

JOHN AND THE BOOK OF SIGNS (2) THE WEDDING AT CANA

John 2:1-11

Jeffrey S. Carlson

February 4, 2018

SCRIPTURE

¹The next day there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ²and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. ³The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus' mother told him, "They have no more wine." ⁴"Dear woman, that's not our problem," Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." ⁵But his mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus told the servants, "Fill the jars with water." When the jars had been filled, ⁸he said, "Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies."

So the servants followed his instructions. ⁹When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. ¹⁰"A host always serves the best wine first," he said. "Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!" ¹¹This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him (John 2:1-11 NLT).

INTRODUCTION

The first twelve chapters of the Gospel of John, minus the introduction (1:1-18), is referred to as the "Book of Signs." Sometimes the entire gospel is called the "Gospel of Signs." John uses the word that is translated as "sign" (*semeion*) more than any other New Testament writer. He preferred to use this word instead of the word miracle. We are not to base our faith on miracles. Instead, we are to trust in the One to whom the miracles point.

So John wrote about the signs of Jesus. A sign is meant to communicate a message. Jesus did not perform miraculous signs in order to entertain the crowd like a magician. The signs were intended to communicate something. They point to the identity of Jesus and the new kind of life he offers and thus lead to faith in the crucified and risen Lord. The first sign that John records for us took place at a wedding in the Galilean village of Cana.

¹The next day there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ²and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration (2:1-2).

MESSAGE

What do you do when you and your mother are at the same party? I suppose it would depend on your age. If you are only five then it may seem like a great idea. If you are fifteen then it may seem like your worst nightmare.

Jesus went to a party with his mother. The occasion was a wedding near his home town of Nazareth. Weddings in ancient Palestine were joyous events. They were usually held in the middle of the week. The new couple did not leave after the ceremony. Rather they kept an open house for seven days. They were treated like royalty. They even dressed the part and gave out "orders" to their subjects. It was all in great fun.

Ancient rabbis told their students that nothing must interfere with the study of the Word of God. There was one exception: A wedding. If they were invited to a wedding they were to drop everything and join the celebration.

Is it any wonder then that Jesus uses the wedding feast to represent his invitation to us? We are to drop everything and follow Jesus and we will experience a joy that lasts not seven days but forever. Through Jesus Christ we can experience a fulfilled life.

1. A FULFILLED LIFE MEANS RELATIONSHIPS MATTER TO US.

A fulfilled life means relationships matter to us.

As you may have noticed, this wedding feast was in trouble. They ran out of wine. This was more than a social embarrassment. The host family, which in those days was the groom's side, was liable for the quality of the party. If a guest felt slighted or if they ran out of food or, worse, they ran out of wine then that was considered grounds for a lawsuit.

This family from Cana was in deep trouble on a day that should have been their happiest. Now Mary noticed what was happening and she turned to Jesus and said, "They have no more wine." She wasn't try to inform Jesus. She was trying to get him to do something. Jesus made a curt reply, "Woman, what have I to do with you?" To us that sounds rude. The New Living Translation softens it a bit, ⁴"Dear woman." But in the original there is only the one word – "woman."

When Jesus was dying on the cross he had such a concern for his mother that he entrusted her into John's care. The term he used to address her then is the same term as found here

at the Wedding at Cana. This term is used in elsewhere in literature. It is how Odysseus addressed his beautiful wife Penelope. It is how Caesar spoke to Cleopatra. So the term is not a rude vulgarity but one that expresses the highest level of affection and respect. Jesus had great respect for his mother.

Healthy relationships need to be marked by respect. A healthy friendship, a healthy marriage, a healthy working relationship all require mutual respect. If we do not show respect, if we refuse to guard one another's dignity, then we shouldn't be surprised if our relationships blow up in our face. We need to treat people the way Jesus would treat people.

2. A FULFILLED LIFE MEANS CARRYING OUT OUR PURPOSE.

A fulfilled life means carrying out our purpose.

Jesus said to Mary, "My time has not yet come." A more literal translation would be, "My hour has not yet come." This phrase is used over and over again in the New Testament to refer to Jesus' appointed death on the cross. As C.G. Kruse puts it:

The hour towards which everything moves is the hour of Jesus' glorification, which takes place through his death, resurrection and exaltation.

John wants us to know that even this early in his ministry, Jesus was conscious of a divine purpose that would culminate in a far-reaching climax. It is possible that at some time or another Jesus mentioned the Messianic Feast to Mary or she was familiar with the tradition about the Messianic Feast. The Messianic Feast or Banquet is a symbol of the blessings of the age to come in which those chosen by God share in a rich feast with the Messiah. In the New Testament this is often pictured as a marriage banquet with Jesus Christ as the groom and the church as both bride and invited guests. The feast, which will take place after the consummation of God's kingdom, is prefigured in the Lord's Supper. In any case, Jesus' reply made it clear that it was not yet time for this prophesied feast.

Jesus had great respect for his mother but that did not mean he would do everything and anything she asked. His ultimate allegiance was to God. He did not see his life as a series of wishes like we often do. "I wish this would happen." "I wish I would receive that." "I wish I could do those things." "I wish, I wish, I wish." If you keep that up you will never be happy and you will certainly not experience a fulfilled life.

Jesus did not see his life as a series of wishes. Rather, he saw his life as a purpose to be fulfilled. If you want to experienced a fulfilled life then you need to discover and carry out God's purpose for your life.

According to Mike Royco in an account printed in the Chicago Tribune, a man named Bill Mallory traveled to India to look for the purpose of life. But he did not find the answer there. After returning to the United States, he noticed a sign at a Chevron gas station that simply said, “As you travel, ask us.” So every time he pulled into a Chevron station, he would point to the sign and say, “I’m a traveler. I’d like to ask you a question. What is the purpose life?” These were some of the answers he received:

- The first one said, “Sorry. I’m new here.”
- The second one said, “I don’t remember anything in the manual about that.”
- Another one said, “I’m not much for church myself, sir.”
- One guy gave him a leering look and a wink, whatever that meant.

However, most people just gave him a blank stare and went about their business. One day, Mallory got a phone call from Chevron Customer Relations. They said, “We understand you’ve been asking our dealers questions and getting unsatisfactory answers.” The Chevron representative suggested that Mallory write out his question and send it to Chevron Corporate with a self-addressed stamped envelope. So Mallory wrote, “What is the purpose of life?” and sent it to the Chevron oil company. A couple of weeks later, the envelope was returned. The only thing inside was an application for a credit card!

If you want to know the purpose of life, you need to talk to the Creator who made you. You were made by God and for God. And until you understand that, life is not going to make sense.

3. A FULFILLED LIFE MEANS TURNING TO THE LORD.

A fulfilled life means turning to the Lord.

Mary is an excellent paradigm for faith. When she sensed trouble she turned instinctively to Jesus. A healthy faith turns to Jesus no matter what the circumstance. Jesus said to her, “What have I to do with you.” Again, the New Living Translation softens it a bit, “that’s not our problem.”

This also sounds rude to us but it may not have been to Mary depending on how Jesus said it. “What have I to do with you.” This is a translation of what had been originally an Aramaic expression. If it was said in anger then it was the equivalent of our crudest expression for telling someone to depart from our presence. But if it was said gently then it meant something entirely different.

We have already established that only a moment earlier Jesus used the term of highest respect and affection for his mother. Therefore I believe Jesus said, “What have I to do

with you,” gently, even tenderly. If so then it means, “I’m sorry you do not understand. But that’s Okay. I will do the right thing.”

Having faith does not mean we always understand what God is doing. But even if we don’t understand what God is doing, we can still trust God to do the right thing.

Did you notice how Mary involved others? She got the banquet staff, the servants, to pay attention to Jesus. This is another mark of healthy faith. Faith not only turns to Jesus in all circumstances. Faith also encourages others to turn to Jesus as well.

4. A FULFILLED LIFE MEANS ENTRUSTING OUR DREAMS TO GOD.

A fulfilled life means entrusting our dreams to God.

Jesus did do something. He did something extraordinary. He performed his first recorded miracle. He turned water into wine, lots of it! There are some Christians, even some pastors who are uncomfortable with this. It is almost as if they wished this passage were not in the Bible. They reason this way, "I can see Jesus doing a miracle to give sight to the blind, heal the sick or feed a hungry crowd. But why waste a miracle on such a frivolous thing as a party?"

But this stems from a misunderstanding of the nature of this new life that Christ offers. It is not a meager, sorrowful existence that Christ offers. Jesus said :

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11).

He also said:

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10 NRSV).

Or as the New Living Translation puts it:

“My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life” (John 10:10b NLT).

Christ offers us an abundant life. It is a new kind of life. The master of ceremonies tasted the new wine and he was astonished at its superior quality. The clear implication, represented by this superior wine, is that the quality of the new life that Christ offers us is beyond our earthly limitations, beyond our wildest dreams.

If you had been a Greek of the first century and you heard this story you may have thought about your own myths and legends concerning gods and goddesses who turned water into wine. People knew they were myths but it was a common story and also a source of amusement. There was something called the fountain triglyph or triglyph wall in Corinth. A fountain triglyph was a lot like a wishing well. You parted with some money, made a wish and hoped your dreams would come true. The fountain triglyph wall looked like a large masonry altar with rain gutters made of stone coming out of both sides. You would give the priest some money and then you would pour water into the gutter on one side of the altar. The water would disappear within the altar. If water came out the other side that was considered bad luck. But if wine came out the other side, then the gods had heard your request and your dreams would come true.

I was fortunate enough to do some on site research at the ruins of Ancient Corinth. There is the remains of a triglyph wall in the market place. The altar next to it is man-made. The interior was hollow, large enough for a person to fit secretly inside. There was also a mechanism for diverting the water. I suppose if you did not pay enough money or if the priest did not like you then the water was not diverted. But if you paid enough money then the person inside the altar would divert the water and then pour out some wine which would then appear on the other side. "A miracle!"

Were people really that gullible back then? Just as we know a wishing well doesn't really work, I imagine most people back then knew the triglyph wall was not really supernatural. But what a wonderful idea! They'd love to meet someone who could really do such a thing. Here is the really amazing thing. One day they heard about someone who really could change water into wine. And they realized that if he has the power to change water into wine then he also has the power to fulfill dreams.

But not just any dream. If your dreams are selfish, if you wish to rule over people, if you want untold riches and be granted your forbidden desires then your dreams will come to naught. But if you want friendship with God. If you want a fulfilled life as God intended. If you want love, joy and peace forever then trust your dream to the Lord and he will do even more than you ask!

5. A FULFILLED LIFE MEANS A NEW KIND OF LIFE THAT LASTS FOREVER.

A fulfilled life means a new kind of life that lasts forever.

Jewish believers had a slightly different view of this passage than Greek believers. In the passage you will note the reference to six stone jars filled with water. These were used for ceremonial washing. Six was the number for incompleteness. The ceremonial jars

represented what Old Testament religion had become. The Jewish believes knew that the Law was good but that they themselves had not the power to fulfill it. The Law was good but it had no power to bring about a righteous life. Now along comes Jesus who can do what we cannot. He fulfills the Law. He reconciles us to God. He brings new life out of the old.

I find it interesting that there is no mention of the wedding ceremony. This whole passage is about the wedding feast. I think this speaks volumes about the nature of this new life that Christ offers.

I have had the privilege of marrying many couples during my career. Some couples have been very obvious in their love of Jesus, other couples not so obvious. I know they want Jesus at the ceremony, that is, they want a religious service in a church but it is not always clear to me that they also want Jesus at the party that follows, and their married lives which follow that. This passage is promoting the opposite of conventional expectations for weddings. Yes, its okay if you have a religious wedding ceremony. But what really matters is whether or not you invite Jesus to your party. Yes, saying your marriage vows before God can make a moment in time special. But asking God to be part of your everyday life can make for a joyful eternity.

CONCLUSION

If you are like me, then your life has its struggles, questions, and problems. This passage is good news for us. Lyman Coleman, who is best known for his *Serendipity Bible Studies*, asks this question: Where do you need to see water turned into wine in your life?

In a few moments we will be sharing in the Lord's Supper. We will see and taste the representation of the blood of Christ that was shed for us. As you look into the cup of blessing, ask the Lord to change the water into wine in your life. If you feel unworthy, discouraged, and out of it, ask the Lord to change the water into wine in your life. If you feel hassled, strung out and put through the wringer, ask the Lord to change the water into wine in your life. If you feel pushed, pressed and overloaded, ask the Lord to change the water into wine in your life. If you feel worn out, used up, and ready to quit, ask the Lord to change the water into wine in your life. If you feel dumb, foolish, like your brain has taken a vacation, ask the Lord to change the water into wine in your life. If you feel lonely, dry and out of sync with God and his Church, ask the Lord to change the water into wine in your life. God will answer that prayer. It may not be the answer you expected. It may not be an answer you completely understand. But you can trust God to do the right thing and enable you to live a life that is filled with his love and grace.