



## WEDDING WINE

Catalog No. 1343  
 John 2:1-11  
 Fifth Message  
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 October 19th, 2003

The Hanneman family celebrated a major event in March when my oldest daughter, Sara, got married. As the wedding day approached, amidst all the planning and anticipation we experienced excitement, tension, a few heated discussions, and some mind-boggling financial considerations. My wife was consumed morning, noon and night with making the smallest details special. Our home became chaotic and cluttered. At last, people started to arrive from out of town, and the events of the weekend were upon us. The hectic preparations gave way to enjoyment. We gathered with friends and met the groom's family. The rehearsal and dinner afterwards were meaningful and delightful. By the time I walked my daughter down the aisle, the only thing I felt was complete and utter joy. The party that followed was filled with laughter, merriment and dancing. I watched the festivities with gladness. At one point during the reception, I glanced across the room at my wife, and our eyes met. We gazed at one another and smiled. The day couldn't have been more special. It was a highlight in my life. I only wish I could have bottled the precious joy I felt.

What is it that is so special about weddings? I think it has to do with God. God loves marriage because of the commonality between the mystery of marriage and the mystery of our relationship with him. We enter into both relationships through a covenant. The goal of both is oneness, and the highest emotion we experience in both relationships is love. When two people say their vows to one another, married couples in the crowd remember their own vows and once again commit their hearts to each other. No one knows what the new couple will encounter in the years to come. Certainly the road will not be easy. There will be times of sorrow as well as joy. But on the wedding day, God's Spirit hovers over the festivities like it did at creation. We feel wonder, mystery, hope—God himself. It's no coincidence that the first of Jesus' signs took place at a wedding.

In our studies in the gospel of John we have come to the familiar story of the wedding at Cana. This account, in 2:1-11, is a hinge story. It is both a conclusion and an introduction. It concludes the new creation week that began in 1:19, and at the same time it introduces a section, which concludes with the end of chapter 4, which is bounded by references to Cana and signs. There is a thematic wholeness in this section as the new replaces the old: new wine, new temple, new birth, new living water, new worship. This first sign of Jesus also intro-

duces us to the "book of signs," which records the public ministry of Jesus that extends through chapter 12.

The wedding at Cana then introduces the concept of signs. John's story records seven of them which illustrate the great themes of the gospel. The other gospels have counterpoints to each sign, but none for this first one. John could have recounted many others, but these seven are given so that we might "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (20:31).

First, a comment about signs. The word is peculiar to John. The other gospel writers use the word miracle (mighty deed). Another word that is used in this connection is wonders, which is always linked with sign, but only once in John (4:48). Signs are significant displays of power that point beyond themselves to the deeper realities that can only be perceived with the eyes of faith. "These happenings are 'effective signs.' They effect what they signify, and they signify what they effect—namely, the present reality of the gracious rule of God...Of the two sides of the single reality—effectiveness and signification—the synoptic Gospels emphasize the first, and John the second, though neither to the exclusion of the other."<sup>1</sup>

The Synoptic Gospels point to the manifestation of effective power. John points to what they signify, the coming of the kingdom of God. But they are also part of the coming of the kingdom of God. Some commentators attempt to allegorize or spiritualize the signs in John. But the fact that the signs contain rich theological themes and many Old Testament allusions has no bearing on their value as history. The seven signs in John consist of concrete, real things—water, wine, hunger and bread, blindness and sight, being dead and being alive. These things really happened! Jesus is the Word become flesh, the living Word of God in action. So the signs are material, but they signify deeply spiritual things. Miracles and signs play a large role in all the gospels. More than half of Mark's gospel consists of accounts of Jesus' miracles. Miracles are not an end in themselves, but we have to ask whether we have overspiritualized these events. Have we diminished and limited God? Is God the Creator and Lord of all things? Do we live in anticipation that he can break into history at any moment, perhaps at every moment, and work miracles?

Let us come now to our text.

**On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. (John 2:1-2 NASB)**

The third day is perhaps a reference to the resurrection of Jesus on the third day, the day the new age began, represented here by the wine. But more likely it is speaking of the new creation week already referred to in the prologue, climaxing in the miraculous transformation of water into wine. We can't say for certain how this week unfolded, but the following might be helpful:

- Day 1 – delegation sent to John and he bears witness.
- Day 2 – John announces the Lamb of God; two disciples follow Jesus.
- Day 3 – the two disciples stay with Jesus that day.
- Day 4 – Jesus meets Simon Peter, Andrew's brother.
- Day 5 – Jesus meets Philip and Nathaniel.
- Day 7 – wedding is on the third day – two days later.

The fact that the wedding is on the seventh day introduces the theme of God's redemptive work on the Sabbath, in chapters 5, 7 and 9. It also anticipates the marriage of the lamb as portrayed in Revelation.

The village of Cana, just down the road from Nazareth, about nine miles away, mentioned in verses 1 and 11, frames the story. Nathanael came from this village (21:2). Cana was not an upscale place, and yet this is where Jesus first reveals his glory.

God does some of his best work in out of the way places, "far from the madding crowd." We often forget this. We turn the church into a club and lose sight of where God wants to work. Our environment is too polished. We have too many conveniences. The church at times creates a well-rehearsed production to play on center-stage. This is why we must visit Third World countries to see the glory of God. He doesn't want his glory to become a spectator show.

In those days, wedding ceremonies were held in the home of the bride. The celebration following at the home of the bridegroom could last as long as a week. The financial burden for the wedding and the party lay with the groom. Running out of supplies during the party would be a dreadful embarrassment to the couple in first century Israel. Failure to show adequate hospitality would have brought great shame. The groom could even be sued by the bride's relatives.

The fact that Jesus, his mother and his disciples attended the wedding may indicate that the ceremony involved a relative or close family friend. Mary may even have had some responsibility for the organization of the festivities. The disciples present probably included Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, Nathanael, and an unnamed disciple, perhaps John. The twelve are mentioned in 6:67, but there is no information as to how the first group expanded. In a small village like Cana, the entire town probably was in attendance.

Wedding celebrations are celebrated differently in different parts of the world. On one of our trips to the Yucatan, we arrived at a small village late at night to find a wedding reception going on just down the street from where we were staying. We hardly got any sleep because the music and festivities lasted throughout the night. This was the kind of atmosphere that prevailed in Cana that day.

**When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." (2:3-5)**

We can assume that Mary was alone. (There is no further mention of Joseph following the episode in the temple when Jesus was 12 years old.) Therefore, Mary would have depended on Jesus, who was not only a carpenter's son (Matt 13:55) but a carpenter himself (Mark 6:3). Her words to Jesus and her instructions to the servants indicate that she expected something from him. Jesus' way of addressing his mother, "Woman," is not considered an endearing term, but that is how he will speak to her from the cross (19:26). So perhaps it is not as harsh or abrupt as we might think. It may be that he was addressing her in the same way a woman is addressed in the South, as "Ma'am."

Jesus' question to her, "What have you to do with me," is saying, "What do you and I have in common so far as the matter at hand is concerned?" This measured rebuke may signify that Jesus feels completely free from any human advice, even his mother's, so that he might do the will of the Father. This was probably hard for Mary, but she must come to Jesus in the same way as everyone else.

Jesus tells her that his "hour has not yet come." This phrase in John's gospel always refers to his death on the cross and the exaltation bound up with that (7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). It introduces a theme that will be developed later, whetting the reader's curiosity as to what is the hour and when will it come. The thoughtful reader will discover that Jesus' hour will not come until the arrival of the Gentiles, in chapter 12. After that the hour is said to have arrived (13:1; 17:1).

Mary's response is striking. She shakes off the rebuke and responds with belief. She is like the Canaanite woman in Matthew's gospel who was rebuked for her presumptuous approach, but who persevered and was praised for her faith (Matt 15:21-28). Mary points out a physical need, but Jesus replies on a much deeper level. Her words introduce a pattern where people who encounter Jesus operate at a purely human, natural level, while he himself transcends their questions, demands and expectations (3:3-4; 4:15, 47; 5:6-7; 6:32-33, 41; 11:22-24). This first sign also introduces a pattern where Jesus initially refuses a request, and then proceeds to help in his own way (4:47-50; 11:22-44; Mark 7:24-30).

**Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each. Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." So they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it to him. When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom, and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now." (2:6-10)**

The six waterpots were for the purposes of purification. Made of stone, they were more impervious than earthenware. They did not contract uncleanness, which made them suitable for ceremonial washing. Their total volume was somewhere between 100 and 150 gallons.

And Jesus turned the water into wine! Make no mistake, this was real wine, and it was the best wine. The headwaiter was appalled, since it was far superior to that which was served first. No one keeps the best wine for last.

What is the significance of the sign? Not that we should get drunk, certainly, or invest in expensive wine. Nor does it mean that God loves good wine. That may be true, but it's not the point. The water represents the old order of Jewish law and custom. The number six, one less than seven, may be a reference to incompleteness. In the O.T., the messianic age was foretold by the prophets as a time when wine would flow liberally (Isa 55:1; 62:8-9; Jer 31:12; Hos 14:7; Amos 9:13-14). Wine is also a symbol of joy. There is the "wine which makes man's heart glad" (Ps 104:15). A wedding was a symbol for the consummation of the messianic age, an accepted symbol of the joy of God's reign (Isa 54:4-8; 62:4-5; Matt 22:1-14; 25:1-13).

The sign points to the fact that the messianic age had begun. In chapter 3, John the Baptist will point to Jesus as the messianic bridegroom who will supply all the wine needed for the messianic banquet. The hour is not yet fully here, but it has begun. Jesus replaces the law with the Spirit, who is far superior. The water removes uncleanness, but does not give the fullness of joy. The waterpots being filled to the brim may mean that the time for ceremonial purification was completely fulfilled. What the water cannot supply, Jesus gives in superabundance. The sheer quantity of water turned into wine becomes symbolic of the lavish provision of the new age. And this wine is superior, just as the new age is superior. This is the first sign or primary sign, and thus points the way to a new order. This is now the beginning of the greater things that Jesus had promised Nathanael.

The messianic age has begun, the wedding celebration has started, the hour is here. But we can't have the

joy of the wedding without the wine of the Spirit. We cannot have life in the new age by hanging onto the old order that has been replaced. Keeping Torah, living under the law, can never get us to the seventh day. The first wine at the wedding ran out; it failed. So too will dependence on rules and self-effort. And yet this is what we do. We work hard at doing all the right things. We live by the rules in order to avoid sin and temptation. We take classes and work on improving our lives. We think that if we work hard enough and long enough we will have the wedding joy. But we won't. Even the natural joys of life, the things we look to for fulfillment, will fail and come to an end. By themselves, without the Spirit, they will not give us joy in all its fullness.

The sign is telling us to enter the new age and drink from the Spirit. Jesus wants to give us something so much better than what we have. He wants to replace the water of law and self-effort with the wine of the Spirit. This is the wine that will give us joy and life. And he doesn't give us just one bottle. He gives us gallons upon gallons. He wants us to experience the joy of the wedding, to enter into a marriage relationship with him that is all about freedom and trust and joy instead of rules and guilt and shame. We are always looking for something that will give us joy. But the life and joy that Jesus lavishes upon us is not tied to our circumstances or our efforts. Even in the midst of suffering we can experience life and joy in the presence of God. The joy of the wine of the Spirit lies in the fact that the blood of the new covenant has been poured out for the life of the world.

How does this joy become a reality for us?

**This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him. (2:11)**

Jesus revealed his glory, "glory as of the only begotten from the Father" (John 1:14) And the result was that the disciples believed in him. The servants saw the sign, but not its glory. The disciples by faith perceived Jesus' glory behind the sign. This does not always happen. In this gospel we see that even the greatest of Jesus' miracles may lead to total rejection or an enthusiasm that fails to grasp the meaning of the sign. Jesus wants us to see his glory. He wants us to enter into his presence, which is the place where heaven and earth meet. He wants us to see the heavens opened. But in order to see we must first believe. We have to let go of the old in order to enter into the new age by faith.

We all want wedding joy, and it is available, but oftentimes that is not our experience. We sit in silence feeling empty and lonely. Things are just not turning out right. Life is too hard. We want to give up. What is the point? we say. We are consumed with the fact that our lives have failed. Our strength and energy have run out. All of our hopes and dreams have washed away, and we live in that failure. If we understand John's story, then something is terribly wrong. Our lack of joy is

an indication that we are living under the old order, not in the joy of the wine of the Spirit.

Jesus tells us to drink of the Spirit and enter into the joy of the wedding, the life of the messianic banquet. But in order to enter, in order to see, we have to believe, and believing demands that we let go of the old categories: that we stop trying to make life work the way we want; that we take off the heavy weight of law and self-effort. We have failed, but God has not. He has entered

into history. He went to a wedding at Cana and transformed water into wine. He enters into our lives and transforms our failures into joy. If we believe, then we will see his glory. We drink the new wine of his Spirit, and we enter into the joy of the wedding.

1. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 25.

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