

Message #7

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John

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JESUS' FIRST MIRACLE

JOHN 2:1-11

I.

Rod Dreher is an editor, blogger and writer who published a book earlier this year entitled *The Benedict Option*. In it he suggests that in the face of an increasingly hostile world Christians should consider drawing closer together in Christian communities and establishing a greater separation from the world. At one point he writes, "**Today, Christians who hold to the biblical teaching about sex and marriage have the same status in culture and, increasingly, in law as racists. The culture war that began with the sexual revolution in the 1960s has now ended in defeat for Christian conservatives.**" Whether this is truly a defeat for Christians and whether Christians should follow the example of St. Benedict might be debated. But certainly the traditional view of marriage is under assault in our country.

The Bible recognizes an important role for singles in society. Marriages and families based on Biblical principles, however, are the key to the production of a healthy nation. An objective look at the statistics provides a glimpse at the consequences of disrespecting marriage and the family. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics 55% of parents between the ages of 28 and 34 are having kids before marriage. Only 40% of adults in that age bracket are entering family life by getting married first.

A report from the American Enterprise Institute this summer (6/14/2017) found that life is generally better when traditional and Biblical principles are followed. Ninety-seven percent of those who get a high school diploma, get a job and get married before having kids will not experience poverty when they enter their thirties. Doesn't that regimen sound like a good antidote to avoid poverty and a lot of social problems that our country experiences?

Our Creator, according to Genesis #2, established marriage as the first and primary institution for us humans. So it is no coincidence that the first miracle performed by Jesus involved a wedding. It is clear that He was supportive of marriage. We are going to examine the story of that first miracle this morning and see what lessons we can gain from it.

We have begun a study of the Gospel According to John. We have seen that the author is the Apostle John who wrote this account of the life of Jesus several decades after the other Gospel writers. So, much of his material is unique. He also organizes His material around seven miracles. This is the first. In

Chapter 1 we have seen that John described a key witness to his claim that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. That witness was John the Baptist. He introduced Jesus to several of his disciples who began to follow Jesus. Today we find out about one of the first experiences that they have with Him in His public ministry.

II.

In vv. 1-5 of #2 we encounter THE PROBLEM AND OPPORTUNITY AT A WEDDING. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE PROBLEM AND OPPORTUNITY...) According to v. 1, "**On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.**" It would seem that the third day that John is talking about here is the third day after the encounter that Jesus had with Nathaniel at the end of #1. Jesus was heading to Galilee from John the Baptist's baptismal site on the Jordan River, apparently with Andrew and Peter and John the Apostle and Philip and Nathaniel in tow. At this point Jesus seems to have five young men who are following Him and treating him like a Jewish rabbi, though they believe that He is Israel's promised Messiah.

Cana (KHIRBET CANA) was a small town in Galilee. It is generally recognized as being at the site that is called Khirbet Cana today. It was nine miles north of Jesus' hometown in Nazareth. Nathaniel was from Cana. The town will appear again later in John's Gospel. (KHIRBET CANA 2)

The site has been excavated in recent years. It was at a junction of a couple of Roman roads. Archaeologists have discovered the remains of an ancient synagogue there. Also they have found evidence of an ancient monastery and church. They are suspicious that these two buildings were put there because of the connection to the Biblical stories. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In v. 1 John says that the mother of Jesus was there. For some reason she is not mentioned by name. Commentators suggest that the author assumes that his readers know her from the other Gospels. Apparently this is a wedding of a friend or relative of Mary.

The ancient Jewish tradition, perhaps going back to the time of Jesus, is that weddings for virgins were held on Wednesdays. So perhaps this was a Wednesday. Remember, according to Jewish reckoning, a day began at sunset and ended at sunset.

Verse 2 tells us, "**Jesus was also invited to the wedding with his disciples.**" If Mary was related to one of these people getting married, then Jesus would have been related also. We know that Nathaniel was from Cana. So He may also have had a direct connection to the couple. Jesus was acting like a young rabbi. A couple being married in a small village would be happy to have a relative around who was a

rabbi to bless this union. Having a few of his disciples around would also be regarded as normal and expected.

There is no mention of Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus. After Jesus' visit to Jerusalem at age twelve, Joseph does not appear again in the Biblical record. The general suspicion is that he had died by this time.

Typically, a wedding celebration like this would begin with the groom and his friends arriving at the home of the bride and her parents. Often this happened in the evening. In that case, there was a torchlight procession where the groom brought his bride to his parents' home. There would be formalities with blessings and prayers. Then the feasting and celebration would begin. Ideally, the celebration would last for a week. Some could not afford that time and expenditure. Closer friends and relatives might take off the whole week to join the party. There would be eating and drinking and music and dancing.

Jesus' presence here with His disciples indicates that He did not disapprove of such celebrations, even though alcohol was present. Indeed, He is going to be involved in helping to make sure that the wedding festivities are a success. He is even going to provide the wine.

Verse 3 says, "**When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.'**" Wine was clearly an important part of wedding celebrations. This was not simply grape juice, either. Fermentation was necessarily a part of what was involved in the processing of grapes and juice. Modern distillation methods increase the alcohol content of wine today. They did not have those methods back then.

The testimony of Jewish and Gentile history also says that wine was normally mixed with water. The typical ratio was between two and four parts of water with one part of wine. Wine without dilution was regarded as "strong drink." Rabbis and religious Jews frowned upon drunkenness, especially at a celebration like this.

To run out of wine at a wedding celebration was regarded as a terrible social blunder. We don't know why it happened in this situation. Some have suggested that the appearance of Jesus with His disciples may have put a strain on their liquid resources. But the text says that he was invited, and it is doubtful that having five of His disciples would have caught the hosts by surprise or would have drained the wine significantly. So we just don't know about the cause of the shortage.

It does present a situational problem. No one's life is at stake. No one's health is endangered. But Jesus is involved and concerned. The testimony of the rest of the New Testament is not that He should be called upon only in situations of dire emergency and health. He is concerned and interested in the other difficulties of life that we encounter. That should serve as an encouragement to our prayer lives.

Mary's role in these circumstances is not clear. It is possible that she has some responsibility for the food at this event. It could be that she heard from someone else about the problem with the wine supply. If Joseph is indeed dead, then Jesus is the oldest male in the remaining family. It would be natural to call upon the oldest son to do something to help out in a family crisis like this.

But there could be more than that involved. Mary had received a message from heaven about the special nature of her son. She knew about the supernatural aspects of His birth. She knew about the divine messenger that saved them from the massacre in Bethlehem. She knew that the angel Gabriel had told her that the Lord God would give Jesus the throne of His father David and that He would have an eternal kingdom. Perhaps she had heard about the baptism at the hands of their relative John the Baptist and the empowerment that had come to Jesus from the Holy Spirit. Perhaps Jesus had told His mother about some of these things Himself. So perhaps Mary was expecting her son to do something miraculous. Perhaps she was expecting her son to display His greatness.

This might help us to understand Jesus' response in v. 4: **"And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.'"** The word for "woman" here was a courteous and respectful term. But it was not the normal term that a son would use for his mother. There is a hint in the use of this word that there is something different about the relationship between Jesus and Mary.

This is confirmed by His words in the next clause. Literally, He says, "What to me and to you?" The NIV has "Why do you involve me?" Our ESV translation is pretty good. It could also be translated as "What do I have to do with this?" The idea involved is that there is a distancing that has happened from Jesus toward His earthly mother. There is a change in the nature of this relationship. Jesus has a new role and a new responsibility. He is not primarily a son of his mother. He is the Messiah. He is the Son of God, who has to be about Messianic business.

Jesus adds, **"My hour has not yet come."** This term "hour" will appear several times in John's Gospel. It will have primary reference to Jesus' death and resurrection and the consequences that come from this. For example, Jesus at the Last Supper warned the Twelve about His coming arrest and crucifixion. (PROJECTOR ON--- JOHN 12:23) We read in John #12 v. 23, **"And Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.'** The reference is to His death and resurrection.

My interpretation of the use of "hour" in our passage is that it is a reference to the public revelation of His true identity, which will lead to His death and resurrection and exaltation. (PROJECTOR OFF) Mary was perhaps hoping for the public revelation of the true identity of her son. For it would be a vindication of her hopes and understanding about the unique and special nature of her son. She doesn't understand all of the implications of that, but she knows that God intends for Him to do something great.

According to v. 5, **"His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'"** Mary seems to accept this gentle rebuke from her son. She continues with a persevering kind of faith. She realizes that there is still a problem. But if Jesus is now primarily her Messiah and not her son, she can still entrust the situation to His care.

Catholic scholars argue from this verse that Mary is functioning as a mediator with Jesus. She is getting Jesus to do what He otherwise might not have done. So Christians should approach her to help us to get Jesus to do what we need to have done. But this is wrong. Jesus is the sovereign God. His Father's divine purposes are being accomplished here. Mary is just a human being. Jesus is our mediator between man and God.

But Mary's approach to Jesus establishes a model and a pattern that we find in the first disciples of Jesus. They are slow to understand and catch on to what Jesus is doing. They make missteps. They say inappropriate things. But they do turn in faith to Jesus. They entrust difficult situations to Him. They learn to expect Him to act in ways that are often not anticipated.

Such is the approach that we need to follow with Him and with our Heavenly Father. Rather than requesting Him to act in specific ways, often we are wiser to bring difficult situations to His attention and ask Him to do what is best. He may respond in ways that we have never anticipated.

III.

In vv. 6-10 we find that JESUS CHANGES WATER INTO WINE. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. JESUS CHANGES WATER INTO WINE) According to v. 6, **"Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons."**

The Old Testament law said that there were circumstances that created ceremonial uncleanness and prevented people from approaching the tabernacle or the temple. These situations involved childbirth, contact with a dead body, certain diseases, and certain bodily emissions. Part of the remedy involved washing with water. This is where these stone water jars came into play.

The Old Testament law also said that if certain unclean animals or insects fell onto clothes or into household objects, they also become unclean. According to Leviticus #11 v. 33 (LEVITICUS 11:33), "**And if any of them falls into any earthenware vessels, all that is in it shall be unclean, and you shall break it.**" So contaminated pottery was supposed to be destroyed.

In the first century AD rabbis decided that stone cannot be broken. Vessels made out of stone are not susceptible to impurity. So stone vessels such as these large jars were used for ritual washings. (STONE PURIFICATION JARS) Archaeologists found these stone water jars in the ruins of ancient Cana. Stone water jars were not produced after the invasion of the Romans in 70 AD. So it is theoretically possible that one or more of these water jars were involved in the miracle described in our passage.

Probably the stone water jars in our story were located near the synagogue in Cana. Our text says that each one held between 20 and 30 gallons of water. We know that water weighs about 8 1/2 pounds per gallon. So when the stone jars were full, the water alone weighed between 170 and 255 pounds. Then there was the weight of the stone jars themselves. So these things probably did not get moved around much. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In Mark #7 Pharisees from Jerusalem criticized Jesus and His disciples for not ritually washing their hands before eating. The author explains that this was part of the tradition of the elders. Whether the Galileans followed these strict rules is uncertain.

Notice v. 7: "**Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim.**" Water for purification had to be living water. The rabbis understood this to mean that the water had to come from a source with running water, like a spring or a river. So there was some work that was necessary for these servants helping at the wedding to get the water for these jars.

They were filled to the top. This meant that there was no room for anything to be added. Water intended for purification rites was not to have anything mixed in with it. The Talmud specifically says that no wine was to be added. The rabbis, who were almost all Pharisees, would object to having anything other than living water put in these purification jars.

Verse 8: "**And he [Jesus] said to them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.'**" The servants are not going to bring the jars to the guy in charge of the wedding feast. But they bring some kind of smaller container, or containers, to him. Perhaps he knows about the wine shortage. Perhaps he does not. Perhaps he simply saw that the pitchers at the table needed to be refilled. In the end he becomes an unwitting witness to the miracle that occurs.

Verse 9 says, "**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...**" When exactly the transformation of the water occurred, we are not told.

The master of the feast is clueless about what happened. He is unaware of the miracle that has happened. The implication is that the guests at the feast are unaware also. The lowly servants know about the transformation. The disciples of Jesus also know. The others are unaware of the miraculous intervention of God.

I wonder how often that happens around us. I wonder how often God intervenes in the lives of people and events around us. If and when He does, I wonder if it is more likely those who are regarded as the insignificant people of society who are aware of such divine intervention.

Verse 10 continues the sentence begun in v. 9: "**...and [the master of the feast] said to him [the bridegroom], '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.'**" The master of the feast expresses a general principle in regard to parties and to wine. Typically the best wine is given first. The poor wine is served later when people may be a little under the influence of the alcohol.

It was not necessarily the case that the people were inebriated at this wedding ceremony. Rabbis and religious people and the Hebrew Scriptures themselves frowned upon drunkenness. The basic point was that this was really good wine, better than what was available at the beginning. A miracle happened, and Jesus was responsible for it.

IV.

We come then to v. 11 and THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MIRACLE. (PROJECTOR ON--- IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MIRACLE) The author tells us in v. 11, "**This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.**"

We have seen that the term "signs" refers to miracles. So the claim of the Apostle John is that this is the first miracle that Jesus, the God-man, performed in His earthly life. This negates the notion that He performed miracles as a child, as some apocryphal early books claim. This also points toward the likelihood that the performing of miracles by Jesus was linked to his baptism by John and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Him.

Our text relates this miracle to the manifestation of Jesus' glory. The manifestation of Jesus' glory seems to involve a display of who Jesus really is and was. In John #17 Jesus will relate His manifestation of glory to His coming death and resurrection, which is the ultimate display of His love and power.

Just as in that death and resurrection only some grasped the significance of what happened, only some saw the glory of the miracle that was accomplished in our passage. The display of glory was hidden from most of the guests and from the coordinator of the wedding.

In #20 v. 31 we have seen that the Apostle John explains the significance of this and the six other sign miracles. (JOHN 20:31) In that verse he writes, "...**but these [signs] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**" The manifestation of glory described in these seven miracles is intended to produce recognition that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. It is by putting trust in Him that those who believe can have life, eternal life.

A.

There are at least four things which I believe that this first sign is intended to teach us. The first is that JESUS IS THE CREATOR. (IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE... A. JESUS IS THE CREATOR.) This is a creation miracle. Jesus did not just make a seed; He did not just make a vine; He did not just make grapes; He did not just produce grape juice. In this miracle He produced the finished product--- wine. This was good wine. It was the best.

(GENESIS 1:31) At the end of the week of creation in Genesis #1, verse 31 says, "**And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.**" Such is the testimony of the master of the wedding feast at what Jesus has created in this first miracle.

How did God create the world in Genesis #1? By His word. He spoke it into existence. (PROJECTOR OFF) That is what we have here. Jesus simply gave commands and the wine came into existence. In #1 the Apostle John identified Jesus as what? The Word. Jesus is the Word who speaks things into existence. This is what we will find in the other miracles in this Gospel.

B.

In this miracle we also find that JESUS IS PROVIDING A NEW WAY TO DEAL WITH SIN. (IV. A. B. JESUS IS PROVIDING A NEW WAY TO DEAL WITH SIN.) The stone water jars are representative of the Old Testament way of dealing with sin. Certain activities made a Jew ritually impure. They were not allowed to approach the temple or tabernacle in this state.

In Jesus' day, the rabbis interpreted these Old Testament rules to mean that ceremonial uncleanness required the washing of water before Jews could enter the synagogue. In Mark #7 we find that the strict Pharisees required ritual washing after one returned from the marketplace and before one ate a meal.

The water of purification also had to be living water. This living water, and the containers that held it, could not be contaminated with anything else. The Talmud specifically mentioned that wine could not be added to it.

What happens in this first miracle of Jesus? The water is replaced by the One who in #4 calls Himself the living water. Jesus makes the water into wine. This miracle points toward the conclusion that the old way of dealing with sin is being replaced by a new way that is focused upon Jesus.

C.

We also find that in this first miracle JESUS IS INTRODUCING THE MESSIANIC ERA. (IV. A. B. C. JESUS IS INTRODUCING THE MESSIANIC ERA.) According to the other Gospels, the message of John the Baptist was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus also presented that message at the beginning of His ministry.

Wine was associated with that coming kingdom. Consider these verses: (ISAIAH 25:6) In Isaiah #25 v. 6 the prophet Isaiah spoke of this coming kingdom, saying, "**On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine well refined.**" In Amos #9 v. 13 (AMOS 9:13) the prophet Amos records this prophecy: "**Behold, the days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.**" In Joel #3 v. 18 (JOEL 3:18) that prophet speaks of the coming Messianic kingdom. He says, "**And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine...**"

Jesus' miracle of changing water into wine points to the recognition that Jesus is the head of this coming Messianic kingdom. Because of Israel's rejection of Jesus, the coming of that kingdom has been postponed. But it will come.

D.

Then finally this first miracle shows that JESUS IS THE SOURCE OF ABUNDANT LIFE. (IV. A. B. C. D. JESUS IS THE SOURCE OF ABUNDANT LIFE.) The situation at the wedding feast is difficult. To run out of wine would be a total embarrassment to the hosts and to the couple being married. Jesus provides not just enough wine to get them through the difficulty. He fills six large water jars with wine. If each jar held between 20 and 30 gallons, this means that there was suddenly between 120 and 180 gallons of wine on

hand. This was way more than was necessary. If what was left over was given to the newly married couple, this would be a great wedding present. Then also this was very good wine.

The world then, and the world now, presents a message that real living comes from having a lot of stuff, from having money and cars and houses and vacations and makeovers and plastic surgery. Jesus says that real living, eternal life, comes from Him. In the tenth chapter of this Gospel (JOHN 10:10) we will find that Jesus declares, "**I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.**"

This is a lesson that is being taught in this first miracle. Jesus is the source of abundant life. It is a lesson that we need to remember when we are tempted by the world around us. Real living is found in a relationship with Jesus. Jesus is the Creator. Jesus is providing a new way to deal with sin. Jesus is introducing the Messianic era. Jesus is the source of abundant life.