

THE BETTER WINE

John 2:1-11

THE SITUATION:

1 On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples.

John sets the scene for us — a wedding in the town of Cana in the region of Galilee about 4 miles from Nazareth where Jesus grew up. And we find that Jesus, and his mother, Mary and the disciples are invited to a wedding in Cana.

Weddings in the 1st century were big events — celebrations that usually lasted up to a week and involved the whole community. The purpose of the wedding wasn't exclusively to celebrate the love between the husband and wife. It was a time to bring the community together to celebrate the next generation.

3 When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."

In a culture that highly values hospitality, to run out of wine is nothing short of a social disaster. The bill for the wedding was covered by the Bridegroom's family. They were responsible to provide the food and drink to ensure everyone was well-fed and had enough to drink.

To run out of wine is to bring immense embarrassment and shame on your family. In an honor shame culture — that stain stays with you forever. This is not a social misstep — this is a cataclysmic spiral of embarrassment that ends in catastrophe.

Getting to the Heart...

That the wine runs out points us to the reality that eventually — everything runs out.

So much of our life is spent refilling necessities that run out and maintaining our spaces because everything runs out and everything comes undone. Given enough time, eventually we run out of patience and energy too. We run out of money, relationships, and one day everyone of us will run out of time.

Drew Holcomb a singer-songwriter out of Nashville writes...

***You better take a picture, you better write it down
What you always wanted, won't always be around***

***It's bittersweet
It's bittersweet
Every curtain falls eventually***

What is running out in your life right now that feels particularly weighty?

Is it time? Patience? Energy? Relationships? Money? Life?

4 And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” 5 His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

In the 21st century, it's not polite nor encouraged to address your mother as “woman.” But this is 1st century Israel and it's a different culture. This address isn't rude. The modern day equivalent would be “Ma'am.” It has a more formal – less relational sense.

So, it's not rude, but it's also not endearing either. And here, it's certainly abrupt. And add to that Jesus's question to his mother – What does this have to do with me? – And we're left confused as to why Jesus would respond to his mother this way.

The key to understanding his response is to see his explanation – “My **hour** has not yet come.”

The key word for us to notice is the word – Hour. In John's gospel – Jesus will use the word “hour” 15 times – to refer to something more than just a mere time stamp. When Jesus refers to his hour – he's talking about the hour of his death and resurrection – the ultimate revelation of his glory. Remember – John is writing his gospel to show us the glory of Jesus Christ so that we would believe and have life in his name.

Jesus is saying – I'm not ready to fully manifest my glory. The time of my death has not arrived. I'm not even ready to go public at this wedding. And...just so you know, the timing and direction of my ministry is determined by my Father in Heaven, not my earthly family.

John Piper is helpful here...

Your relationship with me as mother has no special weight here. You are a woman like every other woman. My Father in heaven, not any human being, determines what miracles I perform. And the pathway into my favor is faith, not family.

He didn't say this to slight his mother or to be difficult or indifferent. Jesus loved his mother. At the same time, over the course of his ministry, we see Jesus repeatedly asserting the primacy of his Heavenly Father as it relates to his ministry priorities and mission.

Nevertheless – Jesus must have given her some indication that he would do something to help because she directs the servants to listen to whatever Jesus says.

THE SOLUTION:

6 Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim.

Now the jars aren't inconsequential. These aren't ordinary jars. They were used for purification purposes according to Jewish law. As a Jewish person in this time, you had to give daily thought to the clean and unclean laws in Leviticus.

An unclean person couldn't approach the sanctuary of God to worship and to offer sacrifice. So a person would do his or her best to remain clean and to make sure that the objects in your home also remained in a state of cleanliness. If a person who is clean comes into contact with an object that is unclean, that that uncleanness would be transferred.

This would have also involved which foods to eat and which foods to avoid. This would have involved good hygiene and avoiding contact with unclean people and things.

If you became unclean, then you would need to go through the ritual of becoming clean again which often involved a ritual cleansing with water. And these jars kept clean water preserved for those purification rituals. The stone protected the water from uncleanness — so that it was ready when you needed it.

And also notice that the quantity and capacity of the jars. John says there were six jars of varying capacity of about 20-30 gallons respectively.

8 And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. 9 When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom...

The servants draw from the jar and took it to the master of the feast. His job was to make sure the guests had a good time and that they had everything they needed. He takes the water-now-become-wine and he can't believe how good it tastes. It's so remarkable to him that he calls over the bridegroom and commends him.

10 and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.”

It was customary to serve the good fine first while people could still appreciate the taste of good wine before they were either too full to care or too buzzed to know the difference.

The master of the feast marvels that the better wine has been saved for now. And as best as we can tell, the guests, the wedding party, even the hosts never knew there was a problem and weren't aware that a solution had been provided to solve their problem.

Jesus performs this miracle “behind the scenes.” His timing is perfect. At no point are the guests aware that anything is wrong. The problem arises and is solved without any notice — sparing the bridegroom and his family any embarrassment and shame. The only people who know what really happened — are the servants, the disciples, and Mary.

And the amount of water turned to wine is such that no one could say — well Jesus had a case with him and when no one was looking, snuck it in. This is not slight of hand — this is a genuine and true miracle. If you do the math — 6 containers holding somewhere between 20-30 gallons each and convert that to bottles of wine — you get somewhere between 600 and 900 bottles of wine.

His first miracle is a spectacular display of power done in a humble, behind-the-scenes way that remained largely unnoticed. And when the bridegroom gets credit and commendation for saving the best for last — Jesus doesn't feel the need to correct the master of the feast.

He simply lets the bridegroom receive the credit that Jesus earned. The bridegroom had nothing to do with it. In fact, you could say that it was his blunder that created the situation in the first place. Had he planned well there would have been plenty of wine. But thankfully — Jesus was there not only to solve the problem but to bring the better wine.

THE SIGN:

11 This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

John the Evangelist tells us that this miracle was the first sign of Jesus. Over the course of his gospel, he's going to highlight seven signs. Each one will reveal another aspect and another degree of his glory.

Here, Jesus turns water into wine. And by the time we get through chapter 11 we'll see him cleanse the temple, heal a nobleman's son, heal a lame man, feed the multitude, heal a blind man, and raise a dead man.

So that begs the question...what is a sign?

They are a public work of Jesus that John has selected to show that God's glory in Jesus and thus shown to be God's true representative — the one in whom we are to receive and believe that we might live. The signs themselves aren't the point. No sign is the point. The point is what the signs point to. We aren't supposed to focus on the wonder of the sign...rather, we're supposed to focus on the worker of the sign.

John says — this sign made the glory of Jesus clear and obvious. His glory was on displayed and demonstrated.

So, how does this sign points to Jesus as God's true Son — the one in whom we are to receive and believe that we might live?

1. Jesus is the Better Bridegroom

Let's go back and think about the wedding at Cana. Remember — the responsibility of providing the food and beverage for the celebration ultimately fell on the Bridegroom and his family. Now we don't know why they ran out. Perhaps they miscalculated. Perhaps they were trying to hold to a tight budget. Perhaps more people showed up. We don't know why they ran out — just that they did. Fortunately for them — the true and faithful bridegroom was there, doing what the bridegroom was supposed to do.

Listen to how Nancy Guthrie puts it —

Jesus provided such exquisite water-become-wine, the wedding guests thought that the other groom had simply saved the best for last. It's as if the Gospel writer wanted us to see right off who Jesus really is — the true bridegroom, the one God's people had been waiting for ever since the first bridegroom, Adam, failed so miserably in Eden.

Jesus is the true bridegroom for his bride — the church. And here we get a taste of our true bridegroom. Where we fail — our bridegroom does not.

In fact — some have wondered why Jesus chose his first miracle to be at a wedding.

Think about it — The Bible's great story of redemption begins with a wedding in Genesis 2 between Adam and Eve and it ends with a wedding in Revelation 19 at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Paul says in Ephesian 5 that marriage itself is a picture to represent the union between Jesus Christ and his bride — the Church. This is a beautiful image of God's love for his people as Jesus the bridegroom comes for his bride so that she can be united with Him.

Revelation 19:6-8

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure."

The wedding in Cana is a preview — of what's to come — that Jesus is the true and better Bridegroom.

2. Jesus is the Better Purification

Remember the jars Jesus told the servants to fill?

They were jars for purification and they represented the Old Covenant and the old sacrificial system. It's significant that Jesus takes these jars and fills them with his wine. He could have had the servants gather up other containers. He specifically has them take these special containers.

It's like Jesus is saying — I'm bringing something new. Soon, you won't have to labor to remain clean — because when I clean you — you'll be clean in a way that you could never have achieved on your own. When Jesus takes the purification jars and fills them with his wine — he's repurposing them. Pointing to the reality that the grace of Jesus replaces the old system with a better system.

Jared Wilson writes...

This is a vivid illustration of the transformation of the old 'water' of Mosaic religion into the new 'wine' of the Kingdom.

Again — all the details aren't filled out yet. It will take the rest of the Gospel and the New Testament to put the pieces together.

Hebrews 10:19-22

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

This first sign gives us a taste and the writer of Hebrews fills in the details that Jesus brings the truer and better purification.

3. Jesus is the Better Wine

Our world is broken, fractured, and fragmented. And if we're willing to be honest with ourselves, we know that we're part of the problem. Not only do we experience the impact that everything runs out — often, we're contributing to the drain cycle. Just like the bridegroom who fails to provide the wine — we don't measure up either. And here we get a taste of how Jesus is going to solve the problem.

The bridegroom gets the credit for the good wine even though he had nothing to do with it. He gets the credit for what Jesus Christ has done — and that's exactly how salvation works. Jesus does the work. Jesus brings the better wine — and we get the credit for it. His righteousness becomes our righteousness.

He does the work. We get the credit. Jesus brings the better wine of salvation to all who put their trust in him.

And for the believer — there's a promise of a coming day when we will never run out of anything.

- Isa 25:6 On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.*
- 7 And he will swallow up on this mountain
the covering that is cast over all peoples,
the veil that is spread over all nations.*
- 8 He will swallow up death forever;
and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces,
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.*
- 9 It will be said on that day,
“Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us.
This is the LORD; we have waited for him;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”*