

The Wedding in Cana (John 2:1–12)

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Introduction

John's Gospel was designed to reveal the *glory* of Jesus: "*The Word became flesh and took up residence among us, and we saw his glory, glory as of the one and only from the Father, full of grace and truth*" (1:14). Thus, chapters 2 through 11 are often referred to as "the book of signs," in which Jesus reveals His *glory*. Chapters 11 and 12 transition from *the book of signs* to *the book of glory*. In the book of glory, Jesus *received* glory from the Father because of His obedience: "*Jesus answered, 'If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me'*" (8:54).

The purpose of the *book of signs* is to convince believers that Jesus is the Christ (20:30, 31). Thus, the first *sign* is found in the text before us.

The story of the wedding at Cana is much more than the failure of a caterer to provide enough wine for the enjoyment of the guests. The story, although an actual event, is foremost in this gospel setting, an allegory, illustrating the arrival of the messianic age and its renewed supply of the Spirit with accompanying joy. Supporting this conclusion, Paul wrote, "*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come*" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The first chapters in the book of signs (2:1–4:45) successively reveal five new things: (1) the new wine of the kingdom of God replacing the old rites of purification, (2) the new temple of the risen Lord replacing the temple of the old covenant, (3) the new birth necessary for entry into the new-covenant kingdom age, (4) the new and fully satisfying Living Water contrasted with the never-satisfying water of Jacob's well, and (5) the new and true worship of God "*in Spirit and truth*" replacing the old places of worship (Gerizim or Jerusalem).

I. New Sabbath Rest for the People of God

1. John gives us a careful chronology of this first sign.

The chronology begins the day a delegation of priests came to interrogate John the Baptist concerning his identity and mission (1:19–28) and ends on the fifth day when Philip found Nathanael and brought him to Jesus (1:44–51). The reference to the *third day* in 2:1, counts from Jesus' interaction with Nathanael, particularly His saying to Nathanael that because he believed, he would see greater things (1:50).

2. Why is this counting of days important?

John's purpose was to introduce us to Jesus, the Christ, who was bringing in the kingdom of God via the new creation. This pattern mimics the creation process of Genesis 1. The day that Jesus worked His first miracle, changing the water into wine, was the *seventh* day from the Jew's inquiry. The seventh day was the day that God rested from His creative work and instituted the Sabbath (see Hebrews 3 and 4). The symbolism here again points to the resurrection of Christ and the new age begun, represented by the new wine, the Holy Spirit.

II. Jesus' Mother, honored but humbled

1. Mary's connection to the problem

John never mentions Jesus' mother by name. That she and Jesus were invited to the wedding suggests that they were either relatives or close friends of the couple. It is also highly probable that Mary had some responsibility in catering the food and drink, which accounts for her seeking Jesus' help in the shortage. To resolve this potential embarrassment, Mary posed the problem: "*They have no wine.*" (v. 3).

2. Mary's presumption and Jesus' rebuke and correction

Stating the problem to Jesus demonstrates that Mary expected Jesus to fix it. However, Jesus' response seems to be rather hard and uncaring (v. 4). First, while the response is courteous, it is not the normal endearing reference of a son to his much-loved mother. Why would Jesus use this form to address His mother?

Second, why did Jesus her answer her: "*Woman, what does this have to do with me?*" It sounds like a *rebuke*—mild, but still a rebuke. His mother must understand that He was to be free of any kind of human advice or influence. Everything, including family ties, must be secondary to the will of God. No one, even His mother, can presume to approach Him as an insider for special consideration.

Third, Jesus followed the rebuke with a reason that seemed to have no connection to the present problem: "*My hour has not yet come.*" This phrase is consistently used of His death (7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). What is the connection here? While Mary had only an immediate and practical concern, Jesus saw a spiritual connection with the prophets who characterized the coming messianic age by the abundant flow of wine (Amos 9:13, 14).

The present circumstances served the Savior as parabolic of the coming hour of great wine, the hour of His glorification yet to come. Here is also a great hint that Jesus is to fill the role of the messianic *bridegroom*, abundantly supplying the wine of the Spirit.

Fourth, observe the great and glorious transformation that took place in the exchange. Mary responded to Jesus' rebuke as a true believer (v. 5). Mary believed that Jesus would honor her request, and her faith was honored. She could not know what He would do, but she trusted Him to do it.

III. The Spiritual Message Behind the Miracle

John concludes this event: "*This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him*" (v. 11). D. A. Carson rightly observes, "Jesus' miracles are never simply naked displays of power, still less neat conjuring tricks to impress the masses, but signs, significant displays of power that point beyond themselves to the deeper realities that could be perceived with the eyes of faith" (*Commentary on the Gospel of John*, p. 175).

Lessons

1. We are living in this glorious messianic age in which the kingdom of God is growing and strengthening until the day when Jesus returns to usher in the new heavens and earth, the eternal age to come. The demands of Jesus' followers mimic His own devotion to the will of the Father (Luke 9:23–26).
2. Like Mary and the Syrophenician woman, we must have the faith that believes the Lord will act in accordance with His will and purpose. True believers have persevering faith that moves them to ask for the impossible (Luke 11:8, 9; Jeremiah 32:17; Luke 1:37, 38). Do you believe that He is able?