

Sunday Night, March 18, 2007 Notes:

Order of events:

1. Opening prayer.
2. Praise God with song.
3. Praise God with corporate prayer.
4. Praise God with study of His Word.
5. Close with blessing and reminder of the Gospel.

Read John 2:1-11 and discuss overall attributes: the journey from Judea to Cana, the wedding, who was there, what happened.

Given his limited space requirements (John 21:25), of all the things to choose from, John chose to share with us this particular story. This simple event on a day in Galilee that tells us something critical we need to hear.

These verses have survived a lot of creative teachings down through the years. I once heard or read that the Bible has to be the Word of God because it has survived so many bad sermons! Martin Luther inferred that Scripture has a wax nose that can be made and twisted into almost any shape desired. I think that great liberty has been taken over the years here. For example, some see the 3-days journey as a foreshadowing, the 6 pots representing 6 gifts from the 6 in Jesus' group (Jesus and his 5 disciples), the significance of the alcoholic nature of the wine, great profoundness to the meaning of "My time has not yet come," Mary was prominent at the wedding and directed Jesus, speculation on who was married, the family ran out of wine because they were poor, they ran out because Jesus came eating and drinking (Matt 11:19), speculation on the condition of the water pots, etc. It has been said that "What the Bible says is so, what it does not say is open to interpretation." We must exercise care not to add to the Word of God nor take away from it. Even Satan uses Scripture for his own purposes. (Matt 4:1-3) Some of these extrapolations may carry credence. God the Holy Spirit did carefully place into John's mind the things he wanted presented. We dare not make it say what we "want" it to say, let the Bible speak for itself. We do know our God is a God who pays meticulous attention to detail, who fulfills according to what He has established.

In this second chapter of John's gospel is the account of the first miraculous sign of our Lord (v.11). It takes place at a wedding in Cana. Let's discuss those two things a bit before we begin our verse-by-verse examination.

The wedding: a Middle Eastern Jewish wedding. "Eastern weddings are very different from Western affairs. In Western weddings the bride is the prominent figure. When she enters, clad in all her glory, the whole congregation stands and the organ thunders, "Here comes the bride" and every eye is focused on her. But in Eastern weddings it is the groom that is prominent. He is the featured one; the bride merely shows up for the wedding. (She is like the bridegroom in a Western wedding – a sort of necessary evil.) Not only is the groom the featured person, but he also pays for the whole affair! Some of those weddings went on for two or three days – some for as long as a week – with all the relatives of both sides of the family joining together for a big celebration. That is the kind of wedding John is talking about here." [2] This is quite the gathering. Let's see what we can glean from the Scriptures.

We don't know whose wedding it was. It took place in Cana of Galilee, just a few miles from Nazareth. We know Mary, Jesus' mother, was there along with his brothers (v.12). We know that Mary, Jesus, and the disciples were all invited (v.2). They either all ran in the same circles, or when Jesus showed up with his new friends, as it is with most rural folk, it wasn't a big fuss to include the newcomers. Since French wasn't invented yet, no one could RSVP. It was a religious ceremony due to the presence of the ceremonial washing pots. If each person used a pint

of water for cleansing, that would accommodate between 960 and 1,440 people with one filling. As with all gatherings, it's not a good thing to run out of refreshments. There was no place to go get more wine, or the host couldn't afford it. It must have been a sizeable event due to the presence of servants and a master of the banquet. It was customary to have the best wine first. Jesus created somewhere between 120 and 180 gallons of wine, that's 600 to 900 bottles! The bride is never discussed.

Now, concerning signs and miracles, I think C.S. Lewis, in his book *Miracles* does a great job at describing the nature of miracles (it is classic Lewis!):

The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do. (cf. John 5:19)

If we open such books as Grimm's Fairy Tales or Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or the Italian epics we find ourselves in a world of miracles so diverse that they can hardly be classified. Beasts turn into men and men into beasts or trees, trees talk, ships become goddesses, and a magic ring can cause tables richly spread with food to appear in solitary places. Some people cannot stand this kind of story, others find it fun. But the least suspicion that it was true would turn the fun into nightmare. If such things really happened they would, I suppose, show that Nature was being invaded. But they would show that she was being invaded by an alien power. The fitness of the Christian miracles, and their difference from these mythological miracles, lies in the fact that they show invasion by a Power which is not alien. They are what might be expected to happen when she is invaded not simply by a god, but by the God of Nature: by a Power which is outside her jurisdiction not as a foreigner but as a sovereign. They proclaim that He who has come is not merely a king, but the King, her King and ours.

Let us return to our classification and firstly to Miracles of Fertility. The earliest of these was the conversion of water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana. This miracle proclaims that the God of all wine is present. The vine is one of the blessings sent by Jahweh: He is the reality behind the false god Bacchus. Every year, as part of the Natural order. God makes wine. He does so by creating a vegetable organism that can turn water, soil, and sunlight into a juice which will, under proper conditions, become wine. Thus, in a certain sense, He constantly turns water into wine, for wine, like all drinks, is but water modified. Once, and in one year only, God, now incarnate, short circuits the process: makes wine in a moment: uses earthenware jars instead of vegetable fibres to hold the water. But uses them to do what He is always doing. The miracle consists in the short cut; but the event to which it leads is the usual one. If the thing happened, then we know that what has come into Nature is no anti-Natural spirit, no God who loves tragedy and tears and fasting for their own sake (however He may permit or demand them for special purposes) but the God of Israel who has through all these centuries given us wine to gladden the heart of man. [5]

John 2 {1} On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. {2} Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples.

Here we have John firmly grounding us in space and time again – must have been a physicist! Is the “third day” reference significant? When you mention the “third day” to believers, it's like code. Just like the Easter greeting “He is risen!” answered by “He is risen indeed!” In John 1:43, Jesus purposed to go to Galilee and showed up there the third day; he purposed to be raised from the dead, and showed up on the third day! Thank God for his perfect timing! With this statement of his purpose, Jesus does seem to be following some sort of divine time schedule (v.4). For example, the meeting with the Samaritan woman (which we will discuss in a few weeks) seems suspiciously like a prearranged appointment. In another light, it is about a 3-day walk from Judea to Cana up in Galilee – 70-ish miles. John is specific in his reference to Cana *in Galilee* to distinguish it from another city named Cana in Samaria. So, like much of Scripture there could be multiple meanings and readings.

John 2 {3} When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” {4} And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” {5} His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Why did they run out of wine? We should ask this question to ourselves everyday! Are you mad? This question is hugely profound; it’s like Tai Chi for the mind - cleansing. So God could make more; it was for the purposes of God as is everything in this universe! Why did the tower fall on the people at Siloam in Luke 13? Why was the man born blind in John 9? So that God would be glorified. Humanly speaking, they ran out because of poor planning or unexpected guests or lack of funds or spillage; we are not told specifically.

Why did Mary tell Jesus that the wine had run out? Since she is mentioned prominently here, she was probably close to the couple being married or their families. She did not want to see the celebration lose its happy and jubilant ambience. But she never asks Jesus to do anything about it; she merely informs him of the situation. At the risk of sounding somewhat sexist, women rarely make these kinds of observations or statements without the strong, not so subtle hint that they want you to do something about it. But the account, especially verse 5, makes it rather clear that Mary did expect Jesus to help. I personally don’t think she had any idea that he would do anything miraculous; that’s why she instructed the servants to do what he said. However, Jesus had just returned from his baptism and 6 week temptation in the wilderness, and I’m sure Mary had been filled in on the Spirit descending on him and God the Father speaking about his Son, and knowing his miraculous birth and the proclamations of the angels, she just may have had a sneaky suspicion that something spectacular may be about to happen. One other thing, there are a couple of examples of women, due to their persistence and passion, who turned the intent of the Lord. This may be another example of just such an act as the woman who persisted with the judge or the woman who convinced Jesus that “even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” (Matt 15:27)

What kind of answer does Jesus give. “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come”? Any young man today who addresses his mother as “woman” is sure to get walloped. Never fear, the term “woman” was a common title of respect in that day. “Woman, behold your son!” (John 19:26) “What does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” The implication is that this matter belongs to others. I get the impression that Jesus is saying, “What does this have to do with me? It’s not my wedding time yet (the time for my wedding feast hasn’t come yet)! I will provide the wine when it’s my time.” We’ll discuss a little more on this later. Also, as discussed, Jesus seems well aware of his divine schedule. (John 7:6,8,30; 8:20)

John 2 {6} Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. {7} Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. {8} And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it.

Many aspects of these verses we have already discussed. The size, number, and purpose of the jars have been examined. What other things about these verses stand out? Notice the simplicity and dignity of the whole affair. Jesus didn’t make any kind of scene or speak loudly or even touch the jars. Within the limits of normal natural processes, albeit highly accelerated, the water simply became wine (“simply” to God!). Notice two other things. One, the servants filled the jars up to the brim without questioning or grumbling. No doubt this didn’t have to be done again until tomorrow or later for the next day of revelry. But they had to move, even if the jars were just half empty, 480 to 720 lbs. of water around for as yet an unknown reason. Secondly, Jesus didn’t even taste the results of his efforts.

John 2 {9} When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom {10}

and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.”

Did Jesus change the water into wine or change everyone’s taste buds so that they thought it was wine? Which is easier and does it matter? First, the Scriptures tell us in verse 9 that the water has become wine, and I am certain it was the greatest “fruit of the vine” that has ever graced the earth. Everything God does is good! Second, God could have quite easily changed everyone’s taste buds or mental capacities such that while drinking water, they would have thought they were drinking Coca Cola if he desired. But that would be a lie and not in keeping with the true nature of God’s created order. God does not deal in lies or anything but the truth; he is truth itself, reality if you will. This would not be in keeping with his nature.

The steward, headwaiter, master of the feast, master of the banquet, governor, chief servant, ruler of the feast (pick a translation, pick a new name) was truly amazed when he tasted the wine. Notice the conspicuous silence of the bridegroom! He must have been bewildered that new wine showed up and that it was so good, and no one asked him for money. He was certainly smart enough to keep his mouth shut and just smile and enjoy: not taking credit, but not denying credit either. I’m sure everyone knew the wine had run out; this was a delightful turn of events.

While it is completely irrelevant to the story, it is a point of interest. Was this wine, created by Christ, alcoholic? It is quite interesting to read and listen to the debate and discussion on both sides of this issue. I wonder their motives and I wonder at my own. Without going into a lengthy discourse, as I read these verses, it seems it was alcoholic. Two facts stand out: one, this was a Jewish wedding; they drink real wine at their weddings and I believe they always have. We know it existed from the days of Noah. Also, simply stated, that’s why you wait until later in the festival to bring out the poor wine, the imbiber’s taste buds are dulled. That is not the point of this story and it easily distracts.

John 2 {11} This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

As they used to say in the Wendy’s Hamburger commercials, “Here is the beef”, the heart of the matter. What three significant factors are called to our attention here? First, John says this is “the first of his signs.” I think John always refers to Jesus’ miracles he recorded as “signs” or “miraculous signs” in some translations. A “sign” is a miracle that has meaning or a message: an acted out parable. A “sign” is designed to tell you something “that you would not otherwise know: to manifest a significance that might otherwise be hidden.” [2] The sign is twofold: 1) God takes these “ugly bags of mostly water,” us, and turns them into wine. He takes the ordinary, commonplace, humdrum life and brings it to life, gives it flavor, fragrance (bouquet), body, beauty. We people fill up these clay pots with ordinary and God changes us into something extraordinary! 2) We know that weddings and marriage are a big deal to God. They/it reflect our relationship with him. We will soon be the honored guests at another wedding feast called the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-9). We are already drinking the New Wine of the Holy Spirit here (Acts 2:13-18), but just as the best wine was saved till last at Cana, who knows what awaits us there (1 Corinthians 2:9; 1 John 3:2)? When Christ is the bridegroom and puts on his wedding feast, everyone will be like the “governor,” happily amazed that the best was saved until last!

Second, this event “manifested his glory.” John 1:14 says that they beheld his glory, grace and truth, of which Christ is full. In this event we see both his grace and truth. His grace is displayed by the fact that he probably gave the most generous gift of all to the marriage couple: 600 bottles of the world’s finest wine! Along with this generous gift he graciously saved their celebration: grace in gift giving. He also manifested truth about himself by

proving that he was the Lord of nature, her King. In his calm and confident fashion, Christ showed his authority and sovereignty to his creation.

And, third, because of that graciousness and power displayed, “his disciples believed in him.” “They believed that here was God's Man, ruling over all the works of God's hands, put in dominion and authority over the natural world and doing with it whatever he pleased, within the limits of nature itself... When the disciples saw it they believed more deeply in him than before. They saw that here was One who could handle life. Here was One who could take a commonplace thing, nothing out of the ordinary, simple water, and make of it wine, make it a source of joy, of glory and of warmth.” [2]

Miracles are interesting. Why does God perform miracles? We recognize God as the creator and sustainer of all life (John 1); this permits the possibility of miracles. The world is God's theater for displaying his glory and love (Psa 33:5, 65:5-13, Eph 3:10). Miracles are God's revelation to us of His covenant love, of his saving love, and also holy justice. God showed his sovereign power in judgment and salvation in the plagues on Pharaoh and Egypt. And he demonstrated his love and protection by supplying daily manna to Israel. In Matt 11:3-5, Jesus himself tells why he performed miracles. “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.” He did them to fulfill the promises of Messiah's kingdom from Isaiah 24:18-19. They were confirming signs of the presence of the Kingdom of God. As we have seen, John saw these miracles as signs pointing to deeper spiritual truths. By them we grow in our understanding of Jesus, his lordship over nature and death, his suffering, his fulfillment of prophecy. God also began his church with a powerful display of miracles from Pentecost on, recorded all through the book of Acts. The Apostles performed miracles to validate their message and authority. These were a continuation of the miracles of Jesus made possible by God the Holy Spirit working in them with power.

Miracles are part of God's interaction with us. They confirm his love for us. They teach us deep truths. They are signs to an unbelieving world (1 Cor 14:21,22, Rom 1:19,20). Do they happen today? I believe so. I believe that many things we view as ordinary are miraculous and vice versa; they are often in the “eye of the beholder.” I like what Edward Abbey (a non-believer) said, “Only petty minds and trivial souls yearn for supernatural events, incapable of perceiving that everything -- everything! -- within and around them is pure miracle.”

Additional Comments or Questions:

1. Was Christ's reading of the nature of Nathanael not considered a miracle by John? Nathanael's “reading” could have just been interpreted as just very good reading of body language. Jesus may have been able to see the interaction between Philip and Nathanael and read Nate's body language. Also, nothing in the physical universe was changed because of Christ omniscience. Some don't believe Christ was omniscient while a man. That doesn't seem to match Scripture. Knowledge of human nature and hearts and future don't seem to be considered as signs to John.
2. There are some apocryphal writings that describe Jesus making clay pigeons with other children while they were in Egypt. It is said that Jesus would touch his pigeons and they would fly away. These are not considered to be part of the canon of Scripture, simply imaginative accounts. Many things are written... the world is full of books.
3. Jesus' first miracle was converting water to wine. The first plague (miracle) God performed through Moses was converting water into blood.
4. Is bringing back someone from the dead short cutting a natural phenomena? Great answer by Chuck Hamstra: life is the natural state of being; death is unnatural!

5. Is there some significance to the jars being for purification rites in comparison to us as “jars of clay?” There could be, but I don’t see a connection right off. Jesus may be symbolizing the taking of the law and its rites and turning them into something of beauty by completing the entire process.

References:

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3. Guideposts, *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1986
4. Zondervan, *The NIV Study Bible*, 1985
5. Lewis, C.S., *Miracles*, 1947, 1960