

John 2:1–5, 11-12

Introduction

This morning we come to John chapter two, which begins with the famous miracle of Jesus' turning water into wine at a wedding at Cana in Galilee. At the beginning of this account there's an exchange between the mother of Jesus and Jesus that can be both very troubling to us and very confusing. When the wine at the wedding runs out, the mother of Jesus tells Him, "They have no wine." So first of all, what was Mary expecting from Jesus? And why? Jesus responds, "Women, what does this have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." That can sound sharp, and even hurtful and "mean" to us. Is Jesus really rebuking His mother? And if so, why? Maybe most confusing and most troubling of all is Mary's response to this apparent rebuke. Mary said to the servants, "Do whatever He tells you." Did Mary not hear Jesus? Is she being stubborn? Or just really "dense"? Or is there some other explanation? Finally, after having just said to Mary, "My time has not yet come," Jesus ends up "apparently" giving Mary the very thing she had asked for in the beginning.

Because of how "confusing" and "troubling" these verses are to us who live in the 21st century, it's important that we spend some extra time reflecting on them. And as we do this, we'll find that what was at first confusing and troubling is actually full of truth and instruction for us.

I. John 2:1–3 — On the third day [after Jesus' meeting with Nathanael; cf. 1:43-51] there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."

When John says "*when* the wine ran out" we might think that this wasn't unusual. But, in fact, for the bridegroom to let the wine run out would have been a huge social and cultural disgrace not only for the bridegroom but also for the family of the bride. This was such an unacceptable breach of etiquette that it could even result in the bride's family essentially suing the bridegroom for "damages." When Mary says to Jesus, "They have no wine," she's not overreacting to a trivial matter. This would be for the bridegroom a humiliating embarrassment with lasting social consequences. We could say that in some sense, this truly was a crisis. So why does Mary inform *Jesus* about this problem? What was she expecting Jesus to do?

It seems almost certain that Jesus had not performed any previous miracles (cf. 2:11). And yet Mary did know at least as well as anyone else that Jesus was the Messiah. Remember what the angel Gabriel said to her:

- Luke 1:31–33 — Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

Mary knew that she had conceived Jesus as a virgin (cf. Mat. 1:18-25; Lk. 1:34-35). When Mary heard the testimony of the shepherds to what they had been told by the angels (cf. Lk. 2:8-18), Luke says:

➤ Luke 2:19 — Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

Mary would not have forgotten the visit from the Magi (cf. Mat. 2:1-11). Neither would she have forgotten the words of Simeon and Anna at the temple (cf. Lk. 2:25-38). Mary was a faithful woman in Israel who loved and feared the Lord (cf. Lk. 1:28, 46-56) and it's from this perspective that she had even watched Jesus grow up as His mother. After finding Jesus at the temple when he was only twelve years old and hearing his explanation for why he was there (cf. Lk. 2:49), we're told again that:

➤ Luke 2:51 — His mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

We get the picture that this is what Mary was doing all along. Surely, all the rest of the years both before and after this event had only confirmed in her mind all that she had been told at the beginning. And now Mary knows about the ministry and preaching of John the Baptist, the story of whose birth she also would have remembered (cf. Lk. 1:5-25). She knows, too, that Jesus is gathering disciples.

In light of all these things, does Mary expect that Jesus must eventually make Himself known as the Messiah? Does Mary see as perhaps no one else does that still hidden and veiled in Jesus there is a messianic power and glory *of some kind*? I believe she does. Does Mary believe that in light of the apparent transition taking place (from John to Jesus) and also in light of the social shame and disgrace of the wine running out, now would be an opportune time for Jesus to reveal His messianic power and glory? I believe she does. She appears to be motivated *both* by the urgency of the circumstances *and* by her genuine belief in who Jesus is.

II. John 2:4a — When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” **And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me?”**

The fact that it's already obvious to us—and to Mary—what this has to do with Jesus tells us that Jesus is calling upon Mary to reevaluate her assumptions. He addresses His mother as “woman.” On the one hand, this isn't in and of itself a cold or disrespectful form of address (cf. Jn. 4:21; 20:13). It didn't sound 2000 years ago in Greek (or Aramaic) like it sounds today in English. The New Century Version tries to bring this out by translating, “Dear woman” though that's definitely going too far (cf. Lk. 22:57).

- John 20:15 — Jesus said to [Mary Magdalene], “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”
- Matthew 15:28 — Jesus answered [the Canaanite woman], “O woman, great is your faith!”
- Luke 13:12 — When Jesus saw [the woman who was “bent over and could not fully straighten herself”], he called her over and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your disability.”

The real “problem” here is not the form of address by itself, but the fact that Jesus addresses His own mother in this way. That’s something no one else ever did. So why does Jesus do it here? There is a sense in which Mary is presuming on her “connections,” or maybe we could say, her “influence” with Jesus. It seems that Mary herself had some level of “authority” at this feast since she can instruct the servants to “do whatever Jesus tells them” (cf. 2:5). Some have suggested that she might have been a sort of “hostess” at the feast. How tempting it would have been to see the looming catastrophe at the wedding and then use her connection or influence with Jesus, the Messiah, to seek a solution! It only makes “sense,” doesn’t it! And how much more tempting would this have been if Mary saw in this the perfect opportunity for Jesus to reveal who He truly was? Put yourself in Mary’s shoes, who has waited all these years knowing who Jesus is.

But can you see the very, very serious problem here? **In His identity as the Messiah** there can be no thought of any privileged family connections of any kind. **In His identity as the Messiah**—which Jesus has only recently entered into “formally” at His baptism—Mary is to Jesus no more *nor less* than any other believing “woman” could ever claim to be. Was this difficult for Mary? Maybe it was. But we’re never given any indication in the Scriptures that it was. Mary was a woman of faith, and as we’re about to see, she knew immediately and with certainty that this was no personal slight or insult.

The Messiah is “beholden” to no one, not even His mother, and this is what will enable Mary to see in Jesus the Messiah that she needs. For her own spiritual welfare, her view of the Messiah cannot be clouded in any way by any “special” or “exclusive” relationship that she bears to Jesus because this would be in the end to cut her off from that one true relationship of “faith” that is most essential. It’s for this reason that I assume from this time onward Jesus addresses Mary no longer as “mother” but as “Woman” – just as he would any other. We read in John chapter nineteen:

- John 19:26 — When Jesus [while on the cross] saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!”

Even as Jesus fulfills the duties of a son, He guards His true identity as the suffering Messiah that Mary needs. This also explains why Jesus, even when He was twelve years old, would say to His mother and “father” before He went with them and continued *in submission* to them:

- Luke 2:49 (cf. 2:51) — “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

But Jesus’ corrective rebuke isn’t just for the sake of Mary’s spiritual welfare; it’s equally important to all of us. If there are those who have special privileged connections and influence with Jesus as the Messiah, that automatically results in people who are less privileged and who have lesser access and who enjoy a lesser assurance of His personal care and concern. This is why it’s such good news for us when we read in Mark chapter three:

- Mark 3:31–35 — [Jesus’] mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother

and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

Jesus didn’t say this as an insult to his mother and brothers. He said this first of all to encourage you and me – to assure us that as our Messiah we can all have equal and direct and full access to Him by faith, and therefore equal and direct and full access to the Father *through Him*. There is no one with “exclusive” or “special” privileges. There are none who can claim any “one-of-a-kind” or unique relationship to Him.

- Romans 5:2 — Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
- Ephesians 3:12 (cf. 2:18) — In [him] we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

Notice how the language in Mark carefully emphasizes Jesus’ personal and individual love and care:

- Mark 3:34–35 — ***And looking about at those who sat around him***, he said, “***Here*** are my mother and my brothers! For ***whoever*** does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

Can we comprehend the good news that this is for all of us?—And the tender love and care that this means Jesus must have for all of us who He counts as His own family? And can we see again how essential it was that His mother and brothers should understand this truth for their own spiritual good? Their view of the Messiah cannot be clouded in any way by any “special” or “exclusive” relationship that they bear to Jesus because this would cut them off in the end from that one true relationship of “faith” that is most essential – the one that is open to us all. So when Jude, the brother of Jesus, opens his New Testament epistle, he writes not, “Jude, a brother of Jesus Christ,” but rather:

- Jude 1 — Jude, a servant [bondslave] of Jesus Christ and brother of James [cf. Gal. 1:19]...

As a very important side note, we can see in light of these things how the Roman Catholic teaching about Mary, the mother of Jesus, is inherently idolatrous on the one hand, and on the other hand destructive of true saving faith in Jesus. If Mary received Jesus’ rebuke, what might a church that teaches people to ask Mary to pray for them (in light of her special access to Jesus)—what might such a church expect to receive in light of the damage that this must do to people’s souls and the glory this gives to Mary rather than to Jesus?

So now we should be in a position to embrace with humility these words: “And Jesus said to her [His mother], ‘Woman, what does this have to do with me?’” Or as the HCSB says: “What has this concern *of yours* to do with *me*?” There is wonderful Gospel truth here – not only for Mary, but for us.

But there's still something more for us to see and understand. Even though Mary is misguided, she does genuinely believe. She's believed ever since the angel first announced to her that she would bear a son who would reign over the house of Jacob forever (cf. Lk. 1:33). Remember what she said then:

- Luke 1:38 (cf. 1:46-55) — “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

So if, on the one hand, Mary was wrongly presuming on an “exclusive” and “privileged” relationship with the Messiah, on the other hand she does still believe in Him and she is still thinking, apparently, that this crisis for the bridegroom and his family would be an opportune time for Jesus to reveal who she believed and knew Him to be. This, then, explains what Jesus says next.

III. John 2:4b — “Woman, what does this have to do with me? **My hour has not yet come.**”

In the rest of this Gospel, Jesus' “hour” always refers to the time when His glory is revealed fully in and through His sufferings and death, and His resurrection and ascension to the Father (cf. “Son of Man” as a title that emphasizes the revelation of Christ's divine glory in and through His suffering). So we read in other places:

- John 7:30 — They were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, **because his hour had not yet come.**
- John 8:20 — These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, **because his hour had not yet come.**
- John 12:23 — And Jesus answered them, “**The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.**”
- John 13:1 — Before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that **his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father**, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.
- John 17:1 — When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “**Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son** that the Son may glorify you.”

Mary doesn't see yet what the future holds for Jesus, the Messiah. When she says to Jesus, “They have no wine,” suggesting that He might reveal His true identity and power, she's speaking from out of this very limited and incomplete perspective (cf. Mat. 16:21-23). She's thinking without the cross in the picture. And so Jesus, without giving any details that would have been too much for her to bear right now, simply says to her: “My hour has not yet come.” He knew from the very beginning all that that hour would entail. Mary didn't – and still doesn't. But this was enough to help her see that the kind of Messianic revelation with the kind of results she had in mind must still await another day.

So now we all need to ask ourselves a really important question. If I was Mary, and if I was the one who had said to Jesus, “They have no wine,” and if it was to me (Mary) that Jesus answered: “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come,” how would I have responded? We could hear this as Jesus shutting down the conversation. End of discussion. *Or—*

if we have faith and believe like Mary has faith and believes—we could hear this as an invitation to reevaluate our motives and our assumptions and then come again to Jesus in an even truer and stronger faith. We read in verse five:

IV. John 2:5 — His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

It was Mary’s faith that enabled her to hear in Jesus’ words not only rebuke and correction, but also affirmation – and even an invitation to expect that Jesus would, here and now, begin to manifest His glory. When Jesus says, “My hour has *not yet* come,” Mary hears her faith affirmed: He *is* the Messiah, and He *will one day* fully reveal His power and glory. When Jesus says, “My *hour* has not yet come,” Mary hears an invitation to believe that prior to that ultimate “hour” there might still be the *beginnings* of the revelation of His glory. And when Jesus asks, “Woman, what does this have to do with me [what has this concern of yours to do with Me]?” Mary hears not a rhetorical question intended to shut her down, but an invitation to reorient her thinking and then watch to see what *He* will do.

“His mother said to the servants, ‘Do *whatever He tells you.*’” What these five words (six in the Greek) add up to is a most beautiful expression of humble submission on the one hand, and of persevering faith on the other. Yes, Mary has been rebuked and corrected. But faith has enabled her to hear *in* that rebuke and correction an invitation to an even greater faith – and ultimately, therefore, an even fuller joy.

Conclusion

In the end, as we’ll see next week, Jesus does manifest His glory by abundantly supplying the wine. We read in verse eleven:

➤ John 2:11 — This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory.

But then we read in the very next verse:

➤ John 2:12 — After this [Jesus] went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

He manifested his glory, and yet His “hour” had not yet come. Only, now, when that “hour” does come Mary will be in a far better place to understand and to believe. What she’s learning here is that most essential lesson of *humble submission* combined with *persevering faith*. And so what we have in Mary is a beautiful model and example for all of us (Heb. 12:1). In whatever rebukes or discipline God gives us—in whatever trials or tribulations, will we hear Him *calling* us to humble submission and *at the same time inviting* us to a persevering faith? In whatever apparent answers in the “negative,” will we always—ultimately—hear His loving “yes” so that we cling *all the more* to Him with a faith that won’t ultimately be denied (cf. Isa. 62:6-7; Mat. 15:21-28)? Jesus told a parable to the effect that we ought always to pray and not lose heart:

- Luke 18:2-8 — He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’” And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”