

A Wedding Sketch

Wonder-Working Power – Part IV

John 2:1-11

Introduction

There are some sermons that I preach and know will be somewhat controversial. I think that every sermon from John has been that way so far, and this one is no exception. It should give you some material for discussion, and, if indeed it does, I ask that you be kind to me and remember that, underneath this dogmatic exterior, is a kind, loving, warm-hearted individual who wants to be loved by everybody – so, sit up and listen! Know as well, that if anything I say raises questions or offenses, please ask me about it, so that we can talk through the issues more thoroughly. Everyone is welcome to ask, regardless of what you believe.

Three Words in the New Testament Describe Miracles

There are three words used in the New Testament to describe, what we call, miracles, or evidences of the supernatural. When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, he used all three words in relation to the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ.

Look at Peter's words, in Acts, chapter 2, verse 22.

... Jesus ... a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs ...

Miracles

1. The first word is miracles – or “dunamis,” in the Greek, which means, “powers or mighty works”. John never used this word in his gospel.

Wonders

2. The second word is wonders – or “teras,” which is used only once by John.

Signs

3. The third word is signs – or “semeion,” which is used by John seventeen times. The

first appearance is in John, chapter 2, as it related to the miracle of turning water into wine.

Peter summarizes for us, in his sermon, that Jesus Christ employed all three of these – miracles, wonders and signs. Why? To prove His deity. Jesus' miracles were never simply naked displays of power, conjuring up tricks to impress the masses, but signs that were significant displays of power that pointed beyond themselves to deeper realities about Himself.

Now, in John, chapter 2, the first sign is given by Jesus. What did this sign reveal? In case we miss the main point, look at verse 11.

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

Two Reasons For Jesus' First Miraculous Sign

Verse 11 gives two reasons for this miraculous sign:

1. so that His glory would be revealed (His divine attributes);
2. so that His new disciples would believe in Him.

That is quite a powerful impact. Frankly, the first time I read this passage, I did not see any more in this than Jesus turning water into wine. How could turning water into wine have such an incredible impact that it actually revealed Jesus' messiahship and glory and caused His disciples to believe in Him?

All we have is a brief sketch that leaves out a lot of details. Yet, it gives us enough to, like these disciples, see the glory of Christ and have our faith enriched.

The Wedding Sketch

Let us start at the beginning of the story with verse 1 of John, chapter 2.

And on the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

Stop for a moment. The intimate relation between Yahweh and Israel, the nation, is portrayed over and over again through the image of the marriage covenant. The disciples of Christ are likened to wedding guests rejoicing with the bridegroom in Mark, chapter 2.

The fullness of the messianic age was prophesied in Isaiah and spoken of so beautifully through the symbol of marriage. Turn to chapter 62, verse 5, of that book.

For as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons will marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you.

The imagery of a wedding feast is used later, in Matthew, chapter 22, with Israel declining the invitation to come to the wedding and therefore, the invitation goes out to all and anyone to become part of the kingdom of God. In verses 8 and 9, the King said to his servants,

. . . The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.

So, it is highly suggestive then, that Jesus' first miracle, inaugurating His invitation to the kingdom, would be a sign given at a wedding!

Now notice verse 2 of John, chapter 2.

And Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the wedding.

A wedding in those days was a great and long celebration, and it usually began late in the evening. On the evening of the marriage, the bride was led, usually by a spectacular torch-lit procession, from the home of her parents to the home of her new husband. They would sing and chant as they walked along. All the guests of the wedding party would be part of this procession. Once they arrived at the groom's home, the marriage formula was pronounced and all the legal documents were signed. After the prescribed washings and benedictions, the marriage feast began.

At that time, they did not have honeymoons, but instead, had a week long celebration with everyone who had been invited, from the village and family, taking part. The bride and groom would remain dressed in their finest bridal clothing. They were treated like a king and queen, and in fact, they were actually addressed as king and queen. They wore make-believe crowns made from flowers. There was bountiful feasting. In a life where there was much

poverty and constant hard work, this week of festivity and joy was one of the supreme occasions.

Verse 2 tells us that Jesus had made it on the invitation list. Now, your perception of Jesus would be something a little different than Him attending a wedding and a week-long celebration. He is too holy to have fun, right? My friend, Jesus was no severe, austere killjoy. He had a terrific sense of wit and humor that He was usually unleashing on the religious leaders. He was the God-man who loved life!

We would do well to follow that pattern – and smile every so often. I read recently, that children laugh four hundred times a day, while adults laugh only twenty.

Some Christians go around with grim looks and long faces. One of my former professors said that the look on many Christian's faces would make terrific front covers for the book of Lamentations.

Charles Spurgeon, in his book, *Lectures To My Students*, wrote,

I commend cheerfulness to all who would win souls; a genial happy spirit. There are more flies caught with honey than with vinegar, and there will be more souls led to heaven by a person who wears heaven on his face, than by one who wears Hades in his looks.

There are many Christians who, if they ever find themselves in the company of people who are having a good time, they immediately suspect that the cause of the fun is either illegal or fattening! Not Jesus Christ – here He is, an invited guest to the wedding.

Now, the Mormon church has an interesting interpretation of this passage. They have taught for years, that Jesus, a polygamist, married the sisters Martha and Mary, and that a descendant of one of their children founded the church. In some of their circles, it is being taught that the wedding at Cana was in fact, the Lord's own wedding. This is an ingenious interpretation; in fact, someone deserves a medal for remembering to invite Jesus to His own wedding.

Most men start forgetting things after they are married. Had Jesus forgotten His own wedding?! No, Jesus was among the invited guests. Can you imagine, twenty years or so later, while looking through their wedding memorabilia, this couple sees the signature in their guest book, "Jesus," or simply remembers that He had been there?! Wise is that couple today, who invite Jesus to their wedding!

This wedding celebration, however, nearly ended in tragedy. Look at verse 3.

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

Now, in the East, wine at a feast was essential. The rabbis taught, "without wine there is no joy." It was not that people were drunken; in fact, drunkenness was such a disgrace that they were careful to mix wine with enough water to prevent it. Wine, in fact, was their primitive system of purifying the water.

It is a passage like this that raises questions in good people about the subject of drinking. Here you have Jesus creating wine. The question is, "Does the Bible teach abstinence?" No. In fact, Paul encouraged Timothy, in I Timothy, chapter 5, verse 23, to "... drink ... a little wine for the sake of your stomach ...".

But what is often the missing ingredient in the discussion is the fundamental difference between the wine that the Bible allows and the wine from the local grocery store. In fact, careful comparing of Scripture and culture will reveal that what we are buying and drinking today is comparable to "strong drink," and that was prohibited in Scripture.

One historian wrote,

Wine today has a much higher level of alcohol than wine in the New Testament. In fact, in New Testament times one would need to drink eleven 8-ounce glasses of wine in order to consume the same amount of alcohol found in one martini.

He then wrote tongue-in-cheek,

In other words, it was possible to become intoxicated from New Testament wine, but one's drinking would affect the bladder long before it affected the mind.

Those who today, try to find a green light in drinking the modern day alcoholic beverages, overlook the basic difference between wine that was acceptable in Jesus' day and the beverages of today.

What was God's protection from drinking something that was considered intoxicating or "strong drink"? Solomon writes, in Proverbs, chapter 23, verses 31 and 32,

Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper.

In summary, as Norm Geisler of Dallas Seminary wrote,

Though fermented wine was drunk in Bible times and though the Bible approved of wine-drinking, one needs to remember that the alcoholic content was much less than that of wine today. What is used today is not the wine of the New Testament! Therefore, Christians ought to recognize that wine, beer, or other alcoholic beverages are actually "strong drink" and are forbidden in Scripture.

This passage, in John, chapter 2, is one that is so misused. There are those who say, "Well, hey, if it's good enough for Jesus . . ." or "Jesus created it . . .".

I am compelled at that point, to defend the character of Christ. It is utterly impossible to imagine Jesus not only being present at a drunken party, but actually creating the substance that aided in their drunkenness. That is inconsistent with His character.

Ladies and gentlemen, what I find equally tragic is that while our society is finally waking up, in this post-prohibition generation, to the dangers and travesties of alcohol, at the same time, the church is embracing it. How is it that secular magazines are decrying the fact that alcohol is America's favorite drug, while the church is teaching responsible drinking, which is another term for "moderation".

How tragic that in our country, more than 500,000 children are termed alcoholics, and many of them got their first drink from their own kitchen refrigerator. More than fifty percent of them are living in homes with parents who claim to be religious. It is not the first time that the church, in the name of liberty, has strangled common sense.

What Jesus is about to create is one of the most fantastic tasting wines of His day. It is His own recipe, His own selection of spices, and with just the right blend of the best grapes. Was it fermented? Of course, otherwise, the water would not have been purified. Was it strong drink, like that sold today? Absolutely not, or Jesus would have violated other Scripture, and in so doing, would have sinned.

We will get back to the actual miracle in a moment. But first look again at Mary's statement in verse 3.

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

You need to understand that in the East, hospitality was a sacred duty. It would be terribly

humiliating for the bride and groom to run out of provision. In fact, we have extra-biblical evidence that a family guilty of such a lack of foresight could actually be fined. An even greater problem would be the symbolism. To run out of wine would be tantamount to admitting that neither the guests, nor the bride and groom, were happy. It would be terribly embarrassing!

Mary must have been close to either the bride or the bridegroom to have such a personal concern for the success of the festivities, or even to know that the supply of wine was gone. Perhaps Mary was actually assisting in the preparation and serving of the banquet.

She came to Jesus for help. That is not bad. She had learned to rely upon His strength and wisdom. Joseph does not appear in this scene and many believe that he was actually deceased. Jesus Himself was not only known, by this time, as the carpenter's son, but as the carpenter (Mark 6:3). Apparently the family fortunes had, up to this point, depended on Jesus' manual labor. Like any widow, Mary leaned hard on her firstborn son.

So, Mary, knowing the power of Jesus, came to Him and tried to prod Him into action. And that is where she makes her mistake. It is interesting that only two times in the gospels is Mary attempting to influence Jesus as His mother – and both times, she is rebuked. Look at verse 4.

And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what do I have to do with you? My hour has not yet come."

Now the tone in this verse is not rude, but is certainly abrupt. Jesus calls Mary by the Greek term "gune," or "woman". It could be rendered "kind lady" or "dear woman".

But note, this term is never found in Greek writing between a son and a mother. It is not a Hebrew or Greek practice. In fact, as one commentator pointed out, when Jesus called Mary, "woman" instead of "mother," He was clearly indicating a different relationship between them, as He now enters His public ministry. It is a term that stresses a separation between the two parties, while, at the same time, remaining courteous.

There was one other time that Mary tried to influence Jesus during His ministry, and again He distanced Himself from her.

John Philips, a Bible expositor of the *Explore* series, who has represented the Moody organization for decades, wrote in his commentary on John,

At the time of John's writing, various Gnostic errors were already taking root in the church. The day would come when the Roman Catholic Church would proclaim Mary as free from original sin. The imaginations of men and by church dogma she would be exalted bodily to heaven. She would be given the old Babylonian title of "Queen of heaven". She would be called the "Mother of God". She would be proclaimed as co-redeemer and the devout would be urged to pray to her – on the assumption that she was possessed of the divine attribute of omniscience – since only one with such an attribute could hear and separate and comprehend and evaluate the millions of prayers addressed to her in a thousand languages from all parts of the world every single day. The devout were taught to pray to her because she was the Lord's mother and had influence over Him and could get Him to do what she wanted. Anyone who has been in Catholic churches, seen current news reports of papal activities, studied a Catholic catechism . . .

(which I have done by the way)

. . . or read church history knows to what heights Mary has been elevated. Many still hold to the dictum of one church saint who wrote, "It is God's will that we should receive all things through Mary."

Time magazine reported, in a late 1991 cover story,

A grass roots revival of faith in the Virgin is taking place worldwide. Millions of worshipers are flocking to her shrines, many of them young people . . . the late twentieth century has become the age of the pilgrimage toward Mary.

The record of Scripture is different. The teaching that Mary is in heaven now to receive our prayers and, in so doing, can influence her son is not supported by Scripture. In fact, the record of Scripture clearly suggests the opposite.

Barclay translates verse 4, "Lady, let Me handle this in My own way."

The only command Mary ever gave that is recorded in scripture is found in verse 5. I love this. Who did she say to obey?

His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."

Continue to verses 6 and 7.

Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each. Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim.

We have been given a clue that this miracle was a sign. In other words, Jesus did not turn the water into wine because He did not want the party spoiled, He had deeper truth in mind.

Arthur Pink writes,

Judaism still existed as a religious system – there were purifications, but it ministered no comfort to the heart. It had degenerated into a cold, mechanical routine, utterly destitute of joy in God. Israel had lost the joy of their marriage to Yahweh.

Here are these twenty gallon stone pots. People would come and the servants would pour water from them onto their hands in a prescribed fashion. This was external cleansing. Jesus is about to give a sign of internal consumption with wine that had long represented joy!

Religion Can Never Produce Joy

Religion can never produce joy!

The world today is filled with cold religion – external ceremonies, sacrifices, oblations, chanting, and processions – and it can never bring joy. Jesus Christ has come to give you and I, not a new religion, but a new relationship.

One author writes, "He changes the water of the law into the wine of the gospel; the water of Judaism into the wine of Christianity."

Now look at verse 8.

And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the headwaiter." And they took it to him.

Stop and imagine being one of the servants. First, they are told to fill the waterpots with water and notice, they fill them to the brim. Then Jesus tells them to take some of it to the headwaiter. They must be thinking, "This Rabbi is a little strange. And we're about to get yelled at by the headwaiter for bringing him well water!"

These servants are wonderful illustrations of you and me. The duty of obedience belongs to us – it is ours to fill the waterpots; it is ours to take it to others, but it is Christ's to make the water wine.

Continue to verses 9 and 10.

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, 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."

This is like me eating chocolate cake, which is one of my favorite indoor hobbies! That first bite, I can taste every nuance of chocolate. By the tenth bite, it is just "so so". By the third piece, "Hey, it's chocolate."

It is the same with the staple drink for the festivity.

What we have in these verses, is an incredible miracle. Everyone is stunned and, undoubtedly Jesus is recognized.

Now there are many who deny the miraculous – like some liberal Baptists I know. This was not a miracle, according to them, but instead, it was just a joke, turned into fact.

Dr. Leslie Weatherhead writes,

The wine runs out. Water is served. Why that's the best joke of all! They lift their wine-cups as we do in fun and when we shout, "Adam's ale is the best of all." The bridegroom is congratulated by the master of ceremonies, who carried the joke farther still. "Why you've kept the best wine until now." It requires only a servant going through the room into the kitchen for a wonderful rumor to start.

I have honestly wondered why these people even read the Bible, much less preach. It does not matter if he wears a robe, or turns his collar around, or wears a blue suit and a white shirt, any cleric who denies the miraculous is denying the Messiah. I am making all sorts of friends, aren't I?

It is hard to believe that verse 11 was the result of a joke or rumor. Look again at that verse.

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

This miracle was undeniable; it was supernatural; it was the first revelation that this callused carpenter was indeed Jesus Christ the Messiah.

The Miracle Was a Sign

This miracle was a sign:

- to Mary – that Jesus will no longer be influenced by maternal ties, but by paternal design;
- to the disciples – that Jesus has the power to transform elements of nature at His command;
- to the servants, then and now – that Jesus has chosen to perform His wonders through the willing efforts of obedient people;
- to all people, then and now – that Jesus offers to replace empty, external religion with joyful, internal reality.

Look back at verse 11. Jesus manifested His glory when He caused the wine to flow and, in fact, left the newlyweds, nearly ninety gallons of wine as His wedding gift. From the sale of that, they were probably able to afford a real honeymoon.

But the word “glory” is the Greek word “doxa,” from which we get our word “doxology”. Jesus began to reveal His deity, His attributes, His power, His glory.

And so we sing:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise Him, all creatures here below;

Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.