

The Cast|People Engaged in the Story of Jesus Christ

The Mother

John 2.1-12

January 28, 2018

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; ² and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." ⁶ Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each. ⁷ Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." So they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And He said to them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it to him. ⁹ 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, ¹⁰ and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹ This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.

¹² After this He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother and His brothers and His disciples; and they stayed there a few days.

We're looking at The Cast – the great cloud of witnesses who interacted with Jesus Christ and who are included in the accounts written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John... some have little parts, some big.

John, as a writer is particularly interested in signs... There are seven signs...not just miracles but miracles that SPEAK, that tell a story and that communicate WHO Jesus of Nazareth IS and what He has come to do. This is the first of the signs (v.11).

Jesus Christ is NOT a magic-man or a super-hero doing cool things to wow the crowds... He is the final Word from God...the Logos...the Mind of God become physical...and all that He is/does speaks.

Today we look at the FIRST SIGN...and it speaks NOT only to WHO Jesus Christ IS but also to our own expectations. What do we expect from a Messiah ...what do we think we NEED...in our lives; what do we hope religion will contribute to or enhance in our lives... what do we expect...what are we hoping for?... And what do we REALLY need?

Let's look at :

#1 The MIRACLE in the Story

#2 The STORY in the Miracle

The mother of Jesus (Mary) has been invited to a wedding in their home district ...She brings her oldest son and (since her son is a rabbi/teacher) some of His students are invited too. Jesus is about 30 years old at this point.

The host of the wedding runs out of wine for his guests and Jesus turns water into wine... really GOOD wine and lots of it!

Now three clarifications: **1st** Jesus and His Mother **2nd** Wedding Customs and Etiquette in that day and **3rd** WHAT IS A MIRACLE? How are modern people supposed to believe in miracles?

1st – in v. 4 Jesus addressed His mother as “woman” and that seems cold to us ...or worse. What IS that?

First, it's really only the equivalent of our “Ma'am”. It's not the same as saying “Woman” in our time and place. It's a formal type of address.

BUT (you say) why did He address her formally ... why not “Mother” or “Mom”?

Well, twice Mary is addressed by Jesus Christ in this book and twice by this word “Ma'am” and in both instances a separation is taking place: here (at the beginning) and at the end (from the cross as Jesus is dying: “Woman, behold your son”). AND in both cases, for Jesus to say “Mother” or “Mom” would only have only broken Mary's heart EVEN more.

When Jesus says here, “My hour is not yet come”, He's saying, “I have not yet been taken from you... not yet been thrust into the public eye...not yet been targeted for death ... but once I do this THERE'S NO TURNING BACK...” – a chain of events will be triggered...a domino effect.

2nd – These wedding receptions in the ancient Middle East were a big deal. The party could go on for days. Speeches. Parades ... And, it was a real insult to the guests if the family ran out of wine. (Like turning off the air conditioning in August for us.)

There was not only a shame on the hosts but also a kind of symbol...or omen... that it wasn't going to go well in this marriage.

So it's not just “Uh oh! We're running low on appetizers!” THE symbol of joy...has dried up!

3rd - How are modern people to understand these accounts of miracles? Well, John is very intent on declaring "I saw this!"

But are we being asked to believe that H₂O became a Chardonnay?

Well, the bigger question for you...is thĒ BIG question: Is there a Creator? And if He spoke the universe into being, why can't He change water into wine?

C.S. Lewis famously pointed out that God makes water into wine every day... a grape seed falls into the soil and is watered and grows into a vine and produces fruit and it's made into wine... and this miracle is only that process in super high speed.

If you rule out the existence of God...then you've precluded or disallowed the possibility of miracles. But if God exists then Miracles are possible. Why don't they happen all the time in the modern world? Well, they didn't happen all the time in the ancient world either! There are brief moments when God steps in...only a few times really in the thousands of years recorded in the Bible.

But you might say "But, I can't see it so it didn't happen"... We didn't see Washington cross the Delaware...Yeah, but people cross rivers all the time... O.K. – and granted, miracles like this don't happen all the time... but that doesn't mean that God can't interrupt the normal course of things. And that's what John and the witnesses are saying.

Again this was written not as legend or simply a symbolic morality tale or fable but history and distributed so early that there would have been plenty of eyewitnesses to refute John's account but they didn't. There were lots of opponents who would've loved to produce some eyewitnesses who said "That water never turned to wine". They could have snuffed out Christianity from the start. But they did not and they COULD not be found.

The philosopher David Hume insisted, "There must be another possibility because common sense tells us that miracles don't happen". He suggested things like mass hypnosis or conspiracies or group hallucination ... but that does NOTHING to explain that the witnesses... would not change their story- even when facing death.

They saw the significance of this moment...and of this Man.

So what DOES it MEAN? That's the second point – What's the significance of this miracle? What's the story in the miracle – what's it communicating?

Well, John doesn't exactly call this a miracle. He uses the word "sign"...an important word for John. He uses that word over and over again in his account.

AND THIS FIRST SIGN is significant... I mean it "sign-i-fies" something...it speaks.

Critical scholars who deny that these miracles actually took place, THEY have seen the account as a symbol constructed by the church to teach something about Jesus.

AND orthodox scholars (committed to the historicity of John) ... are sometimes so insistent that it actually happened that they never ask what it means...like it's either real OR symbolic?

But why do we have to choose? Why not see it as a real event AND symbolic...a parable PERFORMED.

In other words: it actually took place but it was also a gesture filled with significance...a sign.

The pots of water were for ceremonial cleansing. Jesus says to fill them to the brim...and they do. In doing that Jesus is saying that the ceremonies of the Jewish religion are now completed...fulFILLed.

They have reached their goal...they have outlived their usefulness. They could symbolize cleansing but they could not satisfy our thirst or fill us with joy. And now in the fullness of time (Gal 4.4) – the perfect ripeness of the moment, the hour has come. The law is fulfilled, the Obedient Man is arrived, the Perfect Adam, the ideal Gardener, the Winemaker (and the True Vine) and out of His obedience comes wine enough to flood the world with joy!

Jesus Christ is the better wine given after the water of the Mosaic rituals and ceremonies and regulations.

The headwaiter says, "This just isn't how it's done! All hosts serve the best wine first and after the guests are full of food and wine...and a little dulled...THEN they bring out the lower quality wine."

But God has reversed that order and has served something greater than law/ritual...

The Jewish Law required immense quantities of water for outward cleansing... but in Jesus Christ's administration, He provides that much Wine to be internalized. Some 500-700 bottles of wine!

Wine is a symbol for joy and this is a sign that a source of inexhaustible JOY has come to earth to replace religion and spirituality and self-help and to put, in their place, a Person.

Our attempts at morality, and being good, even the best rituals and religion and spirituality ALL FALL SHORT... We never love like we ought to...we're never good enough! BUT HERE IS A

PERSON who loves and obeys completely, who can wash us from our bad records and then fill us within.

He comes NOT to tell us what to do...NOT to tell us how to cleanse ourselves but comes to do it for us.

AND in His death, the wine of boundless joy spills out into my life and into the entire world and into everyone who drinks it. Because wine imparts joy but only to those who drink it – and the grace of God makes joyful only those who receive it!

When the disciples saw this...symbolic action, the Story in the Miracle, they began to see the glory of this Person and they (v.11) began to believe.

v. 11 - "This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him."

So what are we supposed to do or think or feel in response to this miracle and its meaning?

Well. Could be a number of things ... We could have titled the sermon after the exact words of Mary in v.5 "Whatever He says to you, do it".

Not a bad application... because IF the voice that said, "Fill the waterpots" is the same voice that said, "Let there be light"...then to treat Him as a consultant or an advisor whose counsel you can take or leave as you feel moved...that's insanity. "Whatever He says to you, do it": that's one very obvious response.

And we could say, I suppose, that Jesus and Mary saw the anguish that was coming on these hosts who were insulting their guests by turning off the A/C at a party...by running out of wine... And WE should care for people and if we can help cover peoples' shame... we ought to do that (that's ANOTHER thing to take away from this text).

Or maybe you're beginning to re-think the whole idea of miracles and the historicity of the Gospels and you want to look more deeply at the claims being made by Jesus Christ and IS CHRISTIANITY COMPATABLE WITH THE VIEWS OF MODERN SCIENCE ... And where has science (perhaps) left its boundaries and become (not science but PHILOSOPHY or RELIGION)... THAT would be another good application of this sermon (get the books in the back The Reason for God by Tim Keller or Basic Christianity by John Stott)

But I think thĒ BIG idea John wants us to see here is the beginning of the greater things... In the previous chapter, one of the first disciples of Jesus Christ, Nathanael...was first skeptical and then convinced by one small display of Jesus Christ's power...and Jesus said to him, "You believed because you saw that small display?...You'll see GREATER THINGS than that!"

And now in the next chapter...the “greater things” are starting to happen... John reported in the first chapter that the disciples began believing and here it says again “His disciples believed in Him.”

Now, they’re not only believing in a magic man who sees them when they’re by themselves (sitting under a fig tree)... nor is He one of the Greek mythological heroes come to life and doing cool tricks with wine...

They’re beginning to see Him as He is: He’s the fulfillment of the Law; He’s the end of religion; the Fixer of all that’s broken; the Lord and Giver of life and of wine – the One unending Source of joy... it’s dawning on them, little by little ...but inescapably...

And as they see Him for more than they expected Him to be... as they see the “greater things” He does and IS... they... sort-of “RE-BELIEVE”...they believe at a deeper and deeper level.

AND this, I think, IS the main take-away for us: our problem as people is deeper than we think it is... and God’s solution is always greater than we imagine it to be.

We think we need a little water to clean ourselves up...a New Year’s Resolution ... or get with a counselor or life-coach and make a few little tweaks. Or we THINK we need a vacation or for my kid to shape up ...AND THEN I’ll be happy and have joy and life will be worthwhile again. But that kind of happiness is based on changing circumstances and so our joy rises and falls... enslaved to our moods.

All these other factors (like kids and success and vacations) are pointers and tastes but Jesus Christ is the Fullness (Jn 1.16; Col 2.9-10). He’s what we really need and really want.

If our happiness is rooted in shopping or success or scuba-diving or me-time or good health or in getting people to think I’m ‘nice’ or ‘pretty’ or ‘cool’... then we’re destined for fluctuating serenity...inner peace that goes up and down with our circumstances and our performance.

But Jesus Christ is saying, “I can’t help people who need a minor adjustment... I can only help the tapped-out... I am the Winemaker and I am the True Vine... tie into Me...be grafted into Me... apart from Me you can do nothing but external, behavioral tweaks... BUT IN ME, the desperately thirsty find forgiveness and New Life... grace and peace...and joy unspeakable and full of glory (1 Pet 1.8).

Real salvation for real sinners...and always greater things to come.