holier-than-thou." The One who knew it all did not come across as a "know-it-all." He who was the Creator of heaven and earth did not act high and mighty.

That is what the incarnation was all about. God came near. Deity with skin on. The Creator in shirt sleeves. And we are called to do the same thing. We are called to go out

into the world and live among its peoples and to let them see Jesus in us. In how we work. In how we live. Yes, and even in how we party and in how we rejoice. We are called to be people of joy. Why did Jesus come to this wedding? To celebrate. To rejoice. To have fun. After all, He's planning a big wedding Himself for one of these days. That will be fun, too.

There was another reason that Jesus came to this wedding. It would be the scene of His first miracle. The story develops as we note the cast of characters.

1. The Mother of Jesus.

We know from the Synoptic Gospels that the mother of Jesus was named Mary. She is never mentioned by name in the Gospel of John. It is not that John was ignorant of her name. Perhaps he does not mention her by name for the same reason he does not mention himself by name. He does not wish to draw undue attention to her. This is not a book about Mary; it is a book about Jesus.

When John says that *the mother of Jesus was there*, it uses the imperfect tense, indicating a continuing state of affairs in the past. We could have translated it to say that *the mother of Jesus was already there*.

It is a possibility that Mary had an active part in this wedding feast. This is seen both in her concern for the feast as well as in her instructions to the household slaves in verse 5. On the other hand, we note that Joseph is not mentioned. He is not mentioned anywhere else in the gospel accounts of the ministry of Jesus. We can assume that he had died, leaving the mother of Jesus a widow.

2. Jesus and His disciples: *Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the wedding (2:2)*.

The tense shifts to the aorist. It looks to the point in time when Jesus and His new companions were invited to the wedding. Notice what they are called. They are described as disciples.

There is something special here. Jesus has not yet called these men to service. He has not sent them out onto a mission field or told them to become preachers or televangelists. He has not called them to go into full-time Christian service, although He will eventually do just that. He has not called them to do anything except to follow Him.

That is what a disciple is. It is someone who follows Jesus. The word describes one who learns, but it is more than the mere academic learning that takes place in a classroom. It describes one who learns by being with the one from whom one is

going to learn.

This is different from an apostle. There will come a day when Jesus will call some of these same men to be His apostles. An apostle refers to one who has been sent out with a special commission. There is a sense in which the greatest apostle of all is Jesus, for He was sent from heaven itself on the ultimate commission.

These men would eventually be sent out as apostles. But that has not happened yet. As we come to John 2, these disciples have not yet come to the point where they are ready to be commissioned. They are still in basic training. They are still in boot camp.

There is a lesson here. If you have come to Jesus in faith, trusting Him as your Savior and Lord, you have become a disciples. You have entered into a learning process. That process is not an end to itself. It has a goal. The goal is that you become an apostle. The goal is that you grow to the point where you can be commissioned to go and to make disciples of others.

## THE WINE

*And when the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." <sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what do I have to do with you? My hour has not yet come." <sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." (John 2:3-5).*

To understand the import of this passage, you need to know a bit about weddings in the ancient world. A wedding feast traditionally lasted for seven days; for a poorer family this was sometimes lowered to 3 days.

The bride and the groom didn't go on a honeymoon; the honeymoon came to them. That week would be a time of celebrating and rejoicing. It would be a time of song and of dance, a time of speech-making and gift-giving, a time of eating and of drinking. There would be food and - you guessed it - wine.

There are some people who have a problem with the idea that Jesus was at a party where wine was being served. They have an even greater problem with the idea that He turned water into wine and their problem grows exponentially when they realize the very large scale of this miracle.

If you have a problem with this, I have only one thing to say to you. Get over it. This was wine. This is the same word that is used in Ephesians 5:18 when Paul says do not be drunk with wine.

This should not surprise us. Everyone in the ancient world drank wine except in the case of the priests who were ministering in the sanctuary and those who had taken a Nazarite vow. At no time does the Bible ever prohibit drinking. What it does prohibit is drunkenness.

*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).*

I emphasize this because it is possible to fall into the Pharisaical trap of substituting the teaching of the Bible for American cultural standards. My older brother experienced a great cultural shock a number of years ago when he moved to Germany to become a missionary pastor in that country. He had been out playing soccer with some people in town and he came into a home and began to help himself to a glass of water. His host was shocked and exclaimed, "You cannot drink water in my house! If you are thirsty, then you must have a glass of wine."

If that same situation had taken place in certain parts of the United States, it would have been completely reversed. The principle is that when the Bible speaks clearly, we must obey it clearly. When the Bible does not speak clearly, we are free to follow the customs of our culture and the dictates of our conscience. At the same time, I ought to add that those who struggle with an addiction to alcohol would do well to avoid any exposure.

1. The Problem Presented: *And when the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." (2:3).*

Hospitality at a wedding was a sacred duty. The duty of the host was to honor his guests by keeping their plates full and their cups overflowing. It was considered an insult to the guests if the host ran out of food or wine. So serious was this social custom that, if it was not observed, legal proceedings could be brought by the injured parties.

Furthermore, wine was symbolic of joy. This is seen in several Old Testament passages:

*He (God) causes the grass to grow for the cattle,  
And vegetation for the labor of man,  
So that he may bring forth food from the earth,  
15 And wine which makes man's heart glad (Psalm 140:14-15).*

*Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine  
with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.  
(Ecclesiastes 9:7).*

*Men prepare a meal for enjoyment, and wine makes life merry, and money is the answer to everything. (Ecclesiastes 10:19).*

To run out of wine was to run out of joy. It is in this situation that Mary comes to Jesus. She comes to Him and she says, “They have no wine.” What is it that she wants Him to do? There are several possibilities...

- a. She may have wanted Him to produce more wine.

It is possible that Mary realized that Jesus was capable of miraculously making more wine and that she is hinting that He should perform a miracle at this time.

However, I have a problem thinking that this was the case. There is no indication that Mary believed that Jesus had any ability to perform miracles. Verse 11 calls this the first miracle. He had never performed any miracles prior to this. There is no reason for her to believe that He could do so now.

- b. She might have been suggesting that Jesus and His disciples leave this embarrassing scene.
- c. A third possibility is that she had no real plan as she told Jesus of this crisis. She had no idea where to turn and so, she turns to Jesus and whispers to Him the tragic news.

The answer that Jesus gives is surprising to say the least.

2. A Formal Response: *And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what do I have to do with you? My hour has not yet come.” (2:4).*

As we first read of this response of Jesus, it seems overly harsh. He does not call her “mother.” He calls her “woman.” I do not think that Jesus means to dishonor her by the use of this term. He will use this same term when He hangs on the cross and is concerned for her sorrow and welfare (John 19:26). But it is an indication of formality and of distance. This is made clear by the next phrase...

*“...what do I have to do with you?”*

Or more literally....

The phrase, “What do I have to do with you?” is used five other times in the New Testament. In four of those times, it is demons who say those words to Jesus when He is threatening to cast them out (Matthew 8:28-29; Mark 1:24; 5:7; Luke 8:28). The fifth instance is when Pilate’s wife sends word to her husband to *have nothing to do with that righteous man* (Matthew 27:19). In each instance, the speaker is essentially asking, “Why should we be involved in this?”

“...what is it to me and to you?”

One thing we ought to note in this reply is that it is an echo of an Old Testament passage. The wording used by Jesus is a phrase used on several occasions in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. One particular instance has some particularly striking parallels to this passage. It takes place in 1 Kings 17 when Elijah traveled to one of the cities of Sidon to meet a widow. She and her son were very poor, but the prophet told her to provide a meal for him and, in return, the Lord supernaturally met all their needs, causing their flour and oil to last for many months. When the widow’s son died, she went to Elijah and repeated these same words: “What have I to do with you?” The parallels with that narrative and the one we find here in John 2 are striking.

<b>Elijah and the Phoenician Widow</b>	<b>Jesus and Mary</b>
The widow and her son had run out of food and oil.	The wedding party had run out of wine.
The Lord supernaturally provided so that the bowl of flour and the jar of oil were never empty.	Jesus is going to supernaturally provide by turning the water in the stone jars into wine.
When the widow’s son dies, she asks Elijah, “What have I to do with you?”	When Mary comes to Jesus and reports the lack of wine, He asks, “What have I to do with you?”

Jesus is the One who is better than Elijah as He not only raises the widow’s Son from the dead, but He also eventually rises Himself from the dead and, as a result, we are also promised a resurrection. His is the resurrection that promises all other resurrections.

3. A Timely Consideration: *My hour is not yet come (2:4).*

Mary has come to Jesus and indicated that He should do something to rectify the problem. Perhaps he should go out to the supermarket and buy more wine. Or maybe He and His disciples should leave. But Jesus is not ready to leave. It is not time for Him to leave. It is not the hour for Him to leave.

This phrase is going to be used a number of times in John’s account. Each time it is used, it refers to the hour of Jesus’ final departure. Each time it refers to His death (John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 16:32; 17:1). Why does He use the term here?

I want to suggest that the words of Jesus bring us face to face with a metaphor. It is a metaphor of His death and it is a metaphor of the way in which the Kingdom is to

come. The Kingdom of Heaven is likened elsewhere in the Gospels to a wedding party. In this instance, Jesus is actually at a literal wedding party and the source of joy has given out. There will come a day when Jesus will die upon the cross, offering up His own blood as the wine of our joy. But that day has not yet come. It is not yet time for Him to die.

Thus Jesus uses this phrase with a twofold meaning. It is not time for Him to die on the cross. It is also not time for Him to leave the wedding. It is time for Him to stay. It is time for him to leave His calling card. It is time for a sign. It is time for a miracle.

Mary is gently rebuked by the words of Jesus. The purpose of this rebuke is not to hurt her. Its purpose is to produce faith in her. Mary responds to that rebuke. She realizes something of what Jesus was saying. This is seen in her instructions to the servants.

4. A Faith-Based Instruction: *His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." (2:5).*

The words that Mary speaks to the servants are a demonstration of her faith. In effect, she is leaving the problem of the wine in the hands of Jesus. She is not going to worry about it anymore. It is a lesson that we need to learn. It is a lesson of prayer and of faith.

*Casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.  
(1 Peter 5:7).*

Don't know the right words to say? Don't know what to pray? It is okay. Mary didn't, either. But she knew to whom she should go. I do not know the problems you are presently facing. But I do know the Great Problem-Solver. He is sufficient for whatever you need.

Mary has had her say. She has laid her problem in the hands of Jesus. What does she do next? Nothing! She leaves the rest up to Jesus and He is quick to act.

## **THE MIRACLE**

*Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each. (John 2:6).*

In the Mishnah, the oral collection of conversations of the rabbis, an entire section is devoted to the matter of purification. These traditions are very specific in the matter of ceremonial

washings. The waterpots were kept by the entrance of the house and each guest would wash his hands as he entered. These pots had a ritual use. They were not for everyday use. They were set aside for religious purposes and Jesus is going to use them accordingly.

These were not small wash basins. They each had a capacity of between 20 to 30 gallons. There were six such waterpots. Some hasty math tells me that there is somewhere between 120 to 160 gallons of water that is about to be changed to wine. Perhaps there is a lesson here. It is that when God provides, He provides more than enough. When He provides, He provides abundantly.

However, the bigger lesson stems from the fact that these waterpots held a special meaning. We do not have to guess at this meaning. John tells us that they were *set there for the Jewish custom of purification*. They represented the demands of the Jewish ceremonial law and Jesus is going to do something with the pots that reflects something He will also do with that ceremonial law.

Jewish thinking was that one must approach God through a ceremonial system of purity. But the truth is that this ceremonial system was temporary and promissary. It was temporary in that it awaited the coming of the One who would bring true and ultimate purity and it was promissary in that it served as a type, a symbol, and a promise of the coming of the coming Messiah who would bring that true purification.

This account is going to show Jesus providing wine for a wedding. But there is something deeper here. This is a sign to point to the true identity of Jesus. He is not only the one who provides the wine; in a sense, He is the wine. He will say as much when He tells His disciples that His “flesh is true food” and He “blood is true drink” (John 6:55). These ideas are not new to John’s account. They come from the pages of the Older Testament.

*Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters;  
And you who have no money come, buy and eat.  
Come, buy wine and milk  
Without money and without cost.  
2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread,  
And your wages for what does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,  
And delight yourself in abundance.  
3 Incline your ear and come to Me.  
Listen, that you may live;  
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you,  
According to the faithful mercies shown to David. (Isaiah 55:1-3).*

How does one “buy wine and milk” without money and without cost? It is by coming and by trusting in the One who provided Himself as our sustenance.

*Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. (John 2:7).*

Visualize this for a moment. Mary has just come and told these servants that they are to do whatever Jesus says. The very next thing that happens is that Jesus comes in and instructs them to fill six waterpots. They are to fill them with water. They are to fill them to the brim. This is not a very unusual request. This is what you would expect to go into a waterpot. But Jesus is not done. He now gives them a second command.

*And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the headwaiter." (John 2:8).*

Do you see what Jesus is telling them to do? They are to take this water to the Headwaiter (*ho archi-triklinos*). He was the one who arranged the couches and oversaw that all of the needs of the guests were met. It was also his job to taste the food and the wine before it was served to the guests to make certain that it was up to acceptable standards.

You might be thinking to yourself, "That doesn't sound too bad." But that is because you have never lived in the ancient world. It was not customary to drink water at a wedding. And this was not merely water - it was the water with which people had been using to wash their hands.

And now these servants are going to take it to be sampled prior to it being served to the rest of the guests. I can just imagine what these servants are thinking...

"That Jesus fellow is going to get us fired or worse!"

"What is the headwaiter going to say when he sees that we are serving water instead of wine?"

"What a scandal this is going to create!"

But in spite of all of these considerations, the servants obey. This brings us to our next point.

Not only are we to be people of JOY...

Not only are we to be people of PRAYER...

Not only are we to be people of FAITH...

We also learn from this passage that we are to be people of OBEDIENCE.

In spite of their "better judgment" the servants obey to directions of Jesus. They take a cup to the headwaiter. He drinks. And they wait in anticipation of his outburst. Instead

he smiles. And then, he calls the bridegroom over to speak to him. I imagine that the servants are thinking to themselves, “Well, here it comes...”

*And when the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom, <sup>10</sup> and said to him, “Every man serves the good wine first, and when men have drunk freely, then that which is poorer; you have kept the good wine until now.” (John 2:9-10).*

It was the common practice to serve the best of the wine as well as the best of the food first. Then, as the guests continued to drink freely, their taste buds would not be so sharp to notice that the cheaper wine had been substituted. But the wine which Jesus had produced was the best wine of all. By comparison, it made everything else seem a cheap substitute.

In closing, I want to turn your attention to verse 11. It gives the RESULT of this miracle.

*This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him. (John 2:11).*

Why is this story included in the pages of our Bible? Is it to teach us something about weddings? Or about drinking wine? Or even about miracles? No. The purpose is stated in this verse. It is to produce BELIEF.

First, it produced belief on the part of MARY. She was the one who went to Jesus with the problem and she saw that prayer answered.

Second, it produced belief on the part of the DISCIPLES. This was one of seven signs which are mentioned in the Gospel of John. The disciples saw each of those signs. And each time, their faith in Christ was strengthened.

I think that there was a third group who saw and believed - they were the SERVANTS. Verse 9 says that the headwaiter didn't know where the wine had come from, but that the SERVANT did know.

I want to suggest that there is a correlation between seeing Christ and servanthood. Servants always see more. Been having a tough time seeing Christ during the last week? Check out your serve! It might be that when you start serving Him more, you'll also start seeing Him better.

Mary...

The Disciples...

The Servants...

There is still one more group.

It is you.

Have you seen Him? And have you decided to follow Him?

His name was Ken Clark. He had lost his eyesight during World War 2 and afterward used his GI Bill to attend a university where he studied law. He did very well, pulling a 4.0 average.

A friend asked him how he was able to do so well in the face of his handicap and Ken replied that he really wasn't totally blind but that he wasn't going to tell the government because they wouldn't give him the full benefits.

The person who asked wasn't that much of a friend because he reported it to the Veteran's Administration. The following week, Ken was called in by the head of the Veteran's Administration and he said to Ken, "I understand that you have been defrauding the government and that you can see out of one of your eyes. Which one is it?"

Ken reached up and removed two glass eyes and set them on the Administrator's desk and said, "You decide."

You have a decision to make. You seen Jesus today. You've heard the story of the sign. It was the testimony of an eye-witness. And now there is a decision.

The decision is to accept His invitation. It is a wedding invitation. And He invites you to be the bride. Most of you have accepted the invitation. But perchance there is one here who has not. I can think of no better way to start off the new year than by coming to Him in faith and accepting His free gift of eternal life.