

INTRODUCTION

In this message we are going to visit a wedding in Cana. It's the site of the first recorded miracle of Jesus. You may recall that I mentioned in the first message in this series that John organized his written account about Jesus by selecting seven significant miracles. This miracle at Cana is the first of those seven.

Weddings are happy occasions in every culture. I have had the joy of performing hundreds of weddings, and every single one of them has been fun for me and for the couple. A newly ordained pastor was performing his first wedding ceremony. He was really nervous. He made it halfway through the ceremony, and then he lost his place and just went totally blank. There was a moment of uncomfortable silence. The pastor was desperate to say something to get back on track when he remembered that one of his seminary professors had advised him that if he ever forgot what to say next, to just quote the first scripture that comes to your mind. The young pastor decided to quote a scripture as he stood before the bride and groom. He said, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they do." Fortunately, most couples know what they are doing when they get married.

A Jewish wedding during the time of Jesus was a real celebration. One of my favorite pieces of Biblical Art is the Wedding Feast at Cana by Paolo Veronese. It is a huge painting that hangs on the wall in a huge room of the Louvre in Paris. This painting is one of the largest in the Museum, but it has the unfortunate luck of being on the opposite wall of the Mona Lisa. So, hundreds of people crowd around the Mona Lisa; they even take selfies with Mona. And most of them miss the magnificent work that is behind them.

When you look at Veronese's Wedding Feast (Fig. 1), it depicts a massive party that looked nothing like the real setting. Veronese moved the location to Rome and painted in 130 different people, plus six animals. Some of them are real people. He painted himself in front playing the stringed instrument. The other members of the band are all artist friends of his. He includes Frances 1 of France, Queen Mary 1 of England, and he even includes the Muslim ruler, Suleiman the Magnificent. We have a smaller version of this painting in our Life of Christ Art Gallery in CrossWalk.

While this is a magnificent painting, it is nothing like the real setting. Instead you need to picture a small group of thirty or forty family members and friends gathered in a courtyard of a small village. We don't know why Mary and Jesus are there—it could have been a family member. Some have even suggested it was a younger brother of Jesus getting married and that's why Mary was concerned when they ran out of wine. Whatever the reason they were there, Jesus chose this setting to perform His first recorded miracle.



Fig. 1 The Wedding at Cana
Paolo Veronese
Oil on Canvas, 1562

John 2:1-12 (CSB). “On the third day a wedding took place in Cana of Galilee. Jesus’s mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples were invited to the wedding as well. When the wine ran out, Jesus’s mother told him, ‘They don’t have any wine.’ ‘What does that have to do with you and me, woman?’ Jesus asked. ‘My hour has not yet come.’

‘Do whatever he tells you,’ his mother told the servants.

Now six stone water jars had been set there for Jewish purification. Each contained twenty or thirty gallons.

‘Fill the jars with water.’ Jesus told them. So they filled them to the brim. Then he said to them, ‘Now draw some out and take it to the headwaiter.’ And they did.

When the headwaiter tasted the water (after it had become wine), he did not know where it came from—though the servants who had drawn the water knew. He called the groom and told him, ‘Everyone sets out the fine wine first, then, after people are drunk, the inferior. But you have kept the fine wine until now.’

Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him. After this, he went down to Capernaum, together with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples, and they stayed there only a few days.”

A Jewish wedding was a celebration that lasted anywhere from two days to two weeks. In the United States, at a wedding, the focus is on the bride, and she walks down the aisle, every eye is on her. In a Jewish wedding the focus was on the groom. And the bridegroom paid for all the wedding costs. Then he took the bride back to live in his father's house. Having paid for two daughters to be married, I think the Jewish people had a pretty good idea!

The wedding feast was a test run for the groom. If he could provide enough food and wine for the guests, it was a sign that he could provide for his wife and children in the future. To run out of food or wine would have been a major failure. It would convey the idea that he couldn't provide for his wife and family. His reputation would be ruined and he would begin his wedding with a black mark on his character.

This was much more than a case of just running out of cake or punch at a wedding reception, it was a matter of a man's reputation in front of his family and friends. I've often said there is a miracle in every parable of Jesus and there is a parable in every miracle of Jesus. For us, this miracle provides a powerful teaching about service and about salvation.

I. LESSONS ABOUT SERVICE.

This is one of the rare occasions recorded when Jesus interacted with His mother, Mary. She recognized the severity of the problem, so she approached Jesus and says, "Heads up. They have run out of wine." It was her way of saying, "Son, you've got to do something about this."

To us, the reply of Jesus seems almost rude. "Woman, what's that got to do with me? It's not yet my time." The word translated woman is like our word, "Ma'am." Here's my East Texas translation of what happened: "Son, they're out of wine. You need to do something."
"Yes, ma'am, but the timing of all this seems wrong to me."

Jesus didn't refuse her request. He just questioned the timing. Mary's understanding of Jesus' reply was that Jesus was going to grant her request, so she told the servants, "Just do what He tells you to do." And even as a 30-year-old son, He honors His mother by granting her request.

Let's learn two important lessons about service.

A. Mary said, "Do what He tells you to do."

She spoke these words to the servants at the wedding feast. They were to follow Jesus' directions about how to fix the wine shortage. But these words apply to us as well. Serving the Lord involves doing what Jesus tells us to do. And there are many times in the New Testament where Jesus tells us to do certain things.

He tells us to love the Lord with all our being. He tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves. He tells us to forgive those who have sinned against us. The list goes on. That's the reason we read and study the Bible, we find out what Jesus tells us to do. But reading or hearing it isn't the same thing as actually DOING it.

Jesus said, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and don't do the things I say?" (Luke 6:46 CSB) The word "Lord" really means "boss" or "master." So, when the boss or master gives us an order, our reply should always be, "Right away, sir."

Just remember that we don't serve the Lord in order to EARN salvation. We can't DO anything to be saved—Jesus has already done it all. We serve out of a grateful heart. I recall a short poem I learned in college that says, "I cannot work my soul to save; That work my Lord has done; But I will work like any slave; for the love of God's dear son." Are you doing everything Jesus tells you to do?

B. Obey even if you don't understand why.

Jesus told the servants to take the six stone jars used for purification and to fill them up with more water. The servants knew they were out of wine, so this seemed like a crazy idea. They expected Jesus to say, "Go down the street to the house of Andrew and borrow or buy some more wine." That would have made sense. Or Jesus could have said, "Go search the storeroom again and see if you missed any of the wine." That would have made sense. But Jesus told them to put water in the purification jars.

That's an important nuance many people miss. These six pots didn't contain drinking water; these pots held the water for the ritual hand washing that every Jewish man practiced. This was wash water to begin with!

Even though the servants didn't understand, they obeyed. Now chances are, these pots already had water in them, so they took more water and filled them up to the brim. That was the easy part. Then Jesus said, "Pour out some of it and take it to your boss, the headwaiter, to sample."

If I had been one of those servants I probably would have said, "But sir, that's only water. And it's wash water. If I take him a drink of it, he'll probably spew it out and fire me on the spot!" But the Bible said that the servants obeyed him. They poured what they thought was wash water into a goblet and handed it to the headwaiter. They watched anxiously for his reaction.

These servants are good role models for us. When the Lord tells us to do something, and we don't understand why, we should just obey Him by faith.

In the Old Testament, King Saul disobeyed the Lord. He stole some enemy livestock that he had been commanded to destroy. When he heard that the prophet Samuel was arriving, he hid the sheep and the cattle behind his tent.

Samuel walked up to Saul and said, "You have disobeyed the Lord! He told you to kill all the animals of your enemy." At first Saul lied, "He said, 'I HAVE obeyed the Lord, do you see any of the animals?'" About that moment one of the sheep hidden behind the tent bleated out, "Baaaaaad lie." And one of the hidden cattle let out a moo that remoooooved all doubt about

Saul's lie. Then Saul made up an excuse. He said, "Oh, I know the Lord said to kill these animals, but I kept some of the best ones to sacrifice to the Lord."

In response to that excuse, Samuel issues one of the powerful principles in the Word of God. He said, "Does the Lord take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams." (1 Samuel 15:22 CSB) There is something better than giving your time, and money to the Lord. It is to obey the Lord in every area of your life, even if you don't understand why.

Years ago, I met a man who claimed to be a follower of Jesus, but he had never been baptized. I asked him why he had never been baptized and he said, "I just don't understand how getting dunked in water is going to make me a better Christian."

I knew this man had several small children. I asked him, "Have you ever told your kids to do something and they asked you, 'Why?'" He said, "Of course." You probably said, "Because I said so, that's why." He nodded. I said, "I feel the same way about baptism. Jesus told us to go to all people and give them the good news baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. To me, it is simply an act of obedience. You don't have to understand why to do it. You just need to obey the Lord." A few weeks later, I had the joy of baptizing that dad. Sometimes when God's Word directs us to do something, we may want to ask God, "Why?" And He smiles and says, "Because I said so, that's why!"

II. LESSONS ABOUT SALVATION.

In this miracle of changing water into wine, we can learn three lessons about our personal salvation. Salvation itself is a miracle from God.

I like the fact that this was a quiet miracle. Because miracles don't have to be loud to be miracles. There was no word of command, no hysterical shouting, no laying on of hands, or the binding of Satan. There was no hocus-pocus or mumbo jumbo. He didn't even touch the water. He just said, "Take it to the headwaiter and let him taste it." What a beautiful miracle. The water simply became wine.

What Jesus did actually happens all the time in nature. Just ask any winemaker in Texas or California. Water falls as rain and is soaked up by the vines whose fruit eventually becomes wine. It's a long process. Part of this miracle was how Jesus sped up that natural process into an instant.

Here are three lessons we can learn about our salvation.

A. Jesus changes us into a new creation.

Water was miraculously changed into wine. And salvation is an act by which Jesus transforms us into a new creation.

Through the years I've known desperate people who sought out faith healers or those who claimed to be miracle workers. They were looking for a miracle. I call them miracle mongers.

I have already had a miracle, when Jesus changed me from a sinner to a child of God. In fact, I've seen God perform thousands of miracles because I've been present when people were miraculously born again. Here's the process. God forms us. But sin deforms us, and Jesus transforms us. Schools try to inform us, prisons hope to reform us, but only Jesus can transform us. The Bible says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17 CSB)

In 1954 Billy Graham held his first London Crusade. One night George Beverly Shea sang the old song, "It took a miracle." The chorus says, "It took a miracle to put the stars in place; It took a miracle to hang the worlds in space; but when He saved my soul; cleansed and made me whole; It took a miracle of love and grace."

After the service, he was confronted by a very angry British lady who claimed that he insulted every British subject with his song. He was dumbfounded. He said, "What did I sing that you didn't like?" She said, "How dare you claim that it took America to hang the stars in place ..." He said, "Ma'am. I didn't say, "It took America" I said, "It took a miracle." She was embarrassed and apologized. I love America, but America can't save you. I believe the words of the chorus, "But when He saved my soul; cleansed and made me whole, it took a MIRACLE of love and grace."

B. Jesus supplies us with more than we need.

We don't know how many people were at the wedding feast. Most scholars estimate there were anywhere from ten to forty people there. We know that it's near the end of the party, because the headwaiter mentions that. They had already been celebrating for days.

With the end of the party approaching, Jesus could have fixed the problem by creating three or four gallons of wine at the most. But John makes a point of giving us the detail of the amount of water that was turned into wine. He isn't exact, so he writes that each of the six pots contained two or three *metretas*—it's the only time that word appears in the New Testament—but it's a word Josephus used for a bath. Imagine each pot holding two or three bathtubs of water that became wine. So, thirty gallons in each pot would be close to accurate. That's 180 gallons of wine, or 681 liters.

What happened to all that wine? We aren't told, but I seriously doubt they drank it. Someone suggested that instead of the groom losing face in front of his friends, he became a successful wine merchant!

In other words, Jesus created MORE than was needed. But that is nature of Jesus, to give us more than enough. Jesus doesn't just offer us life; He promises us ABUNDANT life.

God is all about the overflow. The Bible says, "And God is able to make every grace overflow to you, so that in every way, always having everything you need, you may excel in every good work." (2 Corinthians 9:8 CSB)

When Jesus fed the five thousand, the Bible said everyone ate and was satisfied, and there were still 12 baskets of leftovers remaining. The Psalmist says, "My cup runs over." Our God is a God who is "able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us." (Ephesians 3:20 CSB)

That's why we call grace so amazing.

C. Sin always leads to misery. But Jesus saves the best for last!

Let's visit the scene of the wedding party again. The headwaiter is like the master of ceremonies. He takes a goblet of the miraculous wine and tastes it. He says, "Something's wrong here." Everyone gets quiet, and I'm sure the servants are thinking about getting fired. He said to the groom, "What have you done? At every other party, the host always serves the best wine first. Then when everyone has had plenty to drink, they bring out the cheap stuff. But you, my friend, you have saved the fine wine for the last. This is excellent! Delicious. Good show!"

What a great lesson. The devil always offers sin that seems pleasurable at the first, but it always leads to misery and death at the end. He makes the sin look enticing like a shiny colorful fish lure. But he always hides the hook. Proverbs 20:17 says, "Food gained by fraud is sweet to a person, but afterward his mouth is full of gravel." The Bible says there is pleasure in sin for a season, but that sin leads to death and hell.

On the other hand, Jesus always saves the best for last. I love the little chorus we used to sing that says, "Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before. Every day with Jesus I love Him more and more. Jesus saves and keeps me; and He's the One I'm living for. Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before."

Jesus saves the best for last. First there's the cross, then there will be a crown. First there is the race but then there will be the rest. Now there are the burdens, but next will be the blessings.

The glorious truth for us is that although our bodies are wearing out, we have an inner joy that is only growing sweeter day by day. The Bible gives us this promise, "Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory." (2 Corinthians 4:16-17 CSB)

There's one more detail about this miracle that I think we should make. Jesus didn't just turn water into wine. He turned wash water into FINE wine. I'm not a wine expert, but I suppose there is some wine that is pretty cheap and others that are pretty expensive. I think the wine Jesus created that day was the finest wine ever served. Jesus promised His disciples that one

day we would sit with Him and drink the fruit of the vine with Him in glory. Can you imagine what that will be like? Jesus always saves the best for last!

CONCLUSION

This is the first of seven signs we'll study in John's account. Jesus performed these signs to make a point. He was revealing His glory to the world. That's what a sign does. It informs.

A few years ago, I visited the battlefield of San Jacinto a few miles outside Houston. There is a massive tower there, and in true Texas modesty, there's a sign in front that says, "This tower is twelve feet taller than the Washington Monument."

If a stranger approached that tall column, he might guess that something important had happened there, but if there wasn't a sign to explain it, he would miss the point of the tall tower. That's why the Texas government engraved a sign on the base of the tower. It reads, "With the battle cry 'Remember the Alamo; Remember Goliad' the Texans charged. The enemy, taken by surprise, rallied for a few minutes then fed in disorder. The Texans had asked no quarter and gave none. The slaughter was appalling, victory complete, and Texas free!"

The sign shows you the reason for the tower. The signs of Jesus show us the reason He came to earth. His miracles show us that He was more than a man. He was more than a carpenter. He was God in the Flesh; He is the Son of Man who came to seek and to save the Lost; He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The same Savior who changed water into fine wine can change a rotten sinner into a blessed saint. And just remember, the best is yet to come!

OUTLINE

I. LESSONS ABOUT SERVICE.

- A. Mary said, "Do what He tells you to do."
- B. Obey even if you don't understand why.

II. LESSONS ABOUT SALVATION.

- A. Jesus changes us into a new creation.
- B. Jesus supplies us with more than we need.
- C. Sin always leads to misery. But Jesus saves the best for last!

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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