

“Wedding Wine”

Shortly after beginning His ministry Jesus and His disciples attended a wedding feast in the little village of Cana of Galilee. Jesus’ mother Mary was there too. Marriage customs were different then. The ceremony took place in the evening, after a feast. Instead of going away on a honeymoon, the new bride and groom were escorted in royal fashion to their new home. There would be feasting up to a whole week, as guests would come and go.

The festivities were moving right along until they hit a major snag: the couple ran out of wine! Hospitality in Eastern lands was a sacred duty. To run out of wine during the week of celebrating would have been humiliating to this bride and groom. Imagine the talk long after the event, as people would say, “Remember Jacob and Ruth’s wedding? It was so embarrassing for everyone – they ran out of wine!

Mary (who may have had a part in the wedding arrangements) says to Jesus: “They have no wine” (John 2:3). Notice Jesus’ answer: “Woman, what concern is that to you and me?” (John 2:4). Is that a tart answer or not! “Woman!” Imagine kids saying that to their mom today! A pastor relates how the youth minister and his wife in their church were shopping at Walmart at Christmas time. His wife was waiting in the layaway line to pick up some items for their kids. And this youth pastor walked up and said to his wife, loud enough for everybody in line to hear, “Woman, I’ll be over in Sporting Goods.” He liked to call her “Woman” because he thought it was biblical. Well, you can imagine all the glaring looks he got from the other women in line!

Actually, the term Jesus uses translated “woman”, in the Greek, suggests a note of tenderness and intimacy. It’s the same word Jesus used when He was dying on the cross, and He told the disciple John to take care of His mother: “Woman, here is your son”...and to John, “Here is your mother”.

Jesus says, “Woman, *what concern is that to you and me?*” or “*What does that have to do with me?*” That also sounds brusque and inconsiderate. And then He adds: “My hour has not yet come.” That last phrase is mentioned other times in the Gospel of John. Jesus is referring to the time of His glorification: His suffering, death, and resurrection. The wedding at Cana is early in Jesus’ ministry: that time of glorification is down the road. It is almost as if Jesus is reluctant to use His power to address this problem of having no more wine. But the bottom line is that Mary says to the servants there: “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5).

There were 6 water jars in the house, each holding 20-30 gallons. These were there (1) to hold water for washing peoples’ feet when they would come in from the dusty roads, and (2) to hold water for ceremonial washings that the Jews observed, so they would be ritually clean.

Jesus told the servants to fill the jars full of water. After they did, He told them to draw some out and take it to the man in charge of the feast. As they did, ***the water changed into wine!*** The head waiter in charge of the feast tastes it, and is surprised that it’s so good! He says to the groom, tongue in cheek, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now” (John 2:10). Most

hosts would serve people good wine first, then when the guests were somewhat tipsy, the cheap wine would be offered. At that point, the guests wouldn't know the difference anyway!

John closes the story with these words: "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him" (John 2:11). This was "the first of his *signs*." These signs, "***revealed his glory***." The miracles are signs that tell us who Jesus is!

The Gospel of John is packed with symbolism. If we miss the symbolism we miss what John is trying to get across. ***For example, there are six water pots used by the Jews for the ritual washings that the law required.*** The number *six* to Jews represented something ***incomplete, unfinished, unfulfilled.*** John is telling us that the Old Testament law, with its whole system of religious rites and rules, is inadequate! ***Also, the water in those six pots is changed to wine: wine represents the gospel, the gospel of grace.*** Elsewhere Jesus said you don't put the new wine of the gospel into the old rigid wineskins of the rules and traditions of the Jewish religion. And at the Last Supper, as Jesus offers the wine, He says this wine is the cup of the "new covenant", the gospel of grace.

It's as though when Mary asks Jesus to do something about the wine, Jesus can't help but think of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messianic age as being a time when wine would flow liberally! Listen to some of these Old Testament passages: Isaiah 55:1 says, "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy *wine* and milk without money and without price." Hosea 14:7 says, "They shall again live beneath my shadow, they shall flourish as a garden; they shall blossom like the vine, their fragrance shall be like the *wine* of Lebanon." And Amos 9:13-14 also connects wine with the new age of Messiah's rule: "The time is surely coming, says the LORD, when...*the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.* I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and *drink their wine*, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit."

So for Jesus to do this miracle is in a sense an announcement that He is the Messiah about to bring in the new Messianic age.

Beyond the symbolism that spoke to those back then at the wedding feast, this miracle tells us something about the kind of new life Jesus offers us today! ***First, the life Jesus offers brings inward cleansing and transformation of the heart.*** How do you cleanse the human heart of evil? How can we be washed and freed from life's failures and sins? Religious people in the time of Jesus developed an elaborate set of religious rituals that were supposed to make you clean and pure before God: how to wash your hands in a certain ritualistic way, for instance. (This is one reason the water pots were there). Some of us today have our own set of religious rules and customs that we think will make us clean and acceptable to God: just go to church enough, say enough prayers, live a decent life, etc. But none of these – in themselves – have the power to make us clean inside and free us from evil and self-will.

Jesus offers us a relationship to Himself, and the new wine of the gospel, which brings inward

cleansing, forgiveness, and a transformation of our life! A man got converted to Christ. There was no doubt about the change Christ was making in this man's life. He was once a boisterous, heavy drinker. Now he was sober and dependable. But the men he worked with had their doubts about the things this man had come to believe. One time at lunch they were discussing the Bible. "What about all those miracles," one co-worker chided. Do you believe that stuff about Jesus changing water to wine?" The new Christian answered: "I don't have the education to answer all those hard questions about the Bible or about miracles. I don't know whether Christ turned water to wine. But there's something I do know. At our house, He's turned beer into furniture, and that's a miracle for me."

There was a machinist with the Ford Motor Company, and over the years he "borrowed" tools and parts from the company and never returned them. One day, this machinist met Christ and was converted. He got baptized and became a serious follower of Jesus. Afterwards, he was convicted that his "borrowing" from the company was stealing, and was wrong. So the next work day he came to work loaded down with all the tools he had taken. He explained the situation to his foreman, and added that he hoped he would be forgiven. The foreman was so impressed that called Mr. Ford himself, who was visiting a European factory at the time, and explained what happened. Mr. Ford called back and said: "Dam up the Detroit River and baptize the entire city!"

The miracle of Jesus turning water to wine tells us of the abundant power of Jesus to cleanse us from evil and transform our life from the inside out.

This miracle in John's gospel is also telling us that ***Jesus brings joy!*** The new life Jesus offers everyone is one of joy! Jesus not only changed water to wine, but it was ***good wine! The best!***

Rabbis in Jesus' day had a saying, "Without wine there is no joy." In a land not blessed with tea or coffee or tasty beverages, where water was scarce or unfit to drink, wine was precious. It became a natural symbol of joy!

How many times in the Bible are God's people described as ***joyful people!*** The prophet Isaiah said, "With joy shall you draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isaiah 12:3). Jesus told His followers: "I have told you this so that *my joy* may be in you and that *your joy may be complete*" (John 15:11). And in this story of the wedding in Cana, the gospel of Jesus is symbolized by excellent wine that makes people lighthearted and spirited!

Jesus was a joyful person! Unfortunately, most artist's rendering of Him give Him a sad look. But He was no sourpuss or killjoy! He wouldn't put a damper on your wedding celebration if He were a guest!

Jesus wants us to be joyful, like Him! I love Lancaster County (other than the weather!). I love being around the plain sect folk (Amish, Mennonites). But I do think sometimes they have too much of a gloomy, straight-laced approach to life. Some of the signs they post to witness relate a less than joyful attitude: "Prepare to meet thy God". "Ye must be born again." "Repent and

turn from your sins.” Joy-filled Christians, I believe, have a much more effective witness. The great preacher of a former generation, Charles Spurgeon, once said: “I command cheerfulness to all who would win souls; not levity and frothiness, but a genial, happy spirit. There are more flies caught with honey than with vinegar.”

If you have given your life over to Jesus, how joyful are you and I in the Lord? This doesn't mean we will always be laughing, or silly, or even always happy. Joy is different. It's the deep joy of Jesus in us, even in the hard and difficult times of life. Now there are things that smother and squeeze the joy of the Lord from us: willful, unconfessed sin; neglecting spiritual disciplines that connect us to God; getting too immersed in worldly things. But joy can be restored when we correct these issues.

The gospel writer John is telling us that the Jesus who turned water to the best tasting wine you could ever want offers us a new life marked by *joy*!

One other thing symbolized in this story of the wedding at Cana: ***The new life in Jesus, the new wine of the gospel, is a life of fulfillment.*** Jesus not only provided *some* wine for the celebration; there were *six big water pots of exquisite wine, each holding 20-30 gallons. 120 to 180 gallons of wine!* The new life Jesus offers us through committing our life to Him taps into the unlimited resources of God.

In how many ways are we searching for fulfillment today. *It can be money and material possessions.* If we just have enough income, enough money in the bank, enough investments. If we can just get that new car or truck, the nicer house, the clothes we want, then we will be satisfied. *We might seek our fulfillment in another person.* In one of the soap operas, a woman says to a man: “My life is so empty...” (what isn't said is, “If you'll just have me, I'll be fulfilled and satisfied”). In some cases, a man or woman says, “I can't live without you!” So they marry, and 5 or 10 years later (or even 6 months later) one or both say: “I can't live *with* you! I want a divorce.” Relationships are important, but if we lay it on some other person to make us happy or fulfilled, that's an awful load to put on someone else.

Jesus offers us a life of deep fulfillment that stems from our having a relationship with Him, and access to God's unlimited resources for living. One of the great Christians of Japan was Kagawa. He gave away all he had and lived in a slum area. He shared with people who were criminals or diseased. His body became infected with diseases that cost him almost all of his sight and affected many organs of his body. His social reforms led to repeated imprisonments. He had nothing in terms of this world. Yet he had a driving sense of purpose and radiated joy. Wherever he went he spoke not of privation, but of the overflowing abundance in his life. He once said, “God threw in everything when He gave me Christ.” Looking back to my own conversion to Christ as a teenager, I think the thing that brought me to Christ was my search for meaning in life. What is the meaning of life? What is my purpose in life? I had not found it up to that point, but when I gave my life to Jesus, He began to give me a reason for living; He began to satisfy my soul! Aren't you glad Jesus turned water into wine, and that He offers us the new wine of the gospel and a new life in Him!

