

John 2:1-11 – The Wedding at Cana

Chapter 2 to Chapter 12 is the first major section of the Gospel and is the revelation to the world. It is the beginning. What we will see here is the new order pitted against the old. John begins with a miracle that contrasts the law against the Gospel.

John's word for miracles is "sign" which means a wonder with a meaning in it. John always makes a point to bring out meaning and spiritual truth.

Basically the seven signs and their general meanings are:

Water into Wine – Chapter 2 – This story demonstrates the difference that Christ makes. Do you want water or wine in your life?

Healing of Officer's Son – Chapter 4 – Faith, the one thing that is needed in life. We must have the faith of a child who trusts in his parents to care for him.

Healing of the Cripple – Chapter 5 – Christ the Restorer of lost powers. We once existed in and with the Divine. Christ shows us the way back to our rightful place with Him.

Feeding of the Multitude – Chapter 6 – Christ, the Bread of Life. Without the example of Christ, we are lost souls. If we follow His example, we have eternal life.

Walking on the Water – Chapter 6 – Christ our Guide. He will lead us along the path to our re-at-one-ment with our Father in heaven.

Healing of the Man Born Blind – Chapter 9 – Christ the Light. He lights our way, shows us how to live so that we will return. He removes the darkness from the consciousness of mankind.

Raising of Lazarus – Chapter 11 – Christ, our Life. We can be raised from the material hopelessness where we currently find ourselves, raised into the light of eternal life.

Let's begin with the first miracle by having several readings of verses 1-11 from chapter 2.

King James – And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and His disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto Him, "They have no wine." Jesus saith unto her, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." His mother saith unto the servants, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And He saith unto them, "Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast." And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now." This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and His disciples believed on Him.

Knox – Two days afterwards, there was a wedding-feast at Cana, in Galilee; and Jesus' mother was there. Jesus Himself, and His disciples, had also been invited to the wedding. Here the supply of wine failed; whereupon Jesus' mother said to Him, "They have no wine left." Jesus answered her, "Nay, woman, why dost thou trouble Me with that? My time has not come yet." And His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever He tells you." There were six water-pots standing there, as the Jewish custom of ceremonial washing demanded; they were of stone, and held two or three firkins apiece. And when Jesus said, "Fill the water-pots with water, they filled these up to the brim." Then He said to them, "Now draw, and give a draught to the master of the feast." So they gave it to him; and the master of the feast tasted this water, which had now been turned into wine. He did not know whence it came; only the servants who had drawn the water knew that. The master of the feast, then, called to the bridegroom, and said to him, "It is ever the good wine that men set out first, and the worse kind only when all have drunk deep; thou hast kept the good wine till now." So, in Cana of Galilee, Jesus began His miracles, and made known the glory that was His, so that His disciples learned to believe in Him.

New International – "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."

Here are some clues as to the meanings of the miracle at Cana. Jewish legalism is represented by the water of ritual purification; it then becomes the Gospel, the wine which gladdens the Marriage Feast of the Kingdom of God. Judaism is represented by the water. Christianity is represented by the wine. It is Christ that makes the difference between water and wine. Therefore the choice – living the strict laws created by the Jewish system which Christ opposed or living the law of love as Christ demonstrated. The lesson that we must learn then is not only to be transformed by Christ's power, but in the context of joyous human fellowship. We must reject the spirit of gloomy religiosity that was prevalent at that time and is carried forward today by some.

Now some historical facts about Jewish weddings at that time: A wedding was a very notable occasion. One of the Jewish laws was that a wedding of a virgin should take place on a Wednesday. The wedding festivities lasted more than just one day. The actual wedding ceremony took place in the evening after the main feast. The couple did not go away for a honeymoon. They stayed at home and kept an open house for about a week. At a Jewish feast, wine was essential. The saying of the Rabbi at that time was "Without wine there is no joy." The people were not drunkards. Drunkenness was a great disgrace. Hospitality in the East was a sacred duty. So, for the food and drink to fail at a wedding feast would be a terrible humiliation for the bride and groom.

For Mary to approach Jesus about the problem of the lack of wine would indicate that Mary held a certain position as far as the wedding was concerned. This indicates that possibly one of the two in the wedding was a member of her family. Whether it was an immediate member or secondary, the event would still be important to her.

The Authorized Version of King James makes Jesus' reply sound very discourteous or very abrupt. That was not the case. Those are the correct words, but do not give the true meaning. "What have I to do with thee?" was a common conversational phrase. It did not indicate disagreement or reproach, but means the indication of misunderstanding. The meaning of the phrase could mean: "Don't worry," "You don't quite understand what is going on," "Leave things to me" or "I will settle them in my own way." We see Jesus then as telling His mother to leave the situation to Him, and He will deal with it in His own way.

The word "woman" (the Greek word "gunai") is also misleading. It sounds rough and abrupt, but this is the same word used when Jesus, on the cross, addressed John concerning His Mother, Mary, as He left her in the care of John. Christ gave His mother into John's care and universally, to all of us. "Woman" is a title of respect. There is no word in the English language that gives us an exact rendering, but it is possibly better translated as "lady," which gives us at least the courtesy indicated by it. Mary had confidence in Jesus. She told the servants to do as He said.

The word "firkin" has been translated in the Authorized Version as stone jars. A "firkin" represents the Hebrew measure called "bath" which represents a large jug of about a 20 gallon capacity. It also represented the purification ceremony. The purification ceremony had two purposes: First, it was required to wash the feet whenever entering the house. On dry days the feet were dusty and on wet days the feet were muddy.

Second, it was required to wash the hands. Strict Jews washed their hands before the meal and between each course. First the hands were held upright and the water was poured over them in such a way that it ran right down to the wrists. Then the hands were pointed down and the water was poured in such a way that it ran from the wrist to the fingertips and this was done with each hand. Then each palm was cleansed by rubbing it with the fist of the other hand. If this was not done, technically the hands were unclean.

John definitely states that the jugs were filled to the brim. He makes this point clear to show that there was nothing else in there but the water.

We now note three general things about the miracle that Jesus performed. We note when it happened – at a wedding feast. Jesus was no severe austere killjoy. He enjoyed sharing in the happiness and rejoicing of a wedding feast. Some religious people like to shed gloom wherever they go. They are suspicious of any joy and happiness. To them, religion is a thing of black clothes and lowered voices and the expulsion of all social fellowship. These people would be better as undertakers and bury the dead for they will not succeed in influencing the living. It is better to commend cheerfulness to all who wish to win souls, not levity or frothfulness, but geniality and happy spirit. There are more flies caught with honey than vinegar, and there will be more souls led to Heaven by a man who wears Heaven in his face than one who bears grimness in his look. Jesus never counted it a crime to be happy, so why should His followers?

We note where it happened. It happened in a modest home in a village in Galilee. This miracle was not performed against the background of a great occasion or vast crowds. Looking briefly at the Gospel of Luke, we see the author delights in showing Jesus against the background of very simple things, homey things and people such as oxen and servants. Luke domesticates God. Luke brings God right into the home circle and into the ordinary things of life. With the miracle at Cana, this shows us what Christ thought of the home. His first public miracle was in the sanctity of the home. As the Revised Standard Version states it, "He manifested forth His glory." We can understand from this, that to Christ the home was a place for which nothing but the best was good enough.

We note why it happened. In the East, hospitality was a sacred duty. If the wine at the marriage feast had run out, it would have been a great embarrassment and shame on the home. So it was to save this humble Galilean family from hurt and embarrassment. It was in sympathy, in kindness, in understanding for the simple people that Jesus acted. There is a kind of natural human malice that enjoys seeing the misfortunes of others. The Lord of Life, the King of Joy, used His power to save the bride and bridegroom from humiliation. It is by such deeds of understanding and simple kindness that we can also show that we are followers of Jesus Christ.

There are two other things the story tells us about Mary's faith in Christ. First, Mary instinctively turned to Jesus because she knew her son, and she knew that He would not let her down. Second, she believed in Him and she immediately turned to the serving people and told them to do whatever they were instructed by Jesus to do. She did not know what to expect, but she had faith that He would do the right thing. In every life there comes a period of darkness when we, too, do not know what to expect. By placing our faith in Jesus Christ, all things are fulfilled.

Also, the story tells us something about Jesus. "My hour has not yet come." All through His life Jesus knew He came into the world for a definite purpose and a definite task. He saw His life, not in terms of His wishes, but in terms of God's purpose for Him. He saw His life not against the shifting background of time, but against the steady background of eternity. He steadily went towards that hour for which He knew He had come into the world. It is not only Jesus Who came into this world to fulfill the purpose of God. Every man is a dream and an idea of God, so we too, must think not of our own wishes and our own desires, but of the purpose for which God sent us into this world.

Now for the deeper, more permanent truth that John is telling us with this story. We must remember that John was writing with a double background. He was a Jew and he was writing the story of Jesus for the Greeks and the rest of mankind to come. We must remember that beneath John's simple stories there is always a deeper meaning, which is opened only to those who have eyes to see. John never wrote an unnecessary word or insignificant word. Everything means something and everything points beyond.

There were six water pots. The water in them turned to wine. According to the Jews, seven is the number which is complete and perfect. Six is the number which is unfinished or imperfect. The six stone (stone=dead) water pots stand for the imperfection of the Jewish Law. Jesus came to do away with the imperfection of the Law and to put in its place the Wine of the New Gospel of Grace (God's gift that we don't deserve) or the New Covenant that man has with his God. Jesus turned the imperfection of the Law into the perfection of Grace. There were six water pots, each held between 20 and 30 gallons of water. Jesus turned water into wine that would give up to 180 gallons. Simply to state that fact is to show that John did not mean the story to be taken with crude literalness.

What John is saying is that when the Grace of Christ comes to men, there is enough to spare for all. It would be unlikely that a wedding party would drink 180 gallons of wine. No need on earth can exhaust the Grace of Christ. There is a glorious superabundance of it. What John was telling us is that in Christ, imperfections become perfection. Grace is without limit, sufficient, and more than sufficient, for every need. We see that John is teaching us that Jesus does not do a thing once and never again, but of something which He is doing always and forever. The Christ Consciousness is there forever to feed us. Jesus did not do something once in Palestine, but continues doing it today. Whenever Jesus comes into a man's life, there comes a new quality which is like turning water into wine. Without Jesus life is dull, stale and flat, but when Jesus comes into our life, it becomes a vivid, sparkling and exciting life, the joy of a wedding feast.