

The Wedding at Cana
John 2:1-11

Introduction

Conducting weddings is one of the great privileges of being a pastor. I enjoy being able to perform marriage ceremonies and be involved in the festivities. It starts with meeting with couples that seem to float in for premarital counseling. They have great big eyes for each other and they see the world through wonderful romantic rose-colored glasses in which everything is beautiful. The bride will commonly speak of the coming wedding ceremony with great expectations. They present their dream of how everything would look just perfect. It is a joy to help them plan and make that dream come true. It is also a joy for me to conduct the ceremony and see the joy in their faces as they hold hands and make their vows to one another.

However, I must admit that I have yet to see a wedding where every detail came out just as it was planned. Sometimes the flaws are hardly noticed and other times they are very apparent. Sometimes the mistakes that occur can be quite humorous and other times they can be quite embarrassing.

I recall one wedding when the organist played the Wedding March a bit early and the people in the front of the church stood up. The mother of the Bride was horrified and tried to get them to sit down, but as some of them began to sit down, the folks in the back wondered what was going on, so they stood up. It ended up like a sporting event with a couple of waves of standing and sitting before the Bride actually made her entrance. At another wedding, the groom was very nervous and trying to be very careful not to make any mistakes. He listened carefully to the vows so that he would repeat them exactly. The pastor read the vows and concluded by saying, "Thank you," to the groom. The groom dutifully repeated the vows to his bride and included the "Thank you" at the end. This struck the Bride and her Maid of Honor as extremely funny and though they tried hard to suppress their smiles and giggles, they were unsuccessful, and the rest of the wedding party joined in including the pastor. Only the dazed groom stood there not knowing what had happened and why everyone was laughing. Such mistakes can make a wedding very humorous.

A main reason for such occurrences at weddings is that they are very formal occasions with a very idealistic and romantic ideas of how everything is going to occur. Weddings are extremely important in the family and within society. The many guests attending can make people nervous, but add in the fact that it is often the first time that many of the young adults in the wedding party have ever been in such a formal occasion, and you have a good recipe for one of these very nervous people to do something incorrectly.

While our society's wedding customs are closer to ancient Roman than to ancient Jewish practices, there are still similarities between Jewish weddings of the time of Jesus and our own. Among these were the importance of the event in the life of a family and in society, and the mistakes that can occur by missing a detail or not being fully prepared for the unexpected at such a large social gathering. This morning we are going to look at a very important Jewish wedding. It was not important because of who was getting married, for we do even know the names of bride, groom or families involved. It is important because an error was made which allowed Jesus to perform a miracle which demonstrated that He is indeed the Son of God.

Before we look at our passage in John 2, I want to give you some background on Jewish weddings of that time so that you will have a greater understanding of the events that take place in our text.

Jewish Weddings at the Time of Christ

Weddings were extremely important in Jewish society not only as a great social event, but also because of their understanding of God's betrothal relationship with Israel. Marriage was a reflection of that relationship and therefore a central focus for celebration.

Alfred Edersheim records the ancient Jewish marriage customs in *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. A man and woman were legally bound in marriage at their betrothal, but they would not enjoy the physical benefits of the marriage until after the wedding ceremony, which could be up to a year later. The betrothal was similar to our engagements, but it was legally binding. It could not be broken except by death or divorce. The betrothal period allowed the man time to prepare for the taking on the responsibilities of having a wife.

On the evening of the wedding, usually a Wednesday for a maid, the bride was led by a procession from her parents home to the home of her betrothed. The procession would be preceded by merry music and those who would give gifts of wine and oil to the people and nuts to the children. The bride followed surrounded by her friends. She was covered in a bridal veil with her long hair flowing. The bridal party was accompanied by those that carried torches or lamps on poles and by others that who carried myrtle-branches and flowers. As the procession wound through the streets, everyone would rise to salute the procession or even join in it. This was deemed almost a religious duty to call out greetings to the bride and praise her beauty, modesty and virtues.

When she arrived at the home of her betrothed, she would be led to him and some formula such as, "*Take her according to the Law of Moses and of Israel,*" would be pronounced and the bride and groom would then be crowned with garlands. A legal document called a *Kethubah*, which contained all the promises being made, would be signed. A ceremonial washing of the hands would be followed by a solemn prayer and then the wedding feast would begin. This might last more than a day and up to seven days in which there would be much merriment. The bride and groom would finally be led to the bridal chamber and the marriage would be consummated.

You can easily conclude from all this that there was great planning and preparation made for a Jewish wedding. Depending on the wealth available, their might be servants hired to help with the planning, preparation and the serving at the feast, or you might get your family and friends to help. Those of you who have been involved with weddings know that the same is true today. Some are able to hire people to make sure everything is in proper order, while most of the rest of us have to rely on the goodwill of friends and family to help. And the reality is that volunteer help may not have the experience or be as diligent as hired help. That can easily lead to some details not getting the attention they need resulting in oversights and mistakes. Such appears to be the case in our text this morning, and yet God uses the error to the glory of His son.

The Setting - John 2:1-2

And on the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; 2 and Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the wedding.

The reference to the "third day" here goes back to the day that Jesus found and called Philip and Nathanael to follow Him (John 1:43). Jesus had purposed to return to Galilee when He found and called them to also be His disciples in addition to Andrew, Peter and John. While we do not know the exact location of either "Bethany beyond the Jordan" (John 1:28) or "Cana of Galilee," we can make some reasonable assumptions about where they may have been. Cana was about 9 miles Northeast of Nazareth and Bethany was in the middle region of the Jordan valley. The two cities would have been a traveling distance of 25-30 miles from each other which is a reasonable distance for a journey from one to the other within three days.

There is a wedding in Cana of Galilee. We are not told what relationship Jesus or His mother had with the couple being married, but we find that Mary is there and Jesus is an invited guest along with His

disciples. It is interesting to note that the grammar of the text makes emphasis on Jesus being an invited guest as compared to His mother who was also there. As we shall see in few moments, Mary seems to have some responsibility in helping with the wedding celebration rather than just enjoying it. She may have been a friend of one of the families involved in the marriage and so was there to help as well enjoy the festivities. Verse 12 indicates that the brothers of Jesus were also there for after the wedding they went with Jesus and His disciples along with their mother to Capernaum for a few days. This lends additional evidence that the wedding included a relative or friend of the family. This may be the reason for the invitation to Jesus, or perhaps he was invited as a special guest because He was already known as a wise teacher of the Law, or perhaps it was a mixture of both or some other unknown reason. In any case, Jesus is invited to come this wedding along with His disciples.

The text does not specifically state how many of Jesus' disciples are with Him, but it would seem safe to assume that all those mentioned in chapter 1, which includes Andrew, John, Peter, Philip & Nathanael, were there since it would seem absurd for Jesus' to call them to follow Him and then leave them alone just a couple of days after meeting. It is also possible that James, John's brother, was also part of the group. Also keep in mind that Nathanael was from Cana of Galilee (John 21:2) and so probably also knew the couple getting married.

The Problem (John 2:3)

3 And when the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus ^said to Him, "They have no wine."

A problem arises at the wedding. The wedding feast is being celebrated and they run out of wine. We are not told why they run out of wine, only that they have. Many have speculated on the cause, but like any error that occurs at any wedding or feast, the reason for the lack is not important. Correcting the problem is what is important.

While we may not understand this at first glance, this is not a minor inconvenience. It is a serious problem. While there are many American Christians that might view the running out of wine as a blessing rather a tragedy, we must understand it from the Jewish perspective. For the Jews, wine was a symbol of God's blessing and was part of any joyous celebration.

Proverbs 3:9-10 instructs the godly Jew in how to gain God's blessing. *"Honor the Lord from your wealth, And from the first of all your produce; 10 So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine."* They understood wine to be something that God Himself provided for them as a blessing. Psalm 104:14-15 states, *"He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the labor of man, So that he may bring forth food from the earth, 15 And wine which makes man's heart glad, So that he may make [his] face glisten with oil, And food which sustains man's heart."* God's invitation to partake in His redemption blessings includes wine. Isaiah 55:1, *"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost."* They viewed wine and an important and joyful element in celebrating. This is also in the description in Isaiah 25:6 of the banquet the Lord will prepare in the millennium, *"And the Lord of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, And refined, aged wine."*

To the people at this Jewish wedding feast, wine was an essential element for the celebration. To run out of wine would be a supreme embarrassment that would not only diminish the dreams of a beautiful wedding, but would have been considered very rude to the guests.

The Solution (John 2:3b-8)

Mary's Statement (John 2:3b)

Mary, referred to in verse 3 as *"the mother of Jesus"* as she is throughout John's gospel, seeks to find a solution to the problem. Again, we do not know her exact role in the wedding, but she has some role in helping in the feast as seen in her action to resolve this problem of running out of wine and her

authority over the servants in verse 5. When she becomes aware that there is no more wine, she goes to Jesus to inform Him. Her statement is straightforward and factual. *"They have no wine."* She does not tell Jesus what to do nor does she even ask Him to do something. She simply informs Him of the problem. Jesus is her son, but He is an adult, not a child. Mary treats Him with the respect due an adult and in this case also a respected Rabbi.

Why would Mary do this? Jesus is an invited guest and this is not His home town. There are plenty of servants who know the area to send on errands as needed (vs. 5). Why would Mary tell Jesus?

There is quite a bit of speculation about her motives. The most obvious one is that Mary trusts Jesus to help. She, more than anyone else, knows His character of compassion and giving as well as His identity as the Son of God. I think there is also validity to the speculation that she thought Jesus might do a miracle of some sort. Jesus' reply suggests that. The prophets had predicted that the messianic age would be one in which wine would flow liberally, as already pointed out from Isaiah 25:6, but also indicated in Jeremiah 31:12 and Amos 9:13-14. Mary did not have a solution, but she trusted her son for a solution. She presumes upon Him, but she does not tell Him what to do. She simply tells Him of the need and trusts Him for the rest.

We would do well to do likewise, yet how often do we want to tell God what to do. We worry and fret and then expect God to solve our problems in a certain way or provide some miracle for a solution. Our petitions are also usually centered on ourselves instead of God's glory. We need to come to God and simply present the need. Matthew 6:32, among many other verses, tells us that God knows our needs and He will meet them. Our focus is to be first on His kingdom and righteousness. Our lives are to be about His glory, not our own.

Jesus' Response (John 2:4)

Jesus' response to His mother is a bit hard for us to understand because the idiom He uses does not translate well into English. A very wooden translation would be, *"Jesus says to her, 'What to me and you, woman, not yet is come the hour of me.'*" First of all, calling His mother, "woman," is not a sign of disrespect, though it is a distancing of the relationship. Jesus would call Mary, "woman," again in a very tender manner when He is on the cross and entrusts her care to John. Mary will need to recognize Jesus not so much as the son she has raised but as the promised Messiah to whom she must submit.

The phrase, *"What to me and you,"* is a Hebrew idiom which distances the relationship of the two parties by asking what there is in common between the two. This is not rude, but it is abrupt with the strength of the reproach depending on the tone of the speaker. The thrust of Jesus' reply to Mary is that He has entered into the purpose of His mission on Earth and all His activities would now be subject to the fulfilment of that mission. Jesus statement that *"His hour was not yet come"* points out that He is on a divine schedule. The blessings of the Messianic age would come, but that was still in the future. At the same time, Jesus' reply also indicated to Mary that He would take care of the problem.

My understanding of Jesus' reply can be conveyed by the following very loose paraphrase. *"This is my affair, not yours, ma'am. This is not now the Messianic age, but it will come."*

Mary's Directive (John 2:5)

Verse 5 indicates that Mary took Jesus' reply as a statement that He would solve the problem. *His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."* Mary has some authority at the banquet and gives directions to the servants. The servants here are not slaves (δουλος / doulos), but either hired or volunteer table waiters (διακονος / diakonos). This directive would be needed for otherwise it would seem strange for a waiter to receive such orders from a guest. It also would require their obedience to Jesus even if what He told them to do seemed foolish to them.

Jesus' Action (John 2:6-8)

John was probably a first hand witness because in verses 6-8 he states the situation and what occurs in a very matter of fact and detailed manner. Verse 6, *"Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each."*

These particular water pots were there for the purpose of purification, that is, for washing. The custom of the Jews was to wash their hands before eating (Mark 7:3). The water was there for that purpose as well as for cleaning the dishes. The pots were fairly large and of different sizes. The text says they were two or three measures each. A measure would have been about 8 or 9 gallons, so each pot would have been between 17 and 27 gallons. The total would have been between 102 and 162 gallons. Why so much water? Because of the many guests present.

Jesus gives directions to the servants in verse 7, *Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim.* The servants went out to the nearest fresh water supply and proceeded to fill up the jars to the very brim. This detail eliminates any possibility of something being added to the pots before or after they were filled with water. They were filled to the brim with no room for anything to be added. Remember as well that they are all watching and would have noticed anything being added. You can imagine these servants wondering at what Jesus was having them do. Was Jesus going to have them serve water instead of wine?

In verse 8, Jesus gives further direction to the servants who had filled the jars with water, *"Draw [some] out now, and take it to the headwaiter." And they took it [to him.]* The results of Jesus' solution to the problem are recorded in verses 9 & 10.

The Result (John 2:9-10)

9 And 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 [men] have drunk freely, [then] that which is poorer; you have kept the good wine until now."

The headwaiter, or more properly "the ruler of the feast" as in the KJV, was surprised by the good wine he was given. He did not know where the wine had come from, but he is very impressed by it. John gives us the detail about the servants who had drawn the water which had become wine because they are the first hand witnesses of the miracle. They had put water in the pots, but when they gave it to the master of the feast, it had turned into wine. It matters not whether the all the water was turned to wine in the pots or if it turned into wine as it was drawn out. Jesus had performed a miracle.

The superb quality of the wine is attested to by the comments the ruler of the feast makes to the bridegroom. It is important to note that it is the ruler of the feast that is making these comments and not just some guest at random. He would know the quality of good wine and poor wine, and this wine is so good that he has to comment on it to the bridegroom. The normal practice was that the best wine would be served first when people's taste buds were fresh. The inferior wine would be served after people had plenty to drink. This is not a statement that such people were intoxicated and would then not care what was served, for the scriptures give many warnings about the sinfulness of drunkenness such as Proverbs 20:1, *"wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise,"* and Proverbs 23:21, *"For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags."* This practice simply considered that the sensitivity of the taste buds would decline as the feast progressed and so a poorer quality wine, which would be less expensive, would not be noticed. In a sense, this is both a compliment on the wine and a mild rebuke of the bridegroom for holding back the best until now.

Before I go on to Verse 11 and the significance of what Jesus did here, let me comment a moment about the idea advocated by some that Jesus turned the water into non-intoxicating grape juice instead of wine. There is a legitimate concern about the danger of drunkenness caused by alcoholic beverages,

however, that is not an excuse for deliberately distorting the Scriptures. The word for wine here is οἶνος /oinos. It is the common Greek word for fermented grape juice, otherwise known as wine. It is the same word as used in Ephesians 5:18, *“Do not be drunk with wine (οἶνος), but be filled with the Spirit.”* There was not a means to keep the grape juice from fermenting at that time and especially so in the warm climate of Israel. Even the new wine, which is γλεύκος /gleukos in Greek, could cause intoxication as indicated in Acts 2:13.

The Bible gives many strong warnings about the sin of drunkenness and the dangers of wine as already briefly noted, but the Scriptures do not condemn wine as evil. Those who say that Jesus turned the water into non-alcoholic grape juice are either ignorant or guilty of twisting the Scriptures to fit their own pre-conceived ideas. That is a serious sin (Matthew 15:9; 1 Timothy 4:1-5; etc.). Jesus turned the water into wine. Jesus also drank wine according to Matthew 11:34, and He will drink it again in His kingdom according to Matthew 26:29 with reference to Isaiah 25:6. You cannot use Jesus' use of wine as an excuse for you to abuse wine and get drunk, but it is Biblical truth.

The Significance (John 2:11)

The significance of what Jesus did is multi-faceted. It demonstrates God's approval of marriage and wedding celebrations. Jesus' generous gift of an abundance of wine to the couple shows His approval to enjoy the good things in life. Those who think godliness is shown in an ascetic lifestyle have not understood the precious gift life is and God's desire for us to live it with joy. We are not to be hedonistic, for life is not about pleasure, but we are to take pleasure in what God grants to us. But these are minor points and fail to compare to the true significance of this miracle John points out in vs 11, *“This beginning of [His] signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.”*

This was a sign miracle that demonstrated Jesus' glory as the Son of God that strengthened their faith in Him. Some have tried to lessen the significance of this miracle in various ways, but this is a miracle of the first order. It takes a grape vine many months to use the energy of the Sun to synthesize a grape from water, air and soil nutrients. Jesus did this in an instant. Even more significant is that it was not just a rearranging of elements already present as a plant does as it grows or a chemist might do in a laboratory. This miracle required the creation of elements as well as the instantaneous rearranging of them into the various molecules contained in wine. Water is made up of just hydrogen and oxygen. While wine is 70-80% water, it also contains organic acids, phenolic compounds, nitrogenous compounds, aroma compounds, minerals and pectic substances. In other words, in addition to the elements of hydrogen and oxygen that make up water, wine also contains carbon, nitrogen, potassium, sodium, iron, sulfur, chlorine and phosphorus. Only God can create the additional elements needed for the water to become wine, and so this miracle attests to Jesus' power to create as the Son of God.

Jesus told Nathanael a few days earlier he would see “greater things” than Jesus' foreknowledge about him. This was the first of those greater signs. The miracle points to Jesus. Everything else falls to the background. Who was getting married is unimportant. Why Mary was there and her exact role in the wedding is inconsequential. Why Jesus was invited along with His disciples and how many were there is insignificant. Like a Rembrandt painting, everything else falls to the background as John describes this miracle to focus the attention on Jesus. He is the miracle worker. He is the Son of God.

Sermon Notes - 6/2/2013
The Wedding at Cana - John 2:1-11

Introduction

Complexity and inexperience often result in _____ being made at weddings

Weddings are extremely important in the family and within _____

American wedding traditions have similarities to both ancient _____ and ancient Jewish customs

Jewish Weddings at the Time of Christ

A joyous social event and a reflection of God's _____ relationship with Israel

A betrothal was _____ binding, with the wedding up to a year later.

A lighted bridal _____ from her home to his home - with music, gifts, flowers and salutations

At his home there would be a religious and legal ceremony and then a _____

This took much preparation and lots of volunteer help, or if wealthy enough, hired _____.

The Setting - John 2:1-2

The third day from when Jesus found _____ and Nathanael

There is an emphasis that Jesus is an _____ guest - though his mother is helping with the serving

It is reasonable to assume that the five men Jesus has called as His _____ were also present

The Problem - John 2:3

They have run out of _____, which was a serious problem in that culture

Wine was a symbol of God's _____ - Proverbs 3:9-10; Psalm 104:14-15; Isaiah 55:1; 25:6

Wine was an _____ element for the celebration at a Jewish wedding feast

The Solution - John 2:3b-8

Mary's Statement - John 2:3b

Mary becomes aware they have run out of wine, and she tells this to _____ - "*They have no wine*"

Mary does not have a solution, but she _____ that Jesus will provide one

We do not have solutions for our problems, but we can present our needs to God and _____ for His solution

Jesus' Response - John 2:4

Jesus using the term "woman" for His mother was not _____ (see John 19:26)

"*What to me and you,*" is a Hebrew idiom that questions what is in _____ between the two

"*His hour was not yet come*" points out that Jesus is on a divine _____

Jesus indicated He will _____ of the problem, though the Messianic age was not yet come

Mary's Directive - John 2:5

Mary has _____ to give directions to the hired servants to do what Jesus tells them.

Jesus' Action - John 2:6-8

Vs. 6 - The water pots were there for purification - _____ - both ceremonial and clean up

Each pot would have held between 17 - 27 gallons - a total of between _____ gallons

Vs. 7 - The pots are filled to the _____ with water - preventing anything else from being added

Vs. 8 - The servants are to draw from the _____ pots and take it so the headwaiter

The Result - John 2:9-10

The headwaiter is surprised by the ____ quality of wine being served this late in the feast and tells the groom

This miracle is not an endorsement of _____ - see Proverbs 20:1; 23:21

Legitimate concerns about drunkenness do not allow the Scriptures to be _____

Jesus turned the water into _____ - fermented grape juice (See Eph. 5:18; Matt. 11:34; 26:29; Isa. 25:6)

The Significance - John 2:11

God _____ of marriage and wedding celebrations

God approves of people being able to _____ the good things in life (not hedonism)

Vs. 11 - this was the beginning of Jesus' _____ - attesting His identity as the Son of God

At least eight elements (N, C, Na, P, S, Cl, K, Fe) and complex molecules from them were _____ instantly

The miracle puts the focus on _____ - and everything else becomes background

KIDS CORNER

Parents, you are responsible to apply God's Word to your children's lives. Here is some help.

Young Children - draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch. **Older Children** - Do one or more of the following: 1) Write down all the verses mentioned in the sermon and look them up later. 2) Count how many times the terms "water" & "wine" are used in the sermon. Talk with your parents about what Jesus ability to perform miracles.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Questions to consider in discussing the sermon with others. What was the most humorous occurrence at a wedding you have been too? What are the differences between our practice in weddings and the practice of the Jews at the time of Christ? What are the similarities? Where was this wedding and why was that a fact that needed to be mentioned? What is the significance of Jesus attending the wedding and joining the celebration? Who else was at this wedding? What was so significant about running out of wine at the wedding feast? How did the Jews view wine? Why? What might be a cultural equivalent in our own society? Why did Mary go and tell Jesus? Why did Jesus respond to her as He did? What was the purpose of the 6 water pots? What did Jesus have the servants do to them? What is the significance of the comments made by the ruler of the feast? Why the many details about what the servants and what they knew? Did Jesus turn the water into wine or grape juice? Back up your answer with Scripture. Why did Jesus turn so much water into wine? What changes had to occur in the water for it to become wine? What is the significance of the miracle? Who is Jesus?