

C. Galilee (2:1-12)

1. The first section of John's record focuses on Jesus' self-presentation to Israel. This began at the Jordan River with John the Baptist and then expanded to include the first disciples. From there Jesus began to make Himself known throughout the Galilee region – not merely as a natural consequence of living in that area, but as a matter of prophetic fulfillment (cf. Matthew 4:12-17 with Mark 1:14-15 and Luke 4:14-15). For his part, John began his account of Jesus' Galilee ministry with a particular incident in the town of Cana. The text suggests that this incident came shortly after Jesus' wilderness testing at the very beginning of His public ministry, but chronology wasn't John's reason for starting here; he began with this incident because it was the first of Jesus' *signs* – the miraculous works which were a critical component of His messianic credential (2:11).

This sign occurred as part of a wedding celebration which John introduced as occurring on the *third day* (2:1). The context indicates that this was the third day after Jesus met with Philip and Nathanael. John recounted that Jesus had determined to depart from the Jordan and travel into Galilee (1:43), and that journey evidently took Him and His new disciples toward the town of Cana. Interestingly, John alone mentions this town among the biblical writers (ref. also 4:46, 21:2) and scholars continue to debate its location. Some associate it with present day Cana (Kafr Kanna); others locate it elsewhere. What is clear is that it was a town in Galilee. If it does indeed correspond to present day Cana, then it lay about four miles northeast of Nazareth and about eight miles from the Jordan River at the point where it originates at the south end of the Sea of Galilee. The uncertain locations of both Cana and "Bethany beyond the Jordan" (1:28) makes it impossible to know how far Jesus and His disciples traveled to get to the wedding, but the three-day interval indicates that the two places were not very distant from one another.

- a. Jesus and His disciples travelled to Cana specifically because they were invited guests of the wedding party (2:2). Some scholars have questioned John's account because it seems implausible that a wedding invitation could come to Jesus and include four men whom He had just met a couple of days earlier, but there are reasonable explanations for what transpired. For his part, John felt no need to explain. He did, however, state that Jesus' mother Mary was also present at the wedding, suggesting that it may have involved extended family or close personal friends. But all questions regarding the wedding and the matters surrounding it must be left unanswered since John provided no details. Obviously these things were of no concern to him and so it must be with his readers; the wedding merely provided the occasion for Jesus' first sign and this was John's sole reason for including it in his account (ref. again his summary statement in verse 11).
- b. The particular circumstance which provoked the miracle was the supply of wine being exhausted. In that day, Jewish weddings were long celebrations often lasting more than a week and the hosts were expected to provide food and drink for their guests for the duration of the festivities. John didn't say how far into the celebration the wine ran out, but regardless, it would have been a huge embarrassment and deeply humiliating for the host family.

Because Mary was aware of the predicament, some have speculated that she was assisting the wedding hosts rather than merely attending as a guest. This is certainly possible, but this, too, is irrelevant to the account and John's reason for recording it. However it was that Mary found out about the wine situation, what matters is that she brought it to the attention of her Son (2:3).

2. Mary approached Jesus with the dilemma and there are several possible reasons for this. One is that she was simply informing Him of the situation. If she, like Him, was a wedding guest, it wouldn't be appropriate for her to go to the head steward. But it would be perfectly natural for her to mention the matter to her Son. On the other hand, if Mary was indeed assisting the host family, one would expect her to tell the head steward about the wine rather than Jesus. But, whatever her role in the wedding, the context clearly suggests that Mary was hoping Jesus would do something about the situation.

Not unlike her countrymen, Mary would have had misconceptions about her Son's messianic calling, but she knew far more about Him than anyone else. She knew of Jesus' miraculous conception and the events that surrounded His birth (Luke 1:26-38, 2:1-35). She also raised Him and witnessed His unique progress into manhood as He "grew in wisdom and stature and favor with God and men" (Luke 2:41-52). Though Mary had not yet witnessed a miraculous work by Jesus' hand (John indicated that none had yet been performed), it seems she was completely confident that her Son was able to resolve the problem she brought to Him.

- a. Jesus' response to Mary shows that He perceived her to be seeking some sort of remedy from Him: "*Woman, what do I have to do with you? My hour has not yet come*" (2:4). Taken at face value, this reply seems strange and even troubling for a couple of different reasons. First, it seems disrespectful for Jesus to use the impersonal label "woman" to refer to His own mother. That impression is only heightened by the question He attached to it: "What do I have to do with you?" These issues call for some consideration and clarification.

First of all, Jesus clearly meant no disrespect in addressing Mary this way. The contemporary connotation of *woman* as a derogatory and demeaning way of speaking to a female didn't exist in first-century Israel; it was a conventional, polite way of addressing female persons, whether married or unmarried. With respect to married women, it was roughly synonymous with *wife* (Matthew 1:20, 24, 5:31); with unmarried women, it was equivalent to the present-day term *lady* (cf. John 19:26 with 4:21, 8:10, 20:15; also Matthew 15:28; Luke 13:12).

At the same time, Jesus' use of this term in speaking to His *mother* hints at an important dynamic of His relationship with His family – a relational dynamic that is to also characterize Jesus' followers. And that is that Jesus' relationship with His human relatives was defined and ordered by His relationship with His heavenly Father: *Jesus loved and served His mother (and other family members), but as one aspect of – and subject to the demands of – His determinative love for the Father who sent Him* (cf. Luke 2:41-52 with Matthew 10:32-39, 12:46-50).

This familial dynamic provides important insight into Jesus' question, "*What do I have to do with you?*" (Literally, the expression is "What to me and to you?") This was a common Jewish expression used in situations of offense or conflict (Judges 11:12; 1 Kings 17:18) or circumstances pertaining to one's involvement in certain matters or affairs (2 Kings 3:13; Hosea 14:8). What appears to the modern reader to be a haughty and snide remark was actually nothing of the sort. Jesus recognized that His mother wanted Him to resolve the problem of the wine shortage; His response reflected His conviction – a conviction He'd come to while still a youth (ref. again Luke 2:41-50) – that His life in all of its particulars was directed by the priorities, demands and goals of His mission. *He'd come to do His Father's will and would not speak or act in any way that misrepresented, undermined, distracted or deviated from His calling.*

This interpretation is reinforced by His subsequent explanation: "*My hour has not yet come.*" Jesus viewed His mother's request through the lens of His own mission and the precise way in which His work was to proceed. He recognized a critical timing in the process of His self-revelation to Israel and, to this point, He'd not performed any miraculous signs. Jesus understood that His signs were to serve a revelatory and authenticating purpose (as the term implies, a *sign* illumines and points to something beyond itself), and that meant that they could not be random or arbitrary; they needed to occur purposefully and within an appropriate and timely context for them to communicate their intended meaning. So also, Jesus knew the effect such miraculous works would have on the Israelite people, creating a frenzy of messianic excitement on the one hand and fierce opposition on the other (cf. 2:23, 3:2, 6:1-66, 7:1-32, 9:1-41, 11:1-53, etc.). And once the furor began, it would not be contained; it would propel things forward until they came to their ordained climax at Calvary. Like everything else in His life, Jesus' miraculous works served the cause of His mission; they, too, needed to be subject to wisdom and timing or they would fail in their purpose.

- b. Jesus' reply expressed His insistence that His mother understand these things. She knew He had come into the world with a divine calling; she needed to recognize that *everything* in His life was bound over to this work and its ultimate goal. Mary's response indicates that she got the message: She would not direct Him in what He should do; rather, she would yield to His judgment. Thus she directed the servants to do whatever He told them to do (2:5).
3. John provided no explanation for the seeming disparity between Jesus' statement ("My time has not yet come") and His decision to perform this sign. Not surprisingly, some have ascribed duplicity to Jesus; others find in Him a heart of compassion that moved Him to meet this need in spite of other concerns. Still others want to argue that, during the few moments of Jesus' conversation with His mother, His "time" – which He insisted had not yet come – somehow arrived, allowing Him to work this miracle. The best answer is that Jesus believed this sign did not violate the principle He'd articulated to Mary: The time hadn't yet come for His self-disclosure to Israel through public miracles, but He could perform this private sign as a service to the wedding party.

- a. Mary instructed the servants to follow Jesus' instructions and He directed them to fill the water pots standing nearby. The water in these vessels was used for purification (washing) and many have sought to find some symbolism in this. But it is likely that Jesus chose these vessels simply because they were available and large enough to hold the amount of wine that was required. John noted that each pot held 2-3 "measures" estimated to be 20-30 gallons and Jesus instructed the servants to fill them to the top with water (2:7). This may have been to maximize the quantity of wine, but it also precluded any later claims that this alleged miracle was a ruse in which wine was added to vessels partially filled with water.
 - b. After completing their task, Jesus directed the servants to draw a portion out of one of the pots and take it to the head steward. When he tasted the contents, he was startled – not only because he didn't know where the wine came from, but also because of its quality. Common sense (and so probably common practice) dictate that the best wine be served first when the guests' palates are fresh and their minds are completely clear. But here was choice wine being served after the other stores – inferior by comparison – were exhausted. The steward naturally concluded that the bridegroom and his family had made this decision and so He called the bridegroom to express to him his amazement (vv. 9-10).
4. John provided no further details; as it stood, his account served its purpose. His concern was the sign itself and the fact that it manifested Jesus' glory to His disciples and further informed and strengthened their faith in Him (2:11). John's summary illumines his reason for recording this episode *and his purpose must direct the reader's interpretation*. Many miss this principle, evident in this passage being used as a proof-text for such diverse matters as Christians' use of alcohol and Jesus' deity. But again, signs, by definition, point to something else; in the case of Jesus' signs, they pointed to who He is (messianic signs) and the nature and orientation of His work (kingdom signs).

Reading this passage through this lens yields profound insights that have nothing to do with alcohol use or Jesus' deity as such. This sign resulted in increased faith – and so increased understanding – on the part of Jesus' disciples. It manifested His glory to them by making more clear who He was (ref. 1:14) and the purpose for His coming. In a word, it added to His self-disclosure as Israel's Messiah: the One sent by Yahweh to end the exile and usher in His kingdom by conquest, liberation, renewal, enthronement and ingathering. Jesus was the Servant appointed to restore all things and the imagery of natural fruitfulness and profusion is fundamental to the Scripture's depiction of this. Yahweh's return to Zion and the establishment of His kingdom would mean *creational renewal* and wine (the fruit of the vine) is a primary symbol in the Scripture's representation of this (cf. Numbers 13:17-27 and Deuteronomy 11:1-14 with Isaiah 53:1-55:5; Jeremiah 31:1-12; Hosea 2:1-23; Joel 2:15-32; Amos 9:11-15; Zechariah 9:9-17).

The profusion of sweet wine was an image graven on the Jews' minds as they longed for the coming kingdom and the messianic age. So Jesus' disciples couldn't help but interpret this, His first sign, in this way. They discerned in this abundance of choice wine the truth that exile and desolation were at an end; Messiah had come and would renew all things.