

March 30, 2014
Community Baptist Church
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
643 South Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study John 2:1-12.

1. Why was Jesus' mother in charge?
2. Why did Jesus respond to His mother in what appears to be a rude manner (i.e. "what does this have to do with me?")?
3. What was the likely alcohol content range of the wine in Jesus' day?
4. What is the common alcohol content range of table wines today and what makes the difference compared to wine in Jesus' day?
5. List some questions any Christian ought to ask before drinking an alcoholic beverage.

THE FIRST MIRACLE **John 2:1-12**

The beginning of Jesus' verifying signs and wonders, His verifying teaching, was in Cana. It is a simple story. It is an important story as John began to prove why we ought to believe in Jesus. It is a story that opens a Pandora's box of other questions. What was Mary's role at the wedding? Why is Joseph not mentioned? Why did Jesus treat His mother harshly? Is Jesus' presence and work a picture of the authority of the Church in modern weddings? And of course what kind of wine did Jesus make?

The Setting (vv.1-5).

Chapter two of John's Gospel opens with the revelation that on the third day there was a wedding (v.1-2). That's interesting. What was the third day? Some would say it is a reference to the fact that Tuesday or Wednesday were the most popular days for weddings in that culture, making Tuesday the third day of the week. That is quite an interesting speculation but not provable. It seems more likely that the reference is to the third day after Jesus and the disciples left the Jordan River area. They would have traveled for two days and then, on the next day, gone to the wedding in Cana where Jesus' mother was.

Weddings were some of the most significant celebrations in the culture. Generally the celebration lasted for about a week. The actual marriage ceremony was a civil ceremony for which the bride and groom would dress like kings and queens. At the end of the day, the bridegroom would go to the bride's family's home and take the bride to his own home where the marriage was consummated. Then the feast would begin the next day and last for the better part of a week. All during this time, the bride and groom maintained their exalted dress and treatment. Instead of disappearing on a week-long honeymoon, the bride and groom entertained guests in their home for a week.

It was a big deal to be invited to a wedding. Jesus and the disciples were invited to this wedding according to verse two. *Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples.* It was in Cana which was probably located only a few miles from Nazareth.

At some point during the festivities, Mary told Jesus there was no wine (vv.3-5). *When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine" (v.3).* Why was wine the responsibility of the "mother of Jesus"? Maybe more concerning to us is why John referred to Mary as "the mother of Jesus" instead of using her name. It seems most reasonable that he introduced her with this rather cold title because the focus in the story is on Jesus. John wrote this account many years after the fact to encourage his readers to believe in Jesus – not in Mary. John also wrote in light of his culture – not ours. Typically, the first century man's place was in the public arena

and the woman's place was in the home. At the important wedding feast, these two realms merged.

It is in this setting that it appears that Mary was in charge of organizing the wedding feast, though a man was the "master of feast" (v.9). Some commentators go so far as to say she was in this position because the bridegroom was her nephew. They even speculate that the bridegroom was John the son of Salome and Zebedee. Yes, the writer of this Gospel! That makes for a great story, but it cannot be confirmed.

Acting in her responsibility, Mary discovered that the wine was gone and told Jesus. Why? Running out of wine was a serious matter that would cause embarrassment to the groom's family. It was possible that if the groom's family did not make sufficient provision, the bride's family could sue. Mary would have been in a very difficult situation since she was in charge, to some extent, and especially if the groom was her nephew. Jesus was her firstborn son, and she would naturally look to Him for leadership. Furthermore, Mary knew that Jesus was special, and, whether she expected a miracle or not, she would at least expect Him to exercise wisdom.

Why did Jesus respond rudely to Mary? *And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come" (v.4)*. His address "woman" is rude only through our western eyes. We don't address our mothers that way. In our culture, such an address would be cold and calloused. Are we not instructed to honor our parents? Would Jesus dishonor His mother? No! So what is the answer to the question? Jesus and John didn't live in America. John only mentioned Mary twice in his Gospel (here and at the cross) and both times she is addressed the same way, "Woman." Also in those two settings, John referred to her as "His (Jesus') mother." Did John have a problem with "Aunt Mary"? No. The address "woman" was a term of respect, though granted it did not convey warmth or intimacy.

In fact, the word is precise and purposeful because Jesus established a very important principle at this point. His response to his mother was quite literally, *what to me and to you*. It was actually quite a common response meaning, "What do we have in common in this matter?" That doesn't seem very nice. But it was necessary and important. Mary, knowing that Jesus was the Christ, might have been

pushing Him to do something to make His power public. Suddenly there was this wonderful opportunity for Jesus to show His power, and at the same time it would keep His family from embarrassment. What a coincidence! How perfect.

To that kind of thinking Jesus said, *"My hour has not yet come."* He referred to the fact that His hour of glorification would be the cross. The cross was His purpose for coming to earth. The time and circumstances of that glory was determined by God, not Mary. So Jesus' response was essentially this: "Ma'am you need to realize that how and when I am revealed and glorified is not up to you." Suddenly it is very obvious that Jesus was in control of His ministry, of doing the Father's calling. In this response, the Messiah had just stepped outside the boundary of all family influence.

Here is another question. Why did Mary seem to ignore Jesus' response? *His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (v.5)*. You have to love Mary. Jesus had just made it clear that she was not in charge. She responded by saying, "Okay." And then turning immediately to the *diakonoi* (gives us the English "deacons"), the people who were serving (but not slaves), "Do whatever He tells you." What made her think Jesus was going to tell them to do something? She knew that Jesus would take care of the problem.

The Miracle (vv.6-10).

The miracle is stated simply enough. Jesus made wine (v.6-8). He made a lot of wine. Here is how John recalled the event: *Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons (v.6)*. The stone water jars held pretty ordinary, common water. Except after the Pharisees' traditions were applied to it, it was no longer ordinary water. This was water the guests used to do the ceremonial washing of their hands. A lot of guests would mean a lot of washing which would require a lot of water. Not only that, but they used the water for washing all the dishes and utensils to also render them ceremonially clean. Did they use the water for washing feet? Maybe. It would take a lot of water.

There was a lot of water. The jars held 20-30 gallons of water each. There were six of them which meant that Jesus made 120-180

gallons of wine. Was it a really big party? Or was Jesus being generous so that the family would have a good bit left over? Or did this indicate that there would be a lot of drunk people over the next few days ?

What kind of wine did He make? If that question makes you think of words like savory red, sparkling rose, or dry white, you are guilty of filtering the Bible through your experience. The Greek word for wine in this case is the common word in the New Testament for wine. It is *oinos* which refers to the very common drink in the first century Middle East. Because there was no refrigeration, grape juice fermented rather quickly. The fermented grape juice could make a person drunk if he drank enough of it. Therefore, almost without exception the wine was diluted with water, one part wine with two parts water, or even to one part wine and nine parts water. This was the common practice in order to prevent drunkenness which would have been a blight to the culture. Such wine was the typical beverage especially at significant meals because the water was generally not palatable. Plus, wine in its general sense was often associated with feasting and celebration—which a wedding definitely was.

In the process of doing the miracle, Jesus gave specific instructions to the servants. *Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it (vv.7-8).* He commanded them to fill the jars so that it would be clear that nothing was added to the water. Then, without any hocus-pocus, or incantations, Jesus told the deacons to take the stuff to the guy who was in charge of the feast (probably another relative). The servants had to trust Jesus on this one because if His miracle had not been successful this could be really embarrassing. Jesus told them what to do because Jesus was in charge.

Jesus impressed the feast master (vv.9-10). The master of the feast responded according to what he tasted. *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) (v.9).* He did not know the source of this wine. All he knew is that it was quality stuff. Obviously he had all his senses about him. How much had he had to drink at this point? No one knows, but he was sober enough to pass exacting judgment.

The master of the feast commented based on his past experience. *The master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "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" (v.10).* Obviously, this wedding feast was no drinking party. However, it appears that this man knew that at some weddings the people got tipsy on the better wine early on in the party. Then once everyone's senses were lacking, the groom's family brought out the stuff from the clearance rack at Walmart. So the master of the feast commended the bridegroom for saving the good stuff until later. And probably the bridegroom wanted to respond like, "I don't have any idea what you are talking about."

The Aside (vv.11-12).

Many people believed because of the first miracle (v.11). That was the reason Jesus did the miracle. *This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him (v.11).* This was God the Son's first sign. Probably it was the first miracle overall, including all the signs and wonders Matthew, Mark, and Luke added to the record. Definitely this was the first of the nine miracles that John recorded. All of them were a manifestation of Christ's divine glory. All of them were intended to help people believe who He is.

Some of the most important words of the story are the fact that the disciples believed. That is not an aside but something of great significance. Had they not already confessed that they found Messiah? Yes. But, through three years of accompanying Jesus their understanding of Messiah would be shaped and clarified more accurately. We will watch them believe and doubt, believe and doubt, much like us as we grow spiritually.

The real aside is the statement that Jesus and family and friends went to Capernaum. *After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days (v.12).* Why did John write that little personal note? God inspired him to do so. God wanted us to know a little about this extended "family" of Jesus. Where was Joseph? Probably dead. Where were Jesus' sisters? Probably at home. But notice that the

handful of disciples (probably Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, and Bartholomew) were along with Jesus. They stayed in Capernaum a few days. Maybe it was a little family vacation in a condo on the shore of the lake. Certainly it was a chance for Jesus to be with the disciples before they went back to work. It does appear they probably went back to work a few days until Jesus called them to follow full time (Matthew 4, Mark 1).

The Application.

First, by way of application, let's review the principles of accurate Bible interpretation. We know from previous studies that there are necessary rules for us to follow. We must interpret Scripture grammatically. We have done that in this text. We must interpret Scripture contextually. That is easy when we preach one verse at a time through the whole book. We must interpret Scripture literally. We have tried to call it what it is. No hidden meanings or types or allegories. We must interpret Scripture according to genre. This section of John's gospel is definitely narrative, a story. And that is how we have interpreted it. We must interpret Scripture historically.

Okay, let's rest on that one for a minute. We do not always follow the rules when we interpret the Bible. In our modern age, we tend to ignore the historical interpretation of this story. We often try to fit Bible truth into our modern experiences rather than measuring our experiences against Bible truth.

In that vein, we must admit that we live in a culture that is infatuated with alcohol. Seventy-five years ago the use alcohol was considered questionable at best, dangerous at worst. Almost without exception, Christians in that generation avoided it like it was a vice. But after seventy-five years of Hollywood glorifying the drinking of alcohol, the entire culture has bought into it. Now statistics show that one third of all Americans who drink alcohol have a drinking problem. They show that 30%-40% of all Americans have had an unpleasant experience or have experienced trouble because of alcohol. We know that 200,000 deaths per year in America are directly attributable to alcohol. Drunken driving is responsible for 50% of automobile fatalities, unless you consider only the fatalities that occur late at night in which case the percentage goes to 75%.

Alcohol consumption is associated with 50% of all homicides and 25% of all suicides. The cost of alcohol consumption for the culture is estimated at \$150 billion per year. These statistics are not from the *Sword of the Lord*. They are from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

That is the historical context of **our situation**, not the historical context of **our text**. I talk about this issue at this point because this story is used by the unsaved and professing Christians alike to justify the use of alcohol even to the point of irresponsibility and abuse.

We need to draw some conclusions based on an accurate historical context of this story. To do that we need to briefly consider an overview of Bible words that are translated to speak of alcohol. That is the broader historical context. There are a handful of Hebrew words in the Old Testament that we translate as wine or strong drink. One is the word *kawh'-mar*. The word actually means to ferment or foam up. Along with this word are two other very similar words derived from this root which are translated "wine." The word appears fourteen times in the Old Testament. Sometimes it is used in reference to sacrifices and particularly in the description of Belshazzar's drunken sacrilege of the temple utensils—not a wholesome setting.

Another word is *yah'-yin*. This word is by far the most common word for "wine" in the Old Testament. It shows up 140 times. Six of the times the word is connected with joy and blessing. One hundred and thirty-four times it pretty much describes debauchery or has warning attached to it. Not very wholesome circumstances.

There are about six other Hebrew words translated wine, drink, drunk, and expressing other ideas related to strong drink. The vast majority of the references using those words carry a negative connotation either forbidding the use of intoxicating beverages, or warning about the dangers associated with drinking them, or recommending such beverages to people who are in agony or about to die.

But there is the Hebrew word *tee-roshe'*. This word presents an obvious exception to the general meaning or use of the previous words. It is translated "wine" thirty-eight times in the Old Testament. As far as we can tell, it refers to fresh wine, or new wine, the juice of freshly squeezed grapes. Of the thirty-eight references, all but three

of them are positive statements describing the blessing of God. The three exceptions are in Hosea where he described the rebellious people agonizing over the fact that God had taken away the harvest and, therefore, their fresh wine.

When we come to the New Testament, we discover that there are only two words used to speak of wine. There is the Greek word *gleukos* (yes, it is the word for sugar in our blood). It is found only once (Acts 2:13). Some people accused the Holy Spirit filled apostles of being drunk on sweet wine. The other word is *oinos*. It is likely that this Greek word came from the very common Hebrew word *yah'-yin*. It is used thirty-two times to refer to wine of various sorts. The word is found most commonly in the Revelation to speak figuratively of the wine of God's wrath. It is the word we find in the John chapter two story.

An overview of all these words reveals that the vast majority of all references to wine, beer, or strong drink in the Bible have a negative connotation. And yet, there are those positive expressions, one of which appears to be the case in our story.

Now it is time for us to take off our "Western Culture Glasses" and consider the historical context of wine in the Bible. When we read the word wine in the Bible, we immediately think of the stuff in the bottles on the shelves of Walmart. That is not accurate, historical context thinking.

Consider this very informative quote from R. Laird Harris in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*.

"Wine was the most intoxicating drink known in ancient times. All the wine was light wine, i.e. not fortified with extra alcohol. Concentrated alcohol was only known in the Middle Ages when the Arabs invented distillation ("alcohol" is an Arabic word) so what is now called liquor or strong drink (i.e. whiskey, gin, etc.) and the twenty per cent fortified wines were unknown in Bible times. Beer was brewed by various methods, but its alcoholic content was light. The strength of natural wines is limited by two factors. The percentage of alcohol will be half of the percentage of the sugar in the juice. And if the alcoholic content is much above 10 or 11 percent, the yeast cells are killed and fermentation ceases. Probably ancient wines

were 7–10 per cent. Drunkenness therefore was of course an ancient curse, but alcoholism was not as common or as severe as it is today. And in an agricultural age, its effects were less deadly than now." (R. Laird Harris, TWOT, vol.1, p.376)

Natural fermentation, the only process used in Jesus' day, produced a beverage that would not normally have above 10% alcohol content. Even adding leaven (like our yeast) would not allow more than 10% alcohol content. In a similar way, if you brew your own today, you will have to use turbo yeast or champaign yeast to get an alcohol content up around 12%-15%. What does all that mean? Well, let's do a brief comparison of alcohol content in popular beverages.

Fruit Juice: 0.1%

Beer: 3% - 10%

Table Wines: 8% - 14%

Fortified Wines: 16%-24%

Champagne: 11%-14% (but it causes drunkenness quickly because of the bubbles; One 4oz. glass = 1 shot of whiskey)

Wiskey, Bourbon, Rum, Vodka: 40% - 79%

The big question is this: "How much of that fortified beverage does a person have to drink to get drunk?" Or what does it mean to be drunk? In South Carolina the legal threshold for blood alcohol content is .08%. If you have more alcohol than that in your blood, you can be arrested for DUI. Typically, that means that a 150 pound person can typically drink 3.5 cans of beer or 10 oz. of table wine to become legally drunk. Okay, we don't want to do that now, do we?

Or looked at another way, a 150 pound person can typically drink 1 ½ beers, or about 4 ½ oz. of wine, or about ½ oz. of hard liquor before becoming "impaired." Impaired responses happen with a BAC of .03-.08. In that condition, the person manifests mild euphoria, sociability, talkativeness, increased self-confidence, decreased inhibitions; diminution of attention, judgment and control; beginning of sensory-motor impairment; loss of efficiency in finer performance tests. Is that the same as drunk or just a little tipsy?

My point is this: When Jesus turned water into wine, He did not tempt anyone, or give opportunity to anyone, to do what He (being

God) clearly forbid in both the Old Testament and New Testament. In the Old Testament God said: *Wine is a mocker, **strong drink** a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise (Proverbs 20:1). It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take **strong drink** (Proverbs 31:4). Give **strong drink** to the one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress (Proverbs 31:6).* Solomon also wrote, *Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine. Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things. You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast. "They struck me," you will say, "but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I must have another drink" (Proverbs 23:29-35).* What ever Jesus did, we can be sure He did not contribute to people getting in that state or condition.

In the New Testament, God (Jesus) gives the command, "*Don't get drunk on wine, which leads to wild living. Instead, be filled with the Spirit*" (Ephesians 5:18 *GWV*). Did Jesus mean don't get legally drunk according to the law of South Carolina, or did He mean don't let yourself be under the influence of a beverage? In light of the low alcohol content of that day, excessive drinking was necessary in order to get drunk. But consider the rest of the verse. Being under the wrong influence can result in shameful behavior (like even saying things you don't mean). Being under the influence of the Holy Spirit is the expected norm for Christians. The implication is that we cannot be under the influence of an external substance and be under the influence of the Holy Spirit at the same time.

Therefore, we can be quite sure that God the Son did not turn water into wine in order to provide a means for people to lose control. He did a miracle with something common and intended to be enjoyed with a clear conscience. He did not create the same stuff you find in an ABC store. That being true, before we drink alcoholic beverages, we need to answer some important questions:

1. Can I have a clear conscience if, while I am drinking, I am wondering if I run the risk of becoming drunk?

2. Can I have a clear conscience if, while I am drinking, I am wondering if I might get addicted to this stuff?
3. Can I have a clear conscience if, while I am drinking, I am wondering if this really does bring glory to God (1 Cor. 10:31)?
4. Can I have a clear conscience if, while I am drinking, I am wondering if this practice might cause a brother to be bold to do what his conscience forbids and as a result become drunk or addicted?
5. Can I have a clear conscience if, while I am drinking, I am wondering if my children will take this thing I tolerate to excess, as they often do?