

**The Gospel of John (12);
“The First Sign: The Wedding at Cana” (2:1-11)**

Introduction:

Let us turn to the second chapter of John’s Gospel in which we read of the first of seven signs that John records which glorify the person and work of Jesus Christ as the Savior of sinners. Let us read these first 11 verses of this second chapter:

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. 3And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “They have no wine.”

4Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.”

5His mother said to the servants, “Whatever He says to you, do it.”

6Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. 7Jesus said to them, “Fill the waterpots with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. 8And He said to them, “Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.” And they took it. 9When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. 10And he said to him, “Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!”

11This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

A portion of Scripture that maybe distinguished as a single episode is commonly referred to as a pericope. Verses 1 through 11 constitute a single pericope in John’s Gospel. A pericope in the Gospels may analyzed as having several characteristics. First there is an *introduction* or *setting* established, which is then followed by the description of some form of *conflict* with an accompanying *reaction* or *response* of Jesus, which is the climax of the pericope. Then there follows a *resolution* which commonly has a response given by Jesus Himself. Lastly the pericope ends with a *conclusion* which is often an *interpretation* of the event for the reader. With view to this episode, or pericope, the following pattern emerges:

1. The *introduction* or *setting* (2:1, 2)
2. The *conflict* or *difficulty* is established (2:3-5)
3. The *resolution* of the conflict or difficulty (2:6-8)
4. The *conclusion/interpretation* of the event (2:9-11)¹

In order to make our outline conform more clearly to the content of this episode, the following outline may be proposed:

- I. The Invitation to a Wedding at Cana (2:1, 2)
- II. Jesus, His Mother, and a Shortage of Wine (2:3-5)
- III. From Purification Water to Celebratory Wine (2:6-8)
- IV. The First Sign of Jesus’ Glory (2:11)

¹ Edward W. Klink, III, *John*. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), pp. 159f.

But before we work through our passage, it would be helpful for us to consider this episode, or pericope, in the larger context of the Gospel. There are some who believe that with the opening of chapter 2 the theme of the public ministry of Jesus begins and then continues through chapter 12. They would cite the record of the seven signs and the seven public discourses of Jesus to argue their organization of this portion of the Gospel.² Others, however, regard the theme, “Jesus’ Self-disclosure in Word and Deed”, is set forth earlier than 2:1, that is, from 1:19 through 10:42.³ Still others would argue that a division of contents should encompass 2:1 through the end of chapter 4 (4:54).⁴

Those who advocate this last form of assessing the contents of John point to the location of Cana of Galilee as both the beginning and the end of this division of John 2:1 through John 4:54. We read in John 2:1, “On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.” And then we read in John 4:46, “So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine.” It is argued that this citing of the location of Cana is the literary key to understanding the opening and closing of this division of John’s Gospel.

Those I have read, who promote chapters 2 through 4 as a distinguishable division, differ in their description of the contents of these three chapters. Herman Ridderbos described this section as “From Cana to Cana: The Revelation of Jesus’ Glory.” William Hendriksen labeled this section, “Revealing Himself to Ever-widening Circles.”⁵ And Edward Klink described this section of John’s Gospel as “The Beginning of Jesus’ Public Ministry.” And then Donald Carson described this section as “Early Ministry: Signs, Works, and Words.” Every one of these commentators put forth good reasons for the organization of this Gospel that they individually determined. What these differences of opinion of these good men and others reveal to us is the richness and complexity of this Gospel.

I appreciated the comments of Herman Ridderbos on these three chapters that showed their relatedness:

Although various divisions of the Fourth Gospel are possible and have been used in the commentaries, it seems to me proper, after what may be considered the introduction (1:1-18) and the preparation (1:19-51), to regard Ch. 2 as the beginning of the real story of Jesus’ self-revelation as it is described in the Fourth Gospel. A clear indication that this is so occurs in 2:11, which describes the miracle at Cana as “the beginning of the signs” that Jesus did. The main division that begins with 2:1 continues to the end of chapter 4, where a new break becomes visible. Important indications of the correctness of this division are that chs. 5 and 6 form a new unity and that the conclusion of chapter 4 returns to Cana (cf. 4:54), thus concluding this great cycle, which begins at Cana, proceeds via Capernaum to Jerusalem, and thence returns via Samaria to Cana.⁶

The episodes or pericopae (pl.) of these three chapters are six in number. They are as follows:

1. Jesus at Cana in Galilee; the First Sign, the Wedding at Cana (2:1-11)
2. Jesus at Jerusalem, the Cleansing of the Temple (2:12-25)
3. Jesus and Nicodemus, the New Birth, and the Unique Son (3:1-21)
4. John the Baptist, the True bridegroom and the Friend of the Bridegroom (3:22-36)
5. Jesus in Samaria, the Woman at Jacob’s Well, Living Water, and True Worshipers (4:1-42)
6. Jesus returns to Cana, The Healing of the Royal Official’s Son (4:43-54)

I believe that Donald Carson best drew together the themes of these episodes of John 2:1 through 4:54:

² Cf. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 65-67.

³ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 105f.

⁴ William Hendriksen, *John*, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1953), p. 68; Edward W. Klink, III, *John*. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), pp. 67f.; Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John; A Theological Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans, 1997), p. 92; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 167.

⁵ Actually Hendriksen begins this section with John 1:19, not 2:1.

⁶ Ridderbos, p. 97.

At the same time, this shorter section (2:1-4:54) is bounded not only by paired references to Cana, but by a thematic wholeness. These three chapters are organized to convey what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “the old has gone, the new has come!” “The three chapters present the replacement of the old purifications by the wine of the kingdom of God, the old temple by the new in the risen Lord, and exposition of new birth for new creation, a contrast between the water of Jacob’s well and the living water from Christ, and the worship of Jerusalem and Gerizim with worship ‘in Spirit and truth’” (Dodd, *IFG*, p. 297).⁷

The point of all this is to emphasize that though we are making a study of each episode (pericope) as we encounter it as the Gospel unfolds, it is important we recognize the importance of the larger message of the Gospel itself, which is the relation and correlation of all these episodes into a single unfolding narrative. It is important that we see the forest, not just the individual trees.

Let us consider the details of this pericope.

I. The Invitation to a Wedding at Cana (2:1-3)

Here we have the *introduction* or *setting* of the episode. We read,

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding.

John the Apostle introduces this occasion with another reference to time in **verse 1**, “On the third day.” We saw in chapter 1 that he described the events of four successive days.⁸ John 1:29 reads “The next day”, John 1:35 reads, “Again, the next day”, and John 1:43 records “The following day.” Here in John 2:1 we read “On the third day.” What John was referring to was the third day following the last day mentioned in 1:43.⁹ Some have seen a symbolic allusion to the resurrection of Jesus Christ “on the third day”, but this claim does not seem to have any true merit. John is simply telling a story, including a general chronology of the events. John’s Gospel suggests an eyewitness recording what he saw firsthand.

We read that on this third day “there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee.” When my son-in-law and I took a tour of Galilee some years ago, one of the stops was the city of “Cana.” There are wineries there and the wine of Cana is a big sale item for tourists. There are also many wedding chapels. Here is one description of the place:

Cana, the Arab village of Kafr **Cana** located in Lower **Galilee**, is often referred to as **Cana** of the **Galilee**. It is the place where Jesus performed his first miracle of turning water into wine. Kafr **Cana** was officially recognized by the Vatican in the 17th century, being confirmed by the pope that Kafr **Cana** is the same as **Cana** of the **Galilee**.

⁷ Carson, p. 166. Carson was also quoting C. H. Dodd’s commentary, abbreviated as *IFG*, which is **The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel** (Cambridge University Press, 1953).

⁸ Verse 29, “The next day”, verse 35, “Again, the next day”, and verse 43, “The following day.”

⁹ Some commentators argue that the Evangelist was setting forth a parallel with Genesis 1, that the Gospel sets forth six days of the new creation in contrast to the Genesis 1 account of the 6 day (old) creation. They argue that with John 2:1 John begins the new creation on the sixth day and that the entire story of John’s Gospel is the “sixth day” in which man is recreated through Jesus Christ, which culminates in Pilate’s pronouncement of Jesus in 19:5, “Behold the Man!” [See Edward W. Klink, III, *John*. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), pp. 67f.] Now it is clear that the Evangelist established Jesus as the eternal Word who brings about the new creation, as well as having created the old creation (John 1:1), but it seems to be a stretch to argue a six day new creation based on John’s chronology. Although D. A. Carson is somewhat open to the idea [Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 167f], Ridderbos dismissed this idea of a six day recreation in John’s chronology [See Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John; A Theological Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans, 1997), p. 102f].

A problem exists, however, in that there have been at least five different cities that have been proposed as being the Cana of John 2.¹⁰ Hendriksen was probably right when he stated, “The exact location of the one where the wedding was held no one knows.”¹¹

In verse 1 Jesus is not mentioned, but His mother is. Again, we read, “On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and *the mother of Jesus was there*.” John never refers to the mother of Jesus by her name Mary. She is always referred to as “the mother” of Jesus (Cf. 2:1, 3, 5, 12; 6:42; 19:25, 26, 27). Perhaps John did not call her by the name, Mary, so as not to confuse her with the other women named Mary that are referenced in his Gospel (15 times). “Her name is not mentioned; only her relationship to Jesus is important.”¹²

In **verse 2** we have the additional detail that Jesus and His disciples were also invited. “*Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding.*” At this point in John’s Gospel Jesus has five disciples, including Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathaniel, and an anonymous disciple, who was probably John. The Gospel of John does not relate the calling of any other disciples by name, but in John 6:67 the Evangelist makes mention of “the Twelve.” That the mother of Jesus, Jesus Himself, and His disciples were invited to this wedding probably indicates it was a family member or a close family friend. That Mary seemed to have some responsibility in the supply of wine at this wedding, this also suggests it was the wedding of a family member. By the way, later John’s Gospel identifies Nathaniel as having come from this city of Cana (Cf. John 21:2). Perhaps there was a connection with him and those of the wedding party.

Here we see Jesus taking part with these people sharing with them in this joyous occasion. “to teach us to be *respectful* to our relations, and sociable with them, though they be mean” (i.e. simple and plain people)” (Matthew Henry). Jesus Christ came not as John the Baptist. Our Lord would later say,

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.” (Matt. 11:18)

There is no mention of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Perhaps he was just absent, but more than likely he had died at some point. There is “no mention being made of Joseph, we conclude him dead before this” (Matthew Henry). Some argue that John’s later reference in John 6:42 hints that Joseph was still alive during our Lord’s ministry. There we read of the reaction of some of the detractors of Jesus: “They said, ‘Is not this Jesus, *the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?* How does He now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”

Weddings in the Jewish culture were occasions of major celebration. The importance of the wedding celebration was seen in that Jewish rabbis would allow them to take precedence over other regularly scheduled religious festivals.¹³ The event would transpire over many days, generally seven days. Often there would be a late night procession of the groom fetching his bride from her father’s house and escorting her through the streets to the feast prepared by the groom’s father. There would be a great feast. If the family was prominent, perhaps an entire village would be invited.

Even more, people who disliked the wedding family would be obliged to attend the wedding, since refusing to attend was socially inappropriate. This makes the invited person, like Jesus, difficult to define in relation to the wedding family. And since it was common for a scholar to be invited to a wedding, it is also possible that Jesus’ invitation was connected to his growing recognition as a public teacher. This might also explain the attendance of his disciples, since they would have been included with their teacher.¹⁴

¹⁰ These include Qana, Lebanon (also known as Qana-al-Jalil); Kafr Kanna, Israel; Khirbet Kana, Israel; Karm er-Rasm, Israel; and Ain Quana, Israel. Most NT scholars identify Khirbet Kana as the cite. “The favored location is Khirbet Qana, which is located about nine miles north of Nazareth” (Klink, *John*, p. 162).

¹¹ William Hendriksen, *John*, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1953), p. 113.

¹² Ridderbos, *John*, p. 104.

¹³ Klink, *John*, p. 162.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Our Lord honored this wedding by His presence. His presence should be evoked at every biblically sanctioned wedding in order to receive and enjoy His blessing.

II. Jesus, His Mother, and a Shortage of Wine (2:3-5)

And then we read of the problem that arose in **verse 3**. “*And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, ‘They have no wine.’*”

We might see this as simply a miscalculation on the part of the hosts or the ones helping the host put on the event. But actually, in that culture it would have been regarded as a major scandalous event.

On this occasion the wine was all used up before the end of the feast. There was also something of a slur on those who had provided it, for they had not fully discharged the duties of hospitality. This may indicate that they were poor and had made minimum provision hoping for the best. It is also possible that the lack of wine involved another embarrassment, in that it rendered the bridegroom’s family liable to a lawsuit.¹⁵

That the mother of Jesus addressed the matter may indicate she had a measure of responsibility to provide for the feast. “It is not impossible that Mary had some responsibility for the organization of the catering; hence her attempt to deal with the shortage of wine.”¹⁶ The mother of Jesus called upon her Son to address the matter; at least that is what is implied. **F. F. Bruce** wrote of this,

Such a festal occasion might be prolonged for a week, and for the wine to run short before it was due to end was a serious blow, particularly damaging to the reputation of the host. Mary may well have had some responsibility for the catering; at any rate she knew that in such a crisis she could do no better than call upon her Son’s resourcefulness. Probably she had learned by experience that to draw his attention to a need was a sure way of getting something done.¹⁷

We read of our Lord’s response to His mother in **verse 4**: “*Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.’*”

Much has been thought and written regarding our Lord’s address to His mother, “Woman.” It seems as rude, abrupt, and dishonorable to address one’s mother in this fashion. It may be assumed that He was in a measure rebuking her for placing this problem on Him to address. But that would be a terrible misunderstanding of our Lord’s use of this term. As one wrote, “*Τύχαι* (“woman”) has caused needless perplexity. While it is an unusual mode of address to one’s mother, it also may be affectionate.”¹⁸ It was not a rude or dishonorable way to address one’s mother in the first century. This can be demonstrated from other sources than the Scriptures.¹⁹

But it would seem clear that Jesus was in a measure rebuffing His mother. “*Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?*” Apparently

the expression is Semitic (Hebraic) and occurs often in situations in which failing to mind one’s own business, so to speak, is considered objectionable. Although in itself it need not contain anything offensive, materially it has the intent of a sharp reprimand. The fact that Jesus addresses it to his mother serves to show therefore how much is at stake for him here. And it is precisely in regard to her that he had to observe sharply the boundaries of his authority (cf. Luke 2:49f.).²⁰

¹⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 179.

¹⁶ Carson, p. 169.

¹⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 69.

¹⁸ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Thomas Nelson, 1999), p. 34.

¹⁹ Notably in Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 17:74.

²⁰ Ridderbos, *John*, p. 105.

Being the consummate puritan, **Matthew Henry** applied this to the error of Roman Catholicism that exalts Mary to an idol, often based on this text which has Mary directing her Son to take action. By Jesus rebuking her, even though respectfully, as “woman,” that

It is a standing testimony against idolatry which he foresaw his church would in after-ages sink into, in giving undue honours to the virgin Mary, a crime which the Roman Catholics, as they call themselves, are notoriously guilty of, when they call her the *queen of heaven*, the *salvation of the world*, their *mediatrix*, their *life and hope*; not only depending on her merit and intercession, but beseeching her to command her Son to do them good... “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” This was plainly designed either to prevent or aggravate such gross idolatry, such horrid blasphemy.²¹

It seems quite clear that He felt that it was an imposition that she was placing on Him and that He was not that pleased that she had done so. I cannot but see perhaps a reluctance that our Lord suggests here to put Himself forward or draw attention to Himself. Certainly, the Evangelist relates how Jesus manifested these signs regarding His glory as the incarnate Son of God who would redeem His people, but there was never a hint of our Lord seeking or desiring personal glory. He desired to glorify His Father, not Himself. The time of His glorification had not yet arrived. He declared, “My hour has not yet come.”

Regarding our Lord’s response to His mother, “*My hour has not yet come*”, we must give our attention. The use of this expression in the Gospel of John always refers to our Lord’s sufferings and death upon the cross and His subsequent resurrection. Here are the references:

John 7:30. “Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, *because His hour had not yet come.*”

John 8:20. “These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, *for His hour had not yet come.*”

John 12:23. “But Jesus answered them, saying, ‘*The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.*’”

John 13:1. “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that *His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father*, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.”

John 17:1. “Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: ‘*Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son*, that Your Son also may glorify You.’”

And very similar to these references we read the following:

John 7:6-8. “Then Jesus said to them, ‘*My time has not yet come*, but your time is always ready. ⁷The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. ⁸You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, *for My time has not yet fully come.*’”

Because of these references, there are those who insist that this is how we are to understand our Lord’s words to His mother in **John 2:4**, “Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? *My hour has not yet come.*” But not all agree. For example, consider **Herman Ridderbos**, for whom I have high regard, but with whom I disagree in this matter. He wrote:

In that connection, “my hour has not yet come” is of particular importance. The saying occurs over and over in John (cf. 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; cf. 16:21; 17:1; cf. also 7:6, 8). As a rule the coming of this

²¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 5 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 872.

“hour” refers to the beginning of Jesus’ sufferings, his going to the Father, his glorification, and many interpreters understand it thus here (i.e. John 2:4). Some think particularly of the hour of Jesus’ death and regard the subsequent miracle as a sign of the forgiveness of sin through Jesus’ blood. But Jesus’ “hour,” as a reference to the end of his earthly career, embraces the fulness of his glory, of which his death is only a part. Others, therefore, think that “the hour” in 2:4 refers to all this future glory. This hour never came during the life of Jesus, and in vs. 11b there is said to be only prophetic mention of Jesus’ glory. In this way the Evangelist is said to have warned his readers that the full significance of Jesus’ glory must be sought not in his miracles but in his subsequent glorification by the Father.

But all this pays too little attention to the setting of the saying here. It is hard to see what a reference to the hour of Jesus’ departure could mean as a reply to Mary’s appeal for help. After all, she did not in fact have to wait that long before Jesus acted. The reference here is not to the hour of Jesus’ departure but to the hour of the beginning, of the breakthrough of the revelation of his glory on earth and in the flesh, and it is therefore arbitrary, in my opinion, to speak of verse 11 as an anticipation of Jesus’ future exaltation. All that is at issue here is that Jesus cannot seize the hour, that is, this beginning, beforehand—even if his own mother urges him to do so.

What he was arguing was this: Although the expression, “*My hour has not yet come*”, in every other place of this Gospel refers to His death on the cross, His departure from this world and His glorification by the Father, nevertheless, it does not mean that here in John 2:4. But I disagree. I believe that this is exactly what Jesus was referring to. I would assert that He knew once He began to display openly His glory as the Lord He would set into motion events that would end in His rejection and crucifixion. It must be, therefore, in accordance with what His Father in heaven had determined, not His mother on earth.

William Hendriksen brought forth the assertiveness of Jesus toward His mother:

When the Lord said, “Woman,” he did not indulge in rudeness. On the contrary, it was very kind of him to emphasize, by the use of this word, that Mary must no longer think of him as merely her son; for, the more she conceives of him as her son, the more also will she suffer when he suffers. Mary must begin to look upon Jesus as *her Lord*. The words, “My hour has not yet come,” clearly indicate Christ’s consciousness of the fact that he was accomplishing a task entrusted to him by the Father, every detail of which had been definitely marked off in the eternal decree, so that for each act there was a stipulated moment... When Jesus knew that this moment had arrived, he would act, not before.²²

We then read in **verse 5**, “*His mother said to the servants, ‘Whatever He says to you, do it.’*” That she spoke to the servants, instructing them, is further indication that she was responsible for the provisions of the wedding feast.

Did Mary completely disregard what her Son just said to her and set matters into motion? Because we understand the ways of God in providence we understand that God’s decrees are exercised in and through the actions of human beings. And although Mary seems to be rather impulsive and insistent in this instance, we know that God had ordered these events to unfold according to His will. We do see in Mary’s instructions to the servants her confidence in her Son that He would take care of the matter. And again, when we consider the serious nature of this problem of running out of wine at this wedding feast and the consequences that might result, we might more easily show deference to Mary. **J. C. Ryle** described her in this way:

Two things are very noteworthy in this verse. One is the meekness with which the Virgin Mary submitted to the gentle rebuke which came from our Lord’s mouth in the last verse; the other is the firm faith which she still exhibited in our Lord’s power to work a miracle in order to supply the lack of wine, and in the probability of His working it.²³

On the part of Jesus, we see one who was always obedient to the law of His Father. The fifth commandment declares, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land

²² Hendriksen, *John*, p. 115.

²³ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 98.

which the LORD your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12). Of course our Lord always honored His Father in heaven, but He also honored His mother on earth. They were not in conflict. If His mother would direct Him to take action, an action that would not lead Him to transgress God’s law, then our Lord would comply willingly and completely and joyfully. This is how our Lord ordered His life in the home of His family. We read in Luke 2 a summary of our Lord’s early life:

Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (Luke 2:51f)

Mary was confident that Jesus would address and solve the difficulty. But because of seems to be a measure of “conflict” between Jesus and His mother, there have been some rather strange and unusual interpretations, and these by good men. **J. C. Ryle** wrote of this:

Some have thought, as Bengal. That Mary suggested to our Lord that it was time for Him and His disciples to depart and leave the feast, in order to spare the feelings of the bride and bridegroom, and to avoid exposing their poverty.

Some have thought, as Calvin, that she wished our Lord to occupy the minds of the guests by profitable discourse, and so to take off their attention from the deficiency of the wine.²⁴

I think that this shows that God does not impart full and infallible understanding to anyone. Any and all are capable of defective understandings of the Scriptures.

Edward Klink described the response and reaction of Jesus to his mother by considering her appeal to Him after the fact:

The response of Jesus’ mother suggests that Jesus’ refusal was neither entirely hostile nor was received in an entirely negative manner. Jesus’ statement in verse 4 is best viewed as a distancing response, not a rebuke or even a rejection. As much as the statement of Jesus transforms the meaning and significance of the immediate wedding crisis, the person of Jesus remains constant enough for his mother to assume that Jesus’ person emitted the very essence of grace and love, something especially noticed by his mother. She may not have known what he would do, as the grammar suggests (the verb is in the subjunctive mood), but she does assume he will do something. The response of the Son of Man to a man-made dilemma was both distancing yet embracing. The mother of Jesus, even if not fully understanding the cosmological vision and mission of her son, had come to understand his vision for those around him. His ultimate submission to the will of the Father does not negate his concern for his siblings (1:12). The narrative depicts with great detail the ability of the Word to “dwell” with his creation and yet remain the God of creation.

And then **Ryle** set forth what I think is a reasonable understanding of what is reflected regarding the mother of Jesus in our passage:

By far the most reasonable and probably idea is, that Mary conjectured that our Lord might in some way supply the deficiency of wine. How it would be done she could not tell. There is not the slightest ground for supposing that our Lord ever worked a miracle up to this time. But it would be foolish to suppose that Mary did not remember well all the miraculous circumstances of our Lord’s birth, and all the words spoken before by the angel Gabriel concerning Him.—We cannot doubt, that although our lord had lived a quiet life at Nazareth for thirty years, and done no miracles, His mother must have observed in Him a perfection of word and deed utterly unlike the behavior of common men.—We cannot doubt that she was aware of all the events of the last few weeks,—our lord’s baptism by John, John’s public proclamation of Him as the Messiah, and the gathering around Jesus of a small knot of disciples.—Remembering all these things, we surely need not wonder that Mary’s expectations were greatly raised.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 96.

She looked for her Son speedily doing some great miracle. She was in daily expectation that He would prove Himself the Messiah by some mighty act. And it was under these feelings that she turned to Him, saying, "They have no wine." It is as though she said, "Surely the time is come for declaring Thyself. Manifest Thy power, as I have long expected Thee to do, by providing a supply of wine."²⁵

III. From Purification Water to Celebratory Wine (2:6-8)

Let us read these verses once again.

6Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. 7Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it. 9When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. 10And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!"

The details are quite clearly stated. Jesus performed a miracle changing water into wine. It was not ordinary wine, but apparently the best vintage "the master of the feast" had ever had or had ever expected. The presentation of this wine at this stage of the feast was quite unusual. Generally, after the people had been in a measure affected by the better wine, the lesser quality and perhaps less expensive wine would be substituted and none would be the wiser.

By the way, we may conclude from this event and many other places in Holy Scripture that wine itself is not an evil. Drinking wine is not sinful. Preaching against wine itself is not biblical, rather it is a belief advocated by many conservative American Christians, which originated from the temperance movement and prohibition rather than the Scriptures. Interestingly, in the colonial days pastors were often paid in commodities rather than coinage. It is rather comical for us to read that pastors were commonly paid for their services with such things as rum, beer, and even whiskey. I am glad this is not practiced today.

But the fact is that the Bible does not condemn wine; it condemns drunkenness that comes through drinking too much wine. Wine is commonly presented in the Bible as a drink associated with peace, joy, and celebration. Jesus turned water into the best wine at a wedding feast. I am not advocating drinking; for great harm comes to people and their families through alcohol; I am simply trying to be biblical in our assumptions and judgments. Wine in most cultures but ours, is a common drink of common people that is a staple part of their existence. It is drunk as a beverage at meals and is drunk in many places in celebration of God's goodness shown to His people. Its presence at a banquet contributed to the joy and celebration of the event.

These were large stone waterpots. It is thought that they could contain between 17 to 25 gallons each. "Accordingly, the six jars had a total capacity of between 100 and 150 gallons! But why is this fact stated? Obviously, in order to emphasize the greatness of Christ's gift!"²⁶

Jesus had given the servants the directives, and they seemed to comply without hesitation or resistance.

The servants dispute not His command, nor ask any reason for His command, but yield that ready and absolute obedience which all of us owe to Divine precepts. They fill them, and so full they could hold no more.²⁷

IV. The First Sign of Jesus' Glory (2:11)

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 96f.

²⁶ Hendriksen, *John*, p. 116.

²⁷ Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, vol. 3 (Hendriksen, 2008), p. 286.

After considering the straightforward details of what occurred, it is important to see the theological significance of this event as a “sign.” The pericope concludes with the Evangelist identifying this miracle as a “sign.” We read in verse 11, “*This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.*”

In this event Jesus revealed His glory as the eternal Son of God incarnate who would bring the fullness of blessing in life on all that would come to believe on Him. His identity was revealed to those who were privy to what He has done. His disciples were affirmed in their faith: “and His disciples believed on Him.”

Now it is important for us to consider, what is meant by a “sign”? We might assume that when we see the term, “sign”, that simply describes a miracle as a work of God which manifests His glory, that reveals to people who God or His Son is what He is like. But this is too narrow and limited view of John’s use of the term “sign.” It is a word that conveys a prophetic or inspired revelation of truth. A miracle as a “sign” means that there is something beyond the miracle itself that is revealed through that sign. Its use here in John 1:11 suggests that there is a far greater event taking place through the person of Jesus Christ than Him turning water into wine, resulting in a successful wedding festivity.

This miracle of Jesus changing water into wine reveals something happening through Jesus Christ that is far greater than the events narrated before us. There is symbolism present. There is spiritual truth being conveyed, which the perceptive reader of the Gospel, illuminated by the Holy Spirit comes to understand, embrace, and celebrate.

In Jesus turning water into wine, we read of the details in verses 6 and 7, “Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. 7Jesus said to them, ‘Fill the waterpots with water.’ And they filled them up to the brim.”

These were large “stone” water pots. They were empty, for they had already been used. The wedding guests arriving at the wedding would have undergone ceremonial cleansing by washing themselves from the water of these stone pots. They were not clay pots, for then the water would come to be regarded as unclean. They were stone waterpots, that were required to supply the ceremonial water for the outward cleansing of the body.²⁸

The “tradition of the elders” held that the Jews were not to eat until they gave their hands a ceremonial washing (Mark 7:3-4). This tradition involved the servants pouring water over the hands of every guest before the meal. The larger number of guests, the larger amount of water needed.²⁹

But here were these empty stone waterpots, that had already served their purpose when the wedding guests had arrived. But now they are transformed for an entirely different use.

Yet they become useful for what would initially be taken in an entirely different purpose: as wine jars. The vessels used to contain the requirements for purification were now to contain celebratory drink.³⁰

Matthew Henry hinted at what we will consider more fully. He wrote regarding the stone waterpots:

To what use Christ put them, quite different from what they were intended for; to be the receptacles of the miraculous *wine*. Thus Christ came to bring in the grace of the gospel, which is as wine, that cheereth God and man (Judges 9:13), instead of the shadows of the law, which were as water, *weak and beggarly elements*.³¹

²⁸ Calvin took an occasion to condemn Rome for its claim to have these stone waterpots on display as relics to be revered. “Some Popish scoundrels have manifested an amazing degree of wickedness, when they had the effrontery to say that they had among their relics those *water-pots* with which Christ performed this miracle in Cana, and exhibited some of them; which, first, are of small size, and, next, are unequal in size.” John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, translated by William Pringle, vol. XVII (Baker Book House), pp. 87.

²⁹ Edward W. Klink, III, *John*. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 166.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Matthew Henry, vol. 5, p. 873.

Our Lord instructed the servants to fill the waterpots with water. The Evangelist does not speak of the actual miracle of transfer of water into wine.

No, He sits still in His place, says not a word, but *wills* the thing, and so works it. Note, Christ does great things and marvelous *without noise*, works manifold changes in a hidden way. (Matthew Henry)

Edward Klink wrote of this:

The moment of transformation from water to wine is avoided because it is eclipsed by a much greater transformation. The imagery is too potent. In the presence of Jesus, a collection of pure (stone) water jars for the ceremonial washing of many people serves to herald the fulfillment (“to the brim”) of the entire ceremonial purification of Second Temple Judaism. In the person and work of Jesus, the purification jars and their water become useless, only suitable to contain celebratory wine.³²

What was formerly useful for external washing has now been replaced with that which is internal. And further, this source of blessing is not from the tradition of the elders, but from the Son of God Himself.

The implication is far reaching: true purification is no longer in reference to external things (e.g. hands and pots) but is entirely internal. And the source of purification is not from the tradition of the elders but “from God” (1:13). The Christian life according to John is drinking and eating what Jesus provides (6:51-58).

When Jesus commanded that the wine be drawn and taken to the “master of the banquet”, Jesus was assuming the role of the bridegroom.

It is ironic that the master of the banquet, the person who should have the most knowledge of and authority over the wine for the wedding, knew less than the servants. The surprise caused the master of the banquet to call for the bridegroom. The two characters so central to the actual wedding are made only secondary to the story. The pericope has reversed who is important at the wedding; rather than involving from the start the master of the banquet and the bridegroom, the narrative began immediately with Jesus. The reversal is stark. What was unknown to the characters themselves is that at this wedding Jesus was ultimately fulfilling the role of the master of the banquet and the bridegroom (v. 10). The image is loaded with significance of the wedding *par excellence* and the new wine to be served to the wedding party of the true bridegroom (Rev. 19:7-9).³³

Now we have provided extended quotations from Edward Klink’s commentary on the Gospel of John because he tied these matters together so clearly and beautifully. I would like to close with a statement he made summarizing these matters:

Everything about those jars of water for Jewish purification speaks of Judaism and the old covenant. Yet their value was entirely changed in the presence of Jesus. The moment that he arrived, true cleansing had no need for ceremonial jars made of purified stone. Rather, their use was relegated to serving as containers for celebratory wine. Purification water was transformed into wine for celebration, not for cleansing. The church is in no need of purification jars made of purified stone; rather, the church needed and received a greater purification that has come through, ironically, a man made in the form of a jar of clay (2 Cor. 4:7).

The narrative has guided the reader to grasp the significance and imagery it projected. Three things can be highlighted. First, based upon the “hour” of Jesus (v. 4) and that the good wine was kept “until now” (v. 10), along with the Gospel’s clear connection to the Old Testament, *Jesus’s person and work is*

³² Klink, p. 166.

³³ Ibid, pp. 167f.

depicted as the fulfillment of God's activity in the world. Yet the miracle of water to wine is at the same time a distancing “not yet” and a “taste” of the good that has already broken through with Jesus.

Second, based upon the amount (v. 6) and quality (vv. 9-10) of water turned to wine, along with the implicit connection to the OT motif of abundance of wine as characteristic for the coming kingdom of God (e.g., Amos 9:13-14; cf. Gen. 49:11), *Jesus's person and work is depicted as the full blessing of God's activity in the world.* As Isaiah declared: “the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all the peoples, a banquet of aged wine ... the finest of wines ... In that day they will say, ‘Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation’” (Isa. 25:6, 9).

Third, based upon the narrative tension between his role at the wedding and the master of the wedding and the bridegroom (vv 8-10), along with the implicit connection to the biblical motif of the wedding of God (Rev. 19:7-9; cf. Matt. 22:1-14), *Jesus's work is to be understood in light of and in preparation for the wedding par excellence.* We stated above that the role of Jesus played in this wedding was ultimately the role of the master of the banquet. But the narrative suggests even more. The narrative's depiction of the anonymous bridegroom, the recipient of the praise of the master of the banquet, is suggesting (and made explicit in 3:29) that Jesus is the bridegroom, whose role as the true bridegroom is bursting through the narrative's significance and imagery.³⁴

Several words of exhortation

1. Our Christian experience should be characterized by joy. “You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.” (Acts 2:28). “Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Neh. 8:10).
2. Our anticipation of what God has promised us in Christ should raise our hope and fix our hearts. One day we will participate and enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb. “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God” (Rev. 19:9).
3. May we all pray, “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law” (Psa. 119:18)
4. See the honor that God through Jesus Christ confers upon marriage between a man and a woman. **Matthew Henry** wrote that in the record of this event that God “foresaw in the papal kingdom (Roman Catholicism), while the marriage ceremony would be unduly *dignified* and advanced into a *sacrament*, the *married state* would be unduly *vilified*, as inconsistent with any sacred function” (i.e. their teaching of the so-called celibacy of their priesthood).³⁵

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. (Rom. 15:13)

³⁴ Ibid, pp. 171f.

³⁵ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 5 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 871.