

No Ordinary Wedding

by Mark Jarvinen

INTRODUCTION

In this fourth NT Gospel, John, the Apostle, is building a theological profile of Jesus as the Messiah, the divine Son of God. To accomplish this, John's intent is not to write a chronological history of Jesus' life and ministry, but to organize this historical material topically in support of his primary thesis. In so doing, John's Gospel is divided into two major parts: **1) The Book of Signs (chs. 1-12)** in which Jesus works public miracles to convey to the Jews the nature of his identity as the Son of God; and **2) The Book of Glory (chs. 13-21)** in which Jesus features and interprets his "hour of glorification", namely his departure from this world by way of the cross (**NIV Application Commentary, p.88**). In **chapters 1-12**, dealing with Jesus' public signs, the cultural and religious themes of Judaism are used as backdrops to reveal Jesus' identity as the Son of God. Thus, a wedding in the village of Cana, a small village about 4 miles northeast of Jesus' hometown of Nazareth, serves as the setting for today's text from **John 2:1-11**, the first of Jesus' signs. Please follow along as today's text is read:

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there,² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

⁴*"Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."*

⁵*His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."*

⁶*Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.*

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim.

⁸ Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.”

They did so, ⁹ 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 ¹⁰ 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.”

¹¹ What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs¹ through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

I. PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS.

A. Jesus Enjoyed Celebrations of Life.

We can assume that at least one member of the wedding party was known to Jesus’ family, and perhaps an actual relative, since it is recorded that Mary was there, presumably in some designated hospitality role at the reception, since she knew that the supply of wine was running dangerously low. We know that Jesus and his disciples were also invited, furthering the notion that someone in the bridal party was a close friend or relative of Jesus’ earthly family. The text offers no clues to suggest that Jesus was critical of the celebration taking place there. If Jesus wasn’t the life of the party, it seems, at the very least, that he enjoyed sharing in the joyous moments of people’s lives.

Weddings in this culture were extremely important community events. Lasting for several days, they were a time of great rejoicing, a welcome respite from the grind of everyday life. At a wedding, a new family unit was recognized and honored among the covenant community of faith. It was the responsibility of both the bride’s and groom’s families to stockpile plenty of provisions to insure that their

guests would be amply supplied with food and drink for a time of extended celebration. Let's not miss the fact that Jesus was there, with his disciples, presumably enjoying the party. Jesus understood that His kingdom was not of this world, but he also loved being around people in the ebb and flow of their everyday life. He was not antisocial or disengaged from their festivities as if they were a frivolous waste of time.

B. Jesus Cared About Everyday Problems.

Hospitality is a big deal in our culture, especially when planning a wedding reception. No one wants to disappoint their guests. But ours only last for a few hours. ***Can you imagine a wedding reception that lasted for several days?*** In the Middle Eastern culture of Jesus' day it was considered a major faux pas and a source of extreme embarrassment to run short of wine. It's interesting that Mary comes to Jesus with this problem of a wine shortage. Apparently, Mary had no reason to believe that Jesus objected to wine being served. After all, it was the cultural norm. Notice also that she wasn't hysterical over the problem, but seemed to understand that Jesus had the potential to do something about this shortage. One has to chuckle over Jesus' response to Mary. It's almost as if he's saying ***"And how exactly is this my problem?"*** Jesus understood that the time was premature to reveal the fullness of his glory. That would come later, at the cross. But his family and friends had a need, not a deep spiritual need, but a pressing practical concern – they were almost out of wine! They were on the brink of social disgrace! We surmise that Jesus was a son who had a soft spot in his heart for his mother, and a kind disposition toward family and friends. Jesus knew his hour had not yet come, but it was now time to lift the curtain and

offer a sneak preview of his coming glory - especially if it would help the family. Mary simply instructed the servants on hand to do Jesus' bidding, which resulted in 6 urns of water becoming 120 to 180 gallons of the best wine the guests had ever tasted. Nowhere does Scripture condone drunkenness, but based on the text, it's fair to say that after Jesus' did his thing, the supply of quality wine was not lacking.

Most often, the events of Jesus' life, as revealed in Scripture, have great spiritual significance. Yet here, on a very practical level, we see Jesus acting on behalf of friends and family to fix a simple everyday problem – they were out of wine at a wedding and unless something was done, they'd be the subject of community gossip, or even worse, social disgrace. ***What do we learn from Jesus' willingness to involve himself with this rather mundane, everyday life concern? Simply, that there's no problem too small or no circumstance too minor for Jesus to be involved.***

We can ask for Jesus' help in navigating through the everyday conundrums of our daily existence. I remember while attending **seminary in Pasadena** during the late 1970's, I was on the staff of **Immanuel LB Church** where former CLB President, **Joel Egge**, was serving as pastor. One day while talking over lunch, I shared with Pastor Egge that Martha and I needed a chair for our apartment. Pastor Egge asked in all sincerity if we had prayed about our need. I remember telling Pastor Egge that I didn't see how that was anything we needed to pray about. I responded, ***“Why would God care about anything as mundane as a chair?”*** (Pause) What a self-absorbed and prideful snob I was!. Pastor Egge didn't say a word,

but gave me “the look,” not a look of disgust, but the kind of look one hates to see on the face of a respected mentor. It was a look that spoke without words, saying **“You poor guy, you’ve got a lot to learn about being a pastor.”** Since then, I’ve learned that there’s no problem that’s too small for God to be involved. Dependence on God is a huge lesson for a Christ-follower to learn (and relearn).

II. SECONDARY SPIRITUAL OBSERVATIONS.

A. The Wedding Elements are Symbolic of Something Greater.

The fact that Jesus’ first sign (miracle) took place at a wedding is symbolically significant since in the literature of Judaism, the **“wedding banquet”** was an image **“pregnant with meaning”** (NIV Application Commentary, p.99).

- 1. The New Wine** - The fact that the original supply of wine had run out and Jesus provided an abundant supply of **new wine**, called **“the best wine”** by the wedding steward who tasted it, points theologically to the fact that **Jesus was about to do something new in the religious realm, upending Judaism, which was based upon tradition and rule keeping, replacing it with an abundant, overflowing relationship with God characterized by mercy and grace.**
- 2. The Six Stone Jars** - Even the reference to **the six stone jars** in **v. 6**, which were used for ceremonial purification among the Jews, provide a meaningful clue about Jesus’ ministry. Jesus wasn’t going to provide new wine in standard clay jars common for everyday use. Clay jars were regarded as those which could easily become contaminated by everyday use and therefore, were regarded as unfit for the elaborate purification

rites of Judaism. Only stone jars could be used for purification. By miraculously providing new wine in the stone jars, Jesus was demonstrating that he came to bring a new kind of purification, an inner work of grace marked by the forgiveness of sins, not just the outward purification marked by the ritual cleansing of a religious rite. To go one step further, we could say that by turning the waters of purification into the wine of celebration, Jesus was signifying that he would not only purify people's hearts initially, but sustain their hearts in gladness as portrayed in the overflowing supply of new wine provided in this first sign of Jesus' ministry.

We've uncovered a lot of meaning in this text so far, but there's more

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III. THE PRIMARY SPIRITUAL OBSERVATION.

Why is this text an Epiphany text? Remember that Epiphany by its word derivation in Greek means that which is “**revealed**” or “**shown forth.**” The ancient Church included this story of Jesus turning water into wine along with the birth of Jesus, the coming of the wise men from the East, and Jesus' Baptism, which we considered last week, as episodes in Jesus' life that reveal Him as the Son of God, the Messiah, worthy of all praise and worship. In other words, **this wedding in Cana was no ordinary wedding.** Something happened at this small town wedding that parallels what occurred both in Bethlehem at Jesus' birth, and in the Jordan River at His baptism. Christ's glory – his true identity – was unveiled for humanity to see. **Jesus was just one more ordinary guest at an ordinary wedding until He was called upon to act, which then revealed Him to be someone special, i.e. the Son of God.**

CONCLUSION

A. Responses to this Revelation

It's interesting to note how the people involved in this event responded to what took place. How often have you heard people say, ***“If only God would do a miracle in my life, then I'd believe?”*** Oh really? Did the **servants** whom Jesus told to fill the 6 stone jars with water, believe? How about the **wedding steward** who tasted the wine produced by the miracle? The **bridegroom**, who was commended for saving the best wine until last, apparently had no clue as to what had taken place, and we're not told that he made it his business to find out. According to John, the people who came to believe that day that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, were his **disciples**. From **John 1**, we're told that these first disciples selected by Jesus, only five at that time, had been disciples of **John the Baptist**. Under John, they had already been on the path of this “new thing” that God was doing, but now, according to what the text says in **v. 11 - *“What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs¹ through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”*** These followers of John the Baptist had been prepared for the coming of Christ, but now the Messiah was revealed to them more personally, creating faith in their hearts that Jesus was no ordinary rabbi, but was in fact, the Son of God.

B. Our Response

This first sign is just a glimpse of the signs that the rest of Jesus' ministry would bring. As we continue reading the Gospel of John, we're drawn in and opened up to the Spirit of God working in our hearts to reveal more and more fully who Jesus is – that not only for those who witnessed this first sign and believed, but for us as well,

He is the Messiah, the Son of God, who came to take away the sins of the world. Read on in John and we'll see in **chapter 4** that Jesus healed a **Roman official's son**, a sign that points to the expansion of God's care outside the bounds of Israel. In **John 8**, Jesus forgave a **woman caught in the act of adultery**, a sign, which indicates that even the most painful, embarrassing sins we commit can be forgiven. In **John 11** Jesus calls **Lazarus** back from the grave, a sign that Jesus would conquer sin and death, and open the graves of all who believe in Him, that they too might experience life eternal.

In all the stories of Jesus we are given the opportunity to join these first disciples of Jesus who attended a wedding that was anything but ordinary, and see Him revealed in his glory as the Son of God. To see in Him, **forgiveness** instead of condemnation, **hope** instead of despair, and **new life** instead of death was indeed a new revelation of God's grace in Christ. This is the Jesus revealed to us at a wedding. This is the Son of God, whom to know is life eternal. Let the celebration continue on in our hearts and lives today and every day. **A-men.**