

Jesus visits Galilee – The Wedding at Cana - John 2:1-12

Background and Context

This account in John's gospel closely follows Jesus' first meeting with Andrew and an unnamed disciple who is almost certainly John himself, then with Simon (Simon Peter), then with Philip and Nathanael, all of whom had been John the Baptist's disciples.

Intrigued by JtB's comments 'Look, the Lamb of God', Andrew and John had spent a day with Jesus and, based on what JtB had said and from spending time with him, were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, probably based on the sense of purpose and authority they would have picked up from him, although their concept of Messiah would have been a largely political one.

Simon was then the recipient of a prophetic word from Jesus about his name being changed to Peter to reflect the change which would take place in his character. Philip was also sure that Jesus was the one from God who'd been prophesied about, and Nathanael was then also convinced that Jesus was the Messiah from God when Jesus told him a word of knowledge about having seen him under a fig tree.

Commentary on John 2:1-11

v1-2 - The wedding at **Cana** then took place after soon after this, apparently just three days later. Cana was to the west of the sea of Galilee, exact location unknown, probably a few miles north(east) of Nazareth and on higher ground than Capernaum [ref v12], probably in hill country.

As Jesus' mother **Mary** was also there, it is likely that this would have been the wedding of a family relative.

Some of **Jesus' new disciples** (perhaps the 5 mentioned above) had also then been invited. Cana was apparently Nathanael's home town [John 21:2] so he may even have had his own invitation along with others from the village community, and the open hospitality of the culture probably made it a natural response to invite the other disciples.

A **Jewish wedding** would have been a significant occasion in a small town such as Cana and it was likely that the celebrations would have gone on for several days, possible involving the whole community. It would have been as much a religious occasion as a social one.

In Bible times, a period of engagement (or betrothal) was spent in preparation prior to a wedding, the groom preparing a home for his bride and the bride preparing herself and getting her wedding clothes together. When the time came for the marriage to take place, the groom would go to the bride's home with his party in a gala procession through the streets to fetch the bride and her party and then take her back to his home where the friends of the two families would gather for the celebrations. It appears from the story in Matt 25 of the wise and foolish maidens that this would be a lamp-lit procession after dark and that the precise time was kept a secret from the bride. During the wedding celebrations, the bride and groom would have been given pride of place amidst the festivities, probably with music and dancing and the presentation of gifts and plenty to eat and drink.

v3 – The **wine running out** would have been a **major social embarrassment**, but more than that, it would have been something of a necessity on the basis that people either drank water or wine, and wine was safer to drink due to the alcohol content, so there was an obligation for the family to provide sufficient wine, not just as it was part of the celebrations but because it would have been the normal thing to drink and therefore an important part of the hospitality and essential to the wellbeing of all there and to the success of the occasion. Without wine, the celebrations would grind to a halt and the wedding would effectively be over.

Mary informs Jesus of the situation not just to say 'we might as well all go home now' but clearly looking to Jesus to initiate some kind of action and apparently suggesting 'now's the time to reveal your power as the 'Son of the most high' [Luke 1:32].

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Even if the problem was as a result of poor planning, Jesus couldn't ignore the difficulty caused and the distress and discomfort of those involved, and he would have wanted to respond from a heart of compassion, but felt a **restraint** on him .

- v4 – ‘ Why do you involve me’ ...‘My time has not yet come’ – Jesus must have known that there was no earthly solution, but also knew that **he had to await the guidance of his Father God** before initiating anything supernatural [Jn 5:19 - *“I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing.”* & John 6:38 *‘I have come ... to do the will of him who sent me’*]
 – His disciples had already gathered that he was a very special person apparently sent from God, although we can see from later accounts that they hadn't grasped what this really meant. Jesus had up to that point had felt no freedom to begin to reveal his true identity as being any more than that. Jesus also would have been aware that, as soon as he did reveal himself as having the very nature and power of God, that ‘a clock would start ticking’ that would ultimately lead to the cross. If he acted, it would mean that **his time had come** and life would change irrevocably.
 He therefore needed to be absolutely sure that God's time had come for him and wouldn't have stepped out and initiated the miracle if he hadn't sensed the Father's approval and will for him to act. John mentions several times through his gospel about Jesus referring to ‘his time’ having come or not come. Jesus had a keen awareness of moving towards the **destiny** he had come into the world for – to reveal God's glory through him and to then become the sacrifice by which our sins could be forgiven on the cross.
- v5 – **Mary had faith** that this urgent need had to be met and that Jesus would act accordingly and do whatever was right in the situation. We don't know whether she had some kind of earthly action in mind but she clearly had an implicit trust that this special son of hers could and would do something to rescue the situation.
- v6 – The six stone jars, apparently empty, probably because the water in them would have been used for ceremonial washing both of hands and cups and utensils prior to starting the celebration supper.
- v7 - Jesus appears to have had a change of heart, being apparently **freed from the restraint** he showed in v4. As we've seen, Jesus nature meant that he would have had considerable compassion for the bridal party in the midst of this imminent social disaster as well as a desire to respond to his mother's request.
 In a short period of time, maybe only a couple of minutes, he must have gained some sense of **permission from his Father God to intervene**. Seeing the large stone jars he instructs the servants to get them filled with water, probably from the village well.
- v8 - Once the servants return, Jesus instructs them to draw a sample of the water out and take it to the master of ceremonies.
- v9 - With his responsibilities, the master of ceremonies would have had to stay sober and retain a discerning palate so he could supervise the serving of all the wedding food and wine and no doubt check the wine before it was served. On tasting this new sample brought to him he recognised it as the finest wine (‘Mmm ... very good in a fact it's the best wine we've had. What's going on!’)
- v10 - Not knowing where this wine had come from he immediately marches off to find the bridegroom, partly to express amazement at the quality of this new wine, but probably also to get some kind of explanation from him as to how the wine stocks had got mixed up, saying as he does, that usual practice would be to have the choice wine first, followed by the cheaper wine when the guests' discernment would have been affected by what they'd already drunk.
- v11 - ‘The first of his miraculous signs’ - Hardly anyone knew what had happened. The party would have got back into gear with all the guests oblivious as to where the new supply of wine had come from and a great time would have been had by all. Just a few people knew – the servants who perhaps

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never got to taste the wine – and the disciples along with Jesus' mother who would have tasted it and been amazed.

This clearly had a profound effect on them and John records the miraculous nature of the event along with the realisation by himself and his fellow disciples that this Jesus was no ordinary man but that they had seen a glimpse of God's glory in Jesus through what he had done, stirring them to faith that he really was the Messiah, although still with limited realisation as to what that really meant.

Application

Let's just go back through this story and pull out some things we can apply in our own lives.

- v2 - Jesus enjoyed being with people and socialising. He wasn't some kind of austere, ascetic monk figure. Jesus later acknowledged that some were directing accusations towards him of being a glutton and a drunkard [Matt 11:19]

Approaching problems in faith

- v3 - If we find ourselves in the middle of a problem, however unspiritual it may seem and even if it is arguably someone else's problem, like Mary, we need to not hesitate in turning to Jesus for a solution. She turned to him with confidence because she recognised the power of the Holy Spirit upon him following his baptism.

He who has now poured out the Holy Spirit (as we see in Acts 2) has made the power of the Holy Spirit available to all who look to him. We need to **turn to Jesus with all our problems**, however mundane, in faith and confidence that he will turn a problem into something remarkable that will cause our faith in him to grow.

We can turn to Jesus in prayer to intervene directly for us, but we can also turn to church, the family of his people that he's made us part of who represent him as the 'body of Christ' (as the NT describes the church). If you have a problem that you can't see a way through, turn to those of your brothers and sisters in Christ in whom you recognise that the Holy Spirit is at work and allow God to bring a solution through them.

Jesus is so willing to come into ordinary human problems and to transform them. He is in the business of transformation – we often call it conversion.

- v5 - 'Do whatever he tells you' - Having identified a problem and brought it to Jesus, it is important that we **put ourselves into a position of obedience**, ready to respond to whatever he may say, either as a direct answer to prayer or as guidance through others we trust. The obedience that comes from faith [Rom 1:5]. We need to be **ready to play our part**, like the servants did, to allow Jesus to act.

Being available for God to work through us

- v4, 7,8 - We may become aware of a need and want to respond to it but realise that only God can meet it. We may well initially feel 'I can't get involved here', but then sense God's prompting/permission to step out and initiate something after all.

God loves to work in unexpected ways (it seems that even Jesus didn't expect this situation). Be open to his prompting to step out and see unexpected things happen.

We need to have 'spiritual antennae' to sense what God wants to do through us and be ready to allow him to act through us [John 14:12-14 ¹² I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.]. What an exciting prospect – (possibly scary too, like a free-fall parachute jump – from abject fear to 'the most amazing experience I've ever had') – but we need to be prepared to step out, to say to God 'I want to be ready for you to use me in faith as you choose'.

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v4 'My time has not yet come' – Sometimes we can feel that we want to move in the Spirit but need to wait for the Lord to open up the opportunity. In family events and social situations, listen out for the prompting and permission of the Holy Spirit to move in the spiritual/ supernatural arena. He will reveal if the time is right.

Prayerfully anticipate times of social interaction and look to God for awareness of what Father wants to do. Make yourself available to him.

If a situation presents itself but you don't feel ready, ask the Holy Spirit for his guidance to act. Be available for God to use, even if it doesn't initially seem as though you should get involved.

v6 – Jesus meets real needs and religious ritual was not his priority. The paraphernalia of religious observance were transformed into a demonstration of the power of God. The time for ritual cleansing had passed; the time for celebration that God is with us has begun.

Expecting the miraculous

v11 - 'The first of his miraculous signs' – John always referred to Jesus' miracles as signs, emphasising their significance rather than the amazing event of itself. His aim in reporting these things is so that his readers will grasp the glory of Jesus as the Son of God and believe in him as the giver of eternal life.

Philip Yancey – 'a sign is not the same thing as proof; a sign is a marker to guide someone who is already heading in the right direction'.

Philip Yancey – 'Prayer, I have found, does not work like a vending machine; input request, receive answer. Miracles are just that, miracles, not 'ordinaries' common to daily experience.' Miracles are to reveal his glory in a way that will build faith in us and a conviction the Jesus truly is God in human form

Being a sign for others

Let's allow our lives to be a sign for others, even if we feel ordinary. Paul talked of us having spiritual treasure in clay jars [2 Corinthians 4:7 (NIV) ⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us].

In the same way as the water in the stone jars was drawn out, God can draw his Spirit out from us who often feel ordinary and make it into the finest wine for whoever he wants to receive it.

You will see ordinary blessings become extraordinary – like the very best wine. Mundane, family situations can become the best they can be. You will see God's glory revealed, enabling you to believe yet more strongly in him and to put your faith in Jesus more than you have ever done before.