

## John 2:1-12 – Water into Wine

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### Setting the scene

John the Baptist had pointed Jesus out to his disciples saying, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." As a result several had followed him. Jesus had begun to gather a group of disciples who now followed him wherever he went. One of the places he went was to Cana, close to his home town of Nazareth in Galilee. He went there for a wedding. It may have been a family wedding since Jesus' mother Mary was invited as was Jesus and his group of disciples. Perhaps it was because of the unexpected number of Jesus' disciples that the wine ran out.

### Mary's intervention

In the culture of Galilee in the first century, wine running out at a wedding would bring shame on the bridegroom's family who were responsible for the feast. Mary was aware of the situation and concerned to avert a crisis; perhaps, if this was the wedding of a close relative, Mary had even been involved in the preparations for the feast. Whatever the case, she pointed out the problem to her son. Was she expecting him to take some action? Jesus' immediate reply did not seem very promising. The NIV translates his words, "Woman, why do you involve me?... My hour has not yet come." What do his words mean?

Jesus is telling Mary that, though she is his mother, she has no special claims on him. Jesus' words, "My hour has not yet come" point forward to the time when he, the Lamb of God, will lay down his life for the sins of the world (see 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20; 12:23; 17:1). Jesus is not a free agent, he must be about his heavenly Father's business; he is no longer Mary's son who must respond to the call of his mother.

Nevertheless, Mary seems to sense that Jesus will do something to help in this situation and so she tells the servants at the feast to do whatever Jesus tells them to do.

### Jesus' Action

John tells us that there were six stone water jars standing nearby, each holding from eighty to one hundred and twenty litres of water. That's around six hundred litres of water in all, or equivalent to the capacity of about 850 wine bottles. These water jars, John tells us, were "the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing." The water may have been used to pour over the hands and lower arms of the guests when they arrived at the feast (see Mark 7:3).

Jesus tells the servants to fill the jars. We need not suppose that they were empty at the time – fetching six hundred litres of water would have taken some time – the jars probably only needed topping up. Whatever the case, when the servants had finished their task, all the jars were full to the brim.

Jesus then told them to draw out some of the "water" and take it to the master of the banquet. This they did, and when the master tasted it he declared it to be the very best of wines – better than any that had been served thus far in the festivities.

So the wedding continued to be celebrated with everyone happy and contented with what was provided for them.

### What is the meaning of all this?

But the key question is, what does all this mean? Why did Jesus perform this miracle? Why is it recorded here in Scripture?

It is clear that he did so not merely to save the embarrassment of those throwing the feast. Jesus is not like Superman, dashing about getting people out of fixes. John tells us that, "What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory" (v.11). So if Jesus did this as a sign, what was it a sign of?

### **Firstly it is a sign of who Jesus is.**

Who is able to turn water into wine at a word of command? Only the great Creator God who made both water and the grape and who can make something out of nothing simply by the power of his word. Jesus is God come in the flesh – he is Immanuel.

### **Secondly, it is a sign of what Jesus had come to do.**

The water jars were for Jewish ceremonial purification. They stood as a reminder of a problem – the problem of uncleanness, un-holiness. They were a perpetual reminder of the sin that pollutes the lives of every human being and which makes us unfit to come into the presence of God. But while they were reminders of a problem, they could not furnish a solution. Ceremonial washing cannot remove sin; it can wash the outside of a person but cannot cleanse the heart; it can wash the skin but cannot remove the sin!

In turning this water into wine, Jesus shows that he has come to transform the signs and symbols of the Old Covenant, replacing them with the realities to which they pointed. This sign points us to what Jesus has come to provide in place of this ineffectual water. He has come to provide real cleansing from sin, cleansing of both heart and conscience.

*He does this firstly through his own shed blood.* It is his blood that washes away our sin and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. In a short time we will celebrate communion together. Just as the wine then points us to Christ's blood shed for us for the remission of our sins, so the wine at the feast points to Jesus shed blood by which we are truly made clean in the sight of God. In the book of Revelation we have this strange but wonderful picture: John sees a great multitude clothed in white robes standing around the throne of God. One of the elders tells John that this great crowd "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." The blood of Jesus cleanses us and enables us to stand in the presence of a holy God.

In changing the water into wine, Jesus replaces the symbols of the Old Covenant with the realities to which they pointed.

*Secondly, Jesus cleanses us from our Sin by his Spirit's work in our hearts.* The Holy Spirit is the one who makes us feel and know that what Christ did there on the cross he did for us. The Spirit applies his saving work to our hearts and makes us new. Our salvation is more than forgiveness alone, it involves being remade in the image of Christ – saved not only from the guilt of sin but also from its power.

The wine at the feast points us to the gift of the Holy Spirit who fills us with joy and peace in believing. "Do not get drunk with wine", says the Apostle Paul, "but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). Jesus provided fine wine for the feast, wine which gladdened the hearts of all who drank it. Jesus provides us with the new wine of his Spirit which fills us with songs of praise to our Lord and Saviour.

### **Thirdly, it is a sign that Christ not niggardly in his blessings**

In response to the need for wine at the wedding, Jesus did not provide a bottle or two; he provided about 850 bottles of fine wine!

Our Lord Jesus Christ has not changed; he is the same yesterday and today and forever. He not only supplies our needs, he pours out upon us an abundance of his good gifts. "From his fullness", John writes, "we have all received, grace upon grace" (John 1:16). And the Apostle Paul, contrasting Adam's sin and its consequences with the fruit of Christ's atoning work, writes, "For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, *how much more* will those who receive *God's abundant provision of grace* and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!" (Romans 5:17). "In him the tribes of Adam boast more blessings than their father lost!"

Jesus is extravagantly generous in his provision for his people. His grace is profligate grace.

### **Fourthly and lastly, it is a sign of the power of Christ to transform lives**

Jesus changes ordinary water into extraordinary wine. Jesus is able to transform the ordinary things of our lives into the extraordinary wine of his kingdom.

I once was asked to give my testimony in a Salvation Army Hostel. I told the Major who had contacted me that there was nothing extraordinary about my life and that the men staying at the hostel might find it rather boring. This godly man rebuked me in the gentlest possible way by saying, "God does not do boring." How true. Jesus transforms the ordinary and mundane into the extraordinary by his presence and blessing. There is no part of our lives that cannot be transformed by the touch of the Saviour's hand.

## **In closing then**

I want to remind you that the Scriptures speak to us of a wedding celebration even more wonderful than that at Cana in Galilee; the Scriptures tell us that Christ's great work of redemption shall culminate at last in the marriage supper of the Lamb. That will be a time of great joy and celebration for his people as we will be with our glorious Saviour for evermore – joined to him as a bride is joined to her husband. The joy of the wedding feast we have read of in John 2 is but a pale anticipation of that final day.

I wonder how many of those at the wedding in Cana in Galilee enjoyed the sign but failed to see what it symbolised. This Sunday marks the beginning of Epiphany, celebrating the way in which God's glory has been revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. John tells us that through this sign, "Jesus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him." How many on that day enjoyed the fine wine but failed to see the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ?

At the beginning of this New Year, I want us not only to read of the power of Christ who makes all things new, but to see his glory and experience his renewing power in anticipation of the day when we shall see him as he is at the marriage supper of the Lamb and be made like him. I want us to be filled with joy and peace in believing. I want us to know his abundant grace. I want us to have an irrepressible testimony to the goodness, mercy and power of our Triune God. I want us to let this tired old world know that here is one who shall make all things new.

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let every heart prepare Him room,  
And Heaven and nature sing.

Peter Misselbrook,

6/1/2019, Christ Church Downend