

**John 2:1-11**

<sup>2</sup> On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, <sup>2</sup> and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup> When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

<sup>4</sup> "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

<sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

<sup>6</sup> Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

<sup>8</sup> Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, <sup>9</sup> and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside <sup>10</sup> and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

<sup>11</sup> What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

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*To sum up: it seems clear that both the Miracle of Cana and the Cleansing of the Temple are semeia [signs] which signify the same fundamental truth: that Christ has come to inaugurate a new order in religion.*

(C.H. Dodd, Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, 303)

The second chapter has a programmatic significance: whoever understands the miracle of the wine and the cleansing of the temple has the key to the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus..."

(G.R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 31)

**A Story on Two Levels**

On one level this is a simple story of a miracle where Jesus saves a young couple from massive social embarrassment at their wedding. The wine runs out, and he turns water into excellent wine – all is well. On another level, it's possible, one might even say probable, that

there is some deep symbolism to his actions, with the facts of it being at a wedding feast, and Jesus replacing the water in ceremonial washing jars with wine, as non-coincidental.

*Jesus' Changing Water into Wine shows the Church how the messianic Lord transforms the ancient people's purifying waters into the new people's vivifying wine, how he changes the ordinary (and its failures) into the extraordinary (and its abundance. As Jesus' first public sign (v11) the miracle wants to show the Church the qualitative change Jesus brings into history and personal life.*

(Dale Bruner, *John*, 126)

### **Background**

In the village culture of Palestine, weddings were important events, announced well in advance and recognized by the whole village. In some villages they would be the most important celebration of the year. The ceremony would last at least three days and could last as long as a week. Running out of food or wine would bring public shame to the couple and their families. Since most people remained in the same area for life, this embarrassment would have been life-long. This was a 'shame' culture, and the responsibility for full financial provision was the groom's. It's possible that failure on this point would have made him vulnerable to a lawsuit from the family of the aggrieved bride.

### **v1,2**

Jesus' mother and his disciples being there imply that she (at least) knew the couple or their family.

### **v3**

Mary makes Jesus' aware that they have run out of wine. We don't know what her expectation was. Was it just that Jesus has proven resourceful in the past, and had been her mainstay since (the presumed) Joseph's death? Had she heard stories from the disciples about his "supernatural" viewing of Nathaniel? Or was it that her own miraculous conception, the prophecies given to her by Simeon and Anna, and the behavior of Jesus growing up (especially at the temple), suggested to her, quite rightly, that he was where she should go in times of trouble?

### **v4**

"Woman, why do you involve me?" The word "woman" used here *gynai*, sounds harsh but it is merely a formal term. Jesus used the same word for the woman of Samaria (4:21) the woman caught in adultery (8:10), his mother at the cross (19:26) and Mary Magdalene at the tomb. He claims that his time "hour" has not yet come.

Commentators are divided on the significance of his “distancing” language. Is Jesus trying to demonstrate that he will not be moved (manipulated?) by any human’s wishes, even his mother, but he must only do what he perceives to be his Father’s will?

Is it that he wishes to keep his messianic identity secret for longer, and that such an action risks exposing him before he is ready to assume that mantle?

#### **v5**

Mary’s response shows that she does not feel too rebuked. She still assumes that Jesus will help her, and instructs the servants to do whatever he tells them. The bottom line is that in a crisis, she has learned to trust Jesus – a model for us all.

#### **v6,7**

Jesus is aware of the six stone water jars. That they are made of stone implies that their usage was for ceremonial washing. Stone holds bacteria less than clay, and was preferred for ceremonial cleansing purposes. Additionally, clay jars could become ritually contaminated and would have to be destroyed, but stone jars, according to rabbinic law, could not. The servants, as instructed, fill them to the brim with water. Each of these jars has a capacity of over 20 gallons. Jesus’ miracle is going to produce over 120 gallons of top-class wine. If we assume five bottles of wine per gallon, this is a total of around 600 bottles of wine. If we also assume a relatively expensive bottle of wine costs \$100, this is a \$60,000 miracle.

#### **v8-10**

The wine is presented to the person in charge of the banquet, who pronounces it superior.

#### **v11**

John offers a commentary on the event, saying that this was the first of the signs (*semeion*) Jesus did which revealed his glory, and the disciples believed in him. Literally, “believed into him” which aligns with “put their trust in.” They had already believed in Jesus and were following him, but perhaps this indicates the believing in Jesus, entrusting ourselves to him, is a living, repeated, daily movement.

John does not use the typical Synoptic word for miracle (*dynamis*) – which often underscores the power of the miracle and that it was received with awe. (e.g. Mark 6:2). Rather, for John they are signs, something revelatory, disclosing something from God, something hidden before. John remarks that through this sign, he reveals his glory. This is a central affirmation for John and the center of what he affirms about Jesus: Jesus is not

merely a man; he is more, he conveys the presence of God in the world (1:14), and since he radiates the presence of God, he appropriately shows forth God's glory.

### **Messianic Overtones**

Dodd believes that the stone water jars "stand for the entire system of Jewish ceremonial observance – and by implication for religion upon that level, wherever it is found, as distinguished from religion upon the level of *alēthia* [truth]... Thus the first of Jesus' signs already symbolizes the doctrine that the law was given through Moses: (deep) Grace and (deep) Truth came through Jesus Christ."

*This incident illustrates at once the poverty of the old dispensation with its merely ceremonial cleaning and the richness of the new, in which the blood of Christ is available both for cleansing (1:29) and for drink 6:53).*

Barrett, *John*, 1928

Several prophetic texts promised abundance of wine and other good things at the coming of the Day of the Lord.

<sup>13</sup> "The days are coming," declares the LORD,

"when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman  
and the planter by the one treading grapes.  
New wine will drip from the mountains  
and flow from all the hills,

(Amos 9:13)

See also Isa 25:6; Jer 31:12, Hos 14:7

Wine in abundance along with oil and milk is a sign of the age of salvation; in the ancient blessing of Jacob, it is characteristic of the Messiah from Judah (Gen 49:11f.)

The wedding feast is also highly symbolic of the coming of the Messiah (Matthew 22, Matthew 25 etc.)

Either the choice of creating "new wine" at a "wedding feast" for this first "sign" in John is highly coincidental, or it hints at the identity and future activity of the sign worker, the inauguration of a new age, a new way of relating to God.