

The First Miracle

John 2:1-12

I went to a wedding yesterday! Many of you were there as well. It was a lot of fun. Chad Brantley and his new wife Anna were certainly very happy! Weddings are always a lot of fun. They are always enjoyable. They are always a happy celebration.

And, of course, there was a reception yesterday. They had hoped to have the dinner outside, but with the uncertain weather and the possibility of rain, it was moved indoors. Still, the party was very enjoyable, and festive. And the meal was excellent. That's what you do at weddings!

But there was a problem at this wedding in Cana of Galilee. They ran out of wine! Now, please don't impose our modern debate about the use of alcohol into this account, but rather, just realize that in that day, in that culture, the wine was a central element of the party. No need to imagine drunkenness or any sense of wild excesses, just that they ran out of wine. Perhaps the better analogy for our understanding is if they ran out of food.

One commentator tries to explain it this way. "The wine runs out. Water is served. Why, that's the best joke of all! The guests lift their wine cups in fun, [and shout, 'This is the best wine of all.'] The bridegroom is congratulated by the master of ceremonies, who carries the joke farther still. 'Why, you've kept the best wine until now.' [And] it requires only a servant going through the room into the kitchen for a wonderful rumor to start."

In other words, those celebrating at the wedding start making a big joke as they drink water, pretending it to be wine. Laughing at their own wit, no doubt becoming somewhat intoxicated by the

wine they have already finished. And that's how the rumor was started that Jesus turned water into wine.

What a great story that makes. And what a bunch of nonsense. It's amazing what people will do when they don't want to believe in the supernatural power of God. It's amazing the stories they come up with to explain away the presence of the power of God. It's amazing that intelligent people actually listen to such foolishness, because their starting point is their own conviction that supernatural power does not exist!

Let me explain this situation to you a little differently than that commentator. I'll start out the same. The wine does run out, not too surprising since Jewish wedding celebrations in those days often lasted for a full week. And perhaps the bridegroom was rather poor, or at least unable to provide the ample supply of wine necessary. But there was no joke about what happened. No mere rumor. What happened was a miracle, a supernatural intervention by Jesus, transforming the very elements of water into wine. He transformed what we scientifically would label as H₂O into the fermented fruit of the grape vine. There was an actual transformation. What was water was turned into wine. And that is what we will be studying this morning. Jesus' first recorded miracle.

So what happened when the wine ran out? We read that Jesus' mother brought the situation to his attention, presumably so that he could do something about it.

v.1-3

There is, in those words, the possibility that Jesus' mother was simply asking her son to make up some excuse to the party-goers and to make the best of the situation, so as to avoid unnecessary embarrassment to the bridegroom. It is also possible that she

would simply want Jesus to engage in some sort of profitable religious teaching, to divert the attention of the guests. But much more likely, the question from Jesus' mother gives the apparent expectation of a miracle, the expectation that Jesus will miraculously provide additional wine.

And what does Jesus do? He rebukes her!
v.4-5

Let me start there this morning, and my three main points this morning are all in the form of questions. So the first question,

I. WHY DID JESUS REBUKE HIS MOTHER?

Let me say first that the word "woman" doesn't have quite the derogatory sense it might have if we were to speak it today, nor the tone of voice that you might think that word implies. "Woman, what does your concern have to do with me?" Jesus isn't being disrespectful, nor should you image any such tone of voice or negative attitude. But still, clearly, the word "woman" isn't as personal as "mother." This would not be how you would expect Jesus to address his mother. In that context, I think that the NIV translation "dear woman" is a bit too personal.

But the word is a bit impersonal. And then Jesus says, "What does your concern have to do with me?" A little more accurately, "What have you do with me?" Now, again, this isn't cold and harsh on Jesus' part, though still a rebuke—so I will ask that question, why? Why the rebuke? As gentle a rebuke as it might have been, what was the reason for it? I'll give two answers to that question. First,

A. Jesus rebuked his mother for emphasizing their earthly relationship.

Her words were, perhaps, quite understandable. And it is

possible that she was either an attendant helping at the wedding, or that it was a relative being married. In either case, she would have had proper concern if they ran out of wine. That would have been a great social embarrassment to the family, as well as a potentially serious financial liability.

So the concern was well founded. And she asked Jesus to do something about it, by bringing it to his attention.

v.3

And the response, as I mentioned just a minute ago, "Woman, what have you do with me?"

I believe that Jesus is seeking to redefine his relationship with his mother. It is no longer merely that of a mother and a son, for he is not merely a human son. He is the son of God. And Jesus gentle rebuke to his godly mother was to urge her to stop looking upon him merely as a son, a difficult task for any mother, to be sure. But it was necessary. It was time, or the beginning of the time, for Jesus to assert his divine authority and to reveal his divine identity. It was the very beginning of his ministry. And so, especially with his mother, there must be a new relationship. Jesus couldn't have his earthly relationships emphasized, now that it was time to begin his actual public ministry, the ministry that would end three years later on the cross.

Mary certainly would have to learn to look upon Jesus as her savior and not merely her human son, if she would be able to bear that awful load of seeing him crucified upon the cross. And it is worth noting that on the cross, Jesus again addresses his mother with this word, "Woman," when he entrusted her to the care of John, his beloved disciple.

As he began his ministry, Jesus is making it clear that he is

not merely a man, and that his relationships while on earth were not merely of this earth. For emphasis, remember what Jesus had done when he was only 12, giving the first indications of this new relationship to be forged with his parents? Returning from the feast of the passover, Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, and his parents were unaware of it.

Luke 2:46 “After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.” 49 “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” 50 But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

At this wedding in John 2, I believe Mary did understand. It appears from her quiet and submissive response that she accepted the rebuke and realized all the more that her son was the son of God.

v.5

I believe that there is one other way in which Mary was gently rebuked, and that is revealed by Jesus’ words, “My hour has not yet come.” It would seem that Jesus was rebuking his mother for asking for a miracle, when he had yet to begin his ministry. It would seem that the request was a bit presumptuous, for only God, in his sovereignty, can order miracles. And so,

B. Jesus rebuked his mother for seeking to dictate the display of God’s sovereign power.

It wasn’t up to Mary to dictate when the miracles should begin. It wasn’t up to Mary to determine when, and under what

circumstances, God’s sovereign power would be displayed by performing miracles. God himself would set that time, and Jesus clearly says that. “My hour has not yet come.”

Mary, even if it was done unconsciously, was putting herself forward in a way that would obscure the glory of her son Jesus. Suppose Jesus had simply agreed to Mary’s request, with no rebuke offered at all? Supposed Mary just came to Jesus asking for a miracle and Jesus performed it?

I think you can imagine. Mary would get an awful lot of praise. Mary would get an awful lot of attention. And anybody that wanted help would be inclined to go to Mary for help, and ask that she intercede for them before Jesus.

And if think that I am stretching it a little bit, then let me remind you that this is exactly the error to which the Roman Catholic Church has fallen prey, in exalting Mary in such a way as to diminish the status and stature of Jesus. At this wedding in Cana, Jesus wanted to be absolutely sure that people would come to him, not to his mother. Jesus wanted to be absolutely sure that the display of God’s sovereign power would be dictated by he himself, not by any human being, not even one as godly and as beloved as his own mother.

John Calvin writes that, “It is certain that this saying of Christ openly warns men not to transfer to Mary what belongs to God, by superstitiously exalting the honor of the maternal name in Mary. Christ therefore addressed his mother like this so as to transmit a perpetual and general lesson to all ages, lest an extravagant honor paid to his mother should obscure his divine glory.”

So, we have a gentle rebuke which allowed Jesus to reveal

his own glory, when and how he chose to do so! And a gentle rebuke that should have kept the church from exalting Mary to a position above that which she is given in Scripture. She is not to intercede for us before Jesus. Jesus himself is our priest, and to him, and him alone, we are to come for help.

Now, having said all that, I have to say something that is very obvious. Jesus did perform a miracle. After rebuking his mother and denying that his time had yet come, he does what she seems to be asking for. He transforms six large, stone waterpots into wine. We're told in verse 6 that each pot contained 20 or 30 gallons. Literally, 2 or 3 metretai, a liquid measure equivalent to about 9 or 10 gallons.

So 6 pots, each 20 to 30 gallons. Maybe 150 gallons total. That's a lot of water. And it became real wine. As we'll see, quite high quality wine. But now, the second question. What was the purpose for the miracle?

II. WHE DID JESUS PERFORM THIS MIRACLE?

Certainly, Jesus was honoring the bond of marriage by honoring a wedding with his own attendance and by adorning that wedding with his first miracle. But there is more to it than that. So let's look at the details. As you read this text, it becomes obvious that,

A. Jesus performed the miracle in order to display his supernatural power.

In strictly human terms, he was showing off. But of course, you can't look at this in strictly human terms. He is displaying his power as God, his supernatural power. He was demonstrating supernatural power to prove that he was God. That's how his ministry would begin.

Let me ask a couple questions? Who was the bride? Who was the bridegroom? We don't know, and by God's inspiration, their identity was left out of this passage, lest we give them the attention. Instead, the subject of this text is not the wedding couple, but Jesus the miracle worker.

Further, what relation did Mary stand to the couple? Again, we don't know. And we shouldn't speculate, for the scriptures offer no help for our curiosity. Instead, what we have is Jesus shining brightly in the fullness of the sunlight. What we see here is Jesus and his supernatural power.

Having rebuked Mary by saying that his hour had not yet come, that it wouldn't come at her request, now, by his actions, he shows that his hour is, in fact, beginning. His time of public ministry is beginning. His work as the one mediator between God and man has begun. With a display of his supernatural power.

This was no joke. Turning the water into wine was not merely some rumor that erupted from some raucous laughing. This was a miracle. Six waterpots of stone were filled with water. Twenty to thirty gallons each. Filled to the brim. Don't miss that detail in verse 7.

And Jesus was pretty obvious about making sure that this miracle was recognized.

v.8-10

Jesus is drawing attention to himself, and to his own supernatural powers. And we need to pay attention. He has the power to transform ordinary water into wine. He alone has that power!

And notice how he did it, some more of the details,

emphasizing the greatness of that power. It wasn't just a little wine. And it wasn't just some poor quality wine. It was an abundance. 120 to 180 gallons total. Much more than would be needed for this wedding party. Perhaps it was offered as a gift to the newly married couple, quite a valuable asset for them.

You should learn by that example that Christ abundantly supplies all the need of his people. Man's inadequacy is obvious contrasted by Jesus' all-sufficiency. And the turning of this water into wine shows our inability to cope with the demands of the normal festivities of human life. And it shows the abundance of God's provisions. An abundance of wine.

And then, more broadly, we're given a specific reason for the miracle.

v.11

B. Jesus performed the miracle in order to display his glory.

Jesus is manifesting his glory. Jesus is revealing the unsurpassed greatness of his glory. By taking 150 gallons of water and transforming it into wine. Amazing, isn't it? Mary asked a simple question, noting that they had run out of wine. And Jesus provided for that need, in way that would have far exceeded any expectation that Mary could possibly have had.

And so we read these words of praise about God in, Eph. 3:20 "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

Phil. 4:19 "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

So how does that apply to us? Well, listen to what Paul says in,

2 Cor.9:8 "God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work."

But notice something else about the wine which Jesus produced. There is not simply an abundance, but we are told that it was wine of very high quality.

v.9-10

The master of the feast didn't know a miracle had been performed. He only knew that there was some very good wine left at the end of the party. And that surprised him, because normally, the best wine would be used first when the taste buds are the keenest. And after everyone's sense were a bit dulled, and in the worst cases, after everyone was drunk, well, then, you would get out the cheap wine.

Now, nothing is implied here that the guests were drunk, but the reaction of the master of the feast is included for a reason, to cause us to realize that God provides that which is good. That which is best. Not just cheap wine. But the finest and choicest of wines.

And why? For what purpose? For Jesus to display his glory! v.11 "This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory."

The word "miracle" is properly translated "sign." A miracle was a sign, that is, it was something meant to point to something else. The point of a miracle, the purpose of a sign, was not to marvel at the sign. But to worship the one who performed it!

When you drive through the country and see a sign that says “Dead end,” that sign is not placed there so that you can marvel at its beauty. You ought not to be meditating upon the sign itself, but rather start looking for the end of the road.

When you drive down the interstate and want to get off at the hospital, there is a sign which tells you where to get off. And that sign has a specific purpose. You don’t sit in your car admire the pretty blue color of that big letter “H”, rather you look for the exit ramp so that you can get off the highway and find the hospital.

The purpose of the miracles, as signs, was to point us to something and someone beyond ourselves. They show us God at work. The miraculous signs performed by Jesus, and the apostles, take their origin from God and they point men to God. It is not surprising, therefore, that they result in faith.

v.11b “...and His disciples believed in Him.”

Jesus accomplished his purpose. He displayed his glory for everyone to see, as he did with each and every miracle he performed. It is a glory that you and I should see clearly today.

And that leads me to my final point. This miracle at the wedding in Cana reveals the glory of God, but not only in the outward elements of water being turned into wine, but in the symbolism.

III. WHAT IS THE SYMBOLISM IN THIS MIRACLE?

It was good wine. And that abundance of good wine appropriately symbolize the goodness of God’s blessing upon our lives. For example, Isaac’s blessing to his son Jacob,

Gen. 27:28 “May God give you of heaven’s dew and of earth’s richness — an abundance of grain and new wine.”

And Moses’ blessing upon Israel,

Deut. 33:28 “So Israel will live in safety alone; Jacob’s spring is secure in a land of grain and new wine, where the heavens drop dew.”

In the poetry of,

Ps. 4:7 “You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound.”

So we should enjoy God’s provisions. For earthly things. So we should enjoy those provisions for our earthly sustenance. Earthly things. Physical things. Food and drink, and in this case, even wine.

James 1:17 “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.”

Jesus was not an ascetic, this is, one who always denied himself the things of this world. Jesus went to a wedding party, and he enjoyed the festivities. He provided for the enjoyment the other guests. And he provides for our enjoyment, if we would but receive from him the provisions for our earthly sustenance.

You should learn to enjoy those gifts of God’s goodness. You should be able to live without them, without the luxury and wealth that so many of us enjoy, but when God gives good things to you, enjoy them, for his glory.

1Cor. 10:31 “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

So this provision for an abundance of wine represents the provisions for all that we need in life. But the symbolism goes deeper.

A. The enjoyment of wine symbolizes the enjoyment of our salvation.

In fact, the provision of wine is often used to symbolize that salvation, emphasizing the great delight we ought to have in our salvation.

Isaiah 55:1 “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price.”

That’s the invitation of the gospel! Then,

Jer.31:11 “For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, And ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he. 12 Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, Streaming to the goodness of the LORD-- For wheat and new wine and oil, For the young of the flock and the herd; Their souls shall be like a well-watered garden, And they shall sorrow no more at all. 13 “Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, And the young men and the old, together; For I will turn their mourning to joy, Will comfort them, And make them rejoice rather than sorrow. 14 I will satiate the soul of the priests with abundance, And My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says the LORD.”

And in a passage that describes our eternal home, our eternal destiny in heaven, we read,

Joel 3:18 “And it will come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; a fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord and water the Valley of Acacias.”

New wine symbolizes the delight we ought to have in the salvation which we have in Christ. And so while drunkenness is

consistently condemned in Scripture, still we are given the great encouragement to enjoy all of God’s provisions, including wine. And we should allow the goodness of those earthly provisions to symbolize the greatness of the glory of our eternal inheritance.

So there is much symbolism in this wine. And in the wedding itself, for,

C. The celebration of a wedding symbolizes our relationship with Christ.

Again, with the connection to wine, we read this tender account in the Song of Solomon, a book of poetry which rightly speaks of an actual marriage, in words of a gentle and holy romance, the actual consummation of the marriage.

Song 4:16 “Awake, O north wind, and come, O south! Blow upon my garden, that it’s spices may flow out. Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its pleasant fruits.”

And the bridegroom responds,

Song 5:1 “I have come to my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk.”

So, to enjoy fruit of marriage, to enter that most blessed garden, is to drink my wine with my milk. And yet, even deeper, Scripture shows to us that the blessed relationship of marriage represents our relationship with Christ.

Eph.5:32 “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

So let me tie all of this together, and encourage you to recognize and observe the glory of God in this great miracle at

the wedding at Cana. Recognize the glory of Christ as he shines above all the other details of this passage. Recognize his power. And his sovereign authority.

And then worship him. Enjoy him. Delight in him.

Rev. 19:7 “Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready...9 ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!”

You see, heaven is portrayed to us as a wedding supper, the wedding supper of the Lamb, who is the bridegroom. And we the church, are the bride. And we have a great foretaste of that wedding supper every time we partake of the sacrament of the Lord’s supper.

So in the sacrament, we are coming to a wedding supper, much like the one I attended yesterday. Only so much better! Because it is the wedding of the lamb. So let this reminder be your encouragement as you partake of the Lord’s Supper today.

Isaiah 55:1 “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price.”

It’s free!

Rev. 19:7 “Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready...9 ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!”