

The Wine – *John 2:1-11*

Introduction – We come to the first of the “signs” that John carefully selects for his gospel, most of which are not found in the Synoptics. John says that Jesus did many more signs than he recorded, but that these ones he chose “*that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name*” (20:30). He was not trying to choose the most spectacular miracles Jesus did. In fact, many, like this one, were done in relative obscurity. Rather, He chose them because of the efficacy of the sign in its ability to point us, like a good sign, to the thing it was signifying. Therefore, we must look beyond the wine-miracle to what the sign is pointing to.

The Book of Signs – Here is a simple outline of the gospel of John. After his Prologue (1:1-18) and introduction/announcement of Jesus’ public ministry (1:19-25), chapters 2-11 contain seven miracles, seven signs, culminating in raising Lazarus from the dead. This section is often called “*the book of signs*.” In them, Jesus *reveals* His glory (1:14, and 2:11 in our passage). The second half of the gospel is often called “*the book of glory*” where Jesus *receives* His glory (i.e. 12:23).

In addition, we can see a thematic section in 2:1 – 4:54 (beginning and ending in Cana). “*The three chapters present the replacement of the old purifications by the wine of the kingdom of God (2:1-11), the old temple by the new in the risen Lord (2:13-25), an exposition of new birth for a new creation (ch3), a contrast between the water of Jacob’s well and the living water from Christ (4:1-20), and the worship of Jerusalem and Gerizim with worship “in Spirit and in truth” (4:21-26)*” (Dodd, Carson). This section conveys what Paul was saying in 2 Cor 5:17, “*...old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*”

Overview – On the third day (making this the seventh day of the first week in John’s recording – another sign?), Jesus attends a wedding in Cana with his mother and his disciples as well (vv1-3). During the celebration (typically a weeklong event at the home of the groom), Jesus’ mother informs Him that “*they have no wine*” (v3). Jesus gives a cryptic answer, distancing Himself and His ministry from any authority of His mother (v4). In faith, His mother instructs the servants to do whatever Jesus says (v5). Six waterpots, totalling 120-180 gallons, used for ceremonial washings, are filled to the brim with water (vv6-7) and Jesus tells them to draw some out (v8). When the master of the feast had tasted it, he is shocked, calls the bridegroom, and proclaims the amazing quality of the wine (vv8-10). This is the first sign, we are told by John (at least that is recorded by John) to manifest Jesus’ glory, and we are told His disciples believed in Him (v11).

Out of Wine/Jesus and His Mother – It is pretty obvious that this wedding must have been of someone closely related to Jesus and His mother. She comes to Him with a sense of responsibility over the fact that the wine had run out. There is a present problem, and she naturally turns to her oldest son to take care of it. She is confident that He can and will (v5) even after Jesus gives what appears as a cryptic answer (v4). “*Woman*” is not a dismissive term as it sounds in our translations (see Jesus use the same term towards her while on the cross in 19:25-27). However, His phrase “*what does your concern have to do with Me?*” is a statement of distancing. Jesus must obey His Father’s will over and above his mother’s wishes and so He is making clear His line of submission. She must come to Him like every other person, as the promised Messiah; there is no inside track for family (Matt 12:46-50). Mary approaches Jesus as His mother and is admonished (v4); she then responds as a believer, and her faith is honored (v5).

His hour (of receiving His glory) had not yet come. This theme will continue to be developed in the gospel (7:6, 30, 8:20) until a clear shift in the next book of glory (12:23, 13:1, 17:1). Jesus will provide for this physical need, but it is done rather quietly, only in the presence of his disciples. The master of the feast has no idea that Jesus had done this miracle (vv9-10).

Out of Wine/Water and Stone Jars – Jesus doesn’t head out to the grocery store or a nearby vineyard. He points to stone jars because this is a “sign.” Levitical authorities had established an extra-biblical command to wash hands before you came in to eat. There was a biblical command for the priest to go through, a ceremonial washing before he offered a sacrifice, but this added mandate for all to wash was something Jesus rejected (Luke 11:37-38). Not only so, but all ritual washings were also fulfilled with the wine of His glory. This new wine would not be kept in the old wineskins of animal sacrifices and ceremonial washings, but in the font of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. We are to see the replacement of the old institutions and rituals with the new life of the Kingdom in Jesus. The master of the feast testifies that this is the better wine. The sign points to

spiritual and eternal life that is quantitatively and qualitatively superior, fulfilling and setting aside all the previous ceremonial signs.

Side Notes – 1) “if our Lord Jesus Christ actually worked a miracle in order to supply wine at a marriage feast, it seems to me impossible...to prove that drinking wine is sinful” Ryle. They had “well drunk” so we are not talking about a substance that cannot inebriate a person. Wine makes the heart glad, but it is to be received as a gift from the Lord, and not a carnal substance to abuse, enslave, and ruin your life with. This is true of all of God’s gifts to us. 2) Jesus is always making wine out of water; He just sped up the process and skipped the grapes. 3) If this was good wine, it was well aged, or at least had “the appearance of age,” something that must have happened in the six days of creation by this great Creator back then.

Full of Wine/Jesus and the Bridegroom – We will see later that John the Baptist will use this picture of Jesus being the bridegroom and that He must increase (the last Old Testament prophet will decrease) and this is to John’s great joy (3:29-30). At this wedding in Cana, the bridegroom falls short in his duties (out of wine for his guests) and in the first miracle Jesus fulfills what the bridegroom could not. Interestingly, we see Jesus quietly play the role of the perfect bridegroom behind the scenes. This manifested the glory of Christ and His disciples, beginning to see this glory revealed, believed in Him (v11).

The Glory of Christ is a Wedding Feast - Of course, this also points to the glorious, promised consummation of Christ’s work – “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God” (Rev 21:2-3). Jesus is the perfect and perfecting Bridegroom who provides for His bride, the great assembly of all who trust in Him.

The Glory of Christ is Eternal Purification – The water was an outward, ceremonial cleansing. In contrast, the wine goes in and makes the heart glad. “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (Heb 10:4), but, “...we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10). The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). That word, “cleanse” is the same root word for the “*purification jars*” at the wedding. Jesus is the true, eternal purifier. He is the Lamb of God come to take away the sin of the world. God’s glory is revealed in His name – “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands and forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and fourth generation” (Exod 34:6-7).

The Glory of Christ is Full to the Brim, Sabbath-Joy – The celebration of a union, overflowing purification, the best wine, rest and celebration on the seventh day. What are you invited to see? What is the sign? “And in this mountain The LORD of hosts will make for all people A feast of choice pieces, A feast of wines on the lees, Of fat things full of marrow, Of well-refined wines on the lees” (Isaiah 25:6). “At your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:9-11). “My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 121).