

Jesus - The Miracle Worker

Bible Reading:

John 2: 1-11

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Have you ever been in a situation that was decidedly awkward, one that you found most embarrassing, but from which you were unable to extract yourself and for which you would have to face the music?

Perhaps you were caught cheating at a school exam and faced suspension. As you sat in the office, the vice-principle began to dial your home....

Or you get nailed with a \$400 speeding ticket and on the way home you are trying to figure out how to explain this one to your wife who is always busy skimping and trying to save \$5 from the family's grocery bill, now to find ALL THIS blown because you were in a hurry to get to.... Home Depot... wherever.

If you've been stuck like this you'll be able to relate to the bridal couple in John 2. They, too, were in a very embarrassing predicament.

You have to understand ancient Jewish wedding practices to appreciate the problem. Weddings in their culture were a very big deal. Celebrations usually lasted 7 days, with the bridal couple footing the party's bill for all the gathered guests, who in turn would shower them with gifts.

It got to the point where things were EXPECTED from each side. The bridal couple was EXPECTED to provide a great party, and the guests were EXPECTED to provide great gifts.

Some historians suggest that if either side didn't put up they could even be hauled into court. Go figure - You could **SUE** the bridal couple for a lousy party! Can you imagine?

At the very least the couple would end up the focus of great gossip in the community and the object of derision and bad jokes should their party bomb.

Which, as we read, this one did. No wine. In Palestine, wine was the standard drink, much like we use milk or coffee. Now **HOW** can you have a good party without any drink to accompany the food?

The couple must have been poor, without the means to properly provide. They probably budgeted carefully, stretched every penny to the limit. They tried. Oh how they tried. But still... they came up short.

How awkward! How humiliating! What a terrible way to begin life together! They will be the laughing stock of Cana!

Mary sees it and feels sorry for the couple, and begs Jesus to help.

We read the rest - water turns into wine, lots of wine, 600 litres of it, the best possible vintage!

You know, if we get nothing else from this passage, if we don't dig beneath the surface, we are at the very least impressed by the immensely caring nature of our Lord; by his sensitivity to an embarrassing problem and his willingness to help people out in very practical ways.

Look at how he helps out - not just a little bit, not begrudgingly, but quietly, carefully and in super abundant ways! Blessing upon blessing.

Psalm 23's famous line, "My cup overflows" takes on a new and concrete significance for this couple.

How wonderful!

That into a world filled with broken edges, damaged moments, and difficult situations, God reaches down in unexpected ways and times to inject hope into otherwise hopeless experiences.

Tuesday I visited a young man named Kyle - a victim of a vicious, senseless beating downtown. His head was pounding with unrelenting pain. He was so nauseated by the pain that he couldn't even hold down a small glass of water. The doctors, though, said he couldn't be further medicated. Prayers were said, pleading to the Lord for mercy, for relief.

Wednesday Kyle was sitting up in bed. He had slept all night. He'd eaten full meals. The pain was gone. His mother said - "We received a gift; a gift of mercy from God."

I've heard I don't know **how** many times of believers who weren't sure where they were going to find their next Christian school tuition payment, only to have an unexpected cheque arrive.

Or wondering where they'd get a winter coat for their child - to have a friend feel mysteriously compelled to hand them a big bag of clothes, with a coat in it.
Same deal with food.
Or facing a financial future that just doesn't seem like it'll work.
Gifts out of nowhere.

Generous mercy gifts from God to people strung out to the very end of their rope; with no other resources, He becomes their Supreme resource of Life.
Taking sometimes very ordinary circumstances and material and making a most extraordinary gift out of it.

Like I said, if we don't dig beneath the surface this is what we will see.
And a great truth that would be, in and of itself!
That we can come to a God of mercy and compassion and find gracious help for us in our times of need.

But let's NOT leave it there. Dig with me a bit -
John 2:11 says:

This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee.

.....The first of His miraculous signs.....

Not only was this a generous act to help out people in a pinch, it was also a living billboard that pointed to the very reason for Jesus' mission on earth.

Now, it is so that every miraculous sign performed by Jesus has its roots in the Old Testament.
Including this one.

There are two major factors at work here:

- a wedding banquet
- and a huge quantity of wine.

What does the Old Testament part of the bible say about those things?

Wedding feasts, in bible language, represent the coming together of God and his people - God claiming these people as his own, pledging himself to them forever, loving them in the deepest possible way!

Listen to these words from the prophet Isaiah, ch 62:

*The Lord is pleased with you
And will be like a husband to you.
Like a young man taking a virgin as his bride,
He who formed you will marry you.
As a groom is delighted with his bride,
So your God will delight in you.*

Prophet Isaiah proclaims a day when God will come to gather to himself a people that have been scattered, that are struggling, perhaps limping their way through life.

He will hold them.
He will love them.
He will be with those people.....
....some day.

And a super-abundance of wine?

What does that mean in the Old Testament?

Listen to another prophet - Amos, this time:

Am 9:13 *"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills.*

What days are being spoken of?

The days when the Messiah, the Redeemer, the Saviour will come to set creation right again, to sweep out all the cobwebs, remove the defects, lift the curse, and restore creation to its original God-intended beauty.

Wine, **lots** of it, is a symbol of God's richest blessings coming to his people. It is a symbol of God beginning to set everything right in a far-from-right world filled with far-from-right people.

Now go back to John 2:

A wedding banquet,
a superabundance of wine coming where there once was nothing.
Do you see it?

"The day is coming," promises God through the ancient prophets.

"I will bring you that day," declares Jesus!

I am he who can bring you from a barren life to a life of abundance.
I can bring hope where there is only despair,
fullness where there is emptiness,
joy where there is sorrow,
freedom where there is shame.

"They have no wine." That was the signal of a young Jewish couple in Cana who found their backs against the wall. They had been called to deliver on their social obligations. They were unable to deliver.

"They have no wine."

How does that translate for us?

We too have been called to deliver on our obligations to our Heavenly Maker; called to obedience, called to service.

We, too, have been unable to deliver that kind of desired obedience, that kind of devoted service and love.

We, too, have our proverbial backs against the wall facing eternal ruin, outcasts from God's presence and care.

We stand, fully exposed, before God.

The call goes out - "They have nothing!"
Jesus sees it. And quietly steps forward.

This wedding banquet of John 2 is not the only banquet which the bible tells us that Jesus attended. 3 years after this banquet there was another. It was a Passover banquet which Jesus ate with his followers - a supper just like the one we will celebrate here this evening.

There Jesus took some wine and gave it to disciples who had nothing. He said, "Take it and drink - this is my blood." He poured out the wine as a symbol of how his blood would be poured out on the cross -
- poured out and broken to make payment, restitution, for all the half-truths and shortcomings and disasters and rebellions of the lives of all of us who stand before God with absolutely nothing to offer and no way out.

Think about it, what's run out in your life?

Your list of excuses as you stand before God?
Your sense that you can do just fine in life by yourself?
Your sense of self-confidence and independence?

The old hymn says,

"Just as I am without one plea but that THY blood was shed for me."

600 litres of wine!

Oh, how Jesus provided in abundance for the couple.

Oh how Jesus promises to provide in abundance for us, too.

That's the promise on a personal level. A promise to each of us.

Now, still one more level to this sign of wine.

Verse 11 tells us that this was "*the first of his miraculous signs....*"

You can't tell from reading the English translation, but the original Greek language uses a special word here. The ordinary word for *first* is *proton*. But that's not the word used. The one used is *arche* – we often translate that as *the beginning*.

It's the word that is used in the previous chapter of John - used to say,

"In the beginning was the Word.... He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made.... in Him was life...."

In chapter 2 John reaches back to chapter one and says, "*Remember that? The One there at the beginning of creation. He's at work here with the water-to-wine sign.*"

It wasn't just **more** wine that Jesus made.

It wasn't just **better** wine that Jesus made.

It was a radically **new** vintage.....

created by Jesus.

It is a sign of the new creation that He will work -

- creating new attitudes, new futures, new hearts in all people who believe

- creating a brand new reality..... New Heaven and New Earth..... one day. He is coming back, Jesus

is, and when He does He will re-create the entire Cosmos and purge it of all wrong, all pain, all inadequacy, all darkness.

A New Creation.

All who believe in Him will become party to that -

- they will live in that New Creation; enjoy Him in that New Creation.

- forever!

And between that day in Cana and the day when He will return Jesus is already doing re-creating work -

- He does it in and through our lives.

He turns us into signs of God's work in this world just as much as that water-to-wine was a sign. God uses each of us in the some way to point to his glory.

Are you a believer?

Then you are a signpost pointing to Jesus.

You and I are signs for each other, signs for those outside this building of God's redeeming changing, transforming and saving power in this world.

The Holy Spirit works in and through us.

Because of His work -

We each carry God-given talents and abilities.

We each encounter God-given opportunities to use them in His service as we serve our neighbor.

We each bring God's presence into this world.

Each time you challenge public policy in the name of the God of Justice;

Each time you take out time to work for social change right here in this city;

Each time you give time to share with a lonely person;

Each time you dig deep to share your wealth;
Each time you deliberately gear back your living standard in a desire to be stewardly and careful with the earth's limited resources;
Each time you take a moment to pray with someone who is hurting;
Each time you make the efforts to join in visible public worship as an example to those who are tired in their faith and need a boost

Each time you do that in faith, dedicated deliberately to God, in prayer for the Spirit of Jesus to work through you,
Each time.....
....**you** become a sign for Jesus.

And so we leave here with two challenges -

Some of you here today are feeling rather beat up. Your reservoir of energy, your bank of resources are drained. Perhaps you're not even sure how you made it here or why you came. You can identify with that poor bridal couple who didn't know what to do.

I invite you to Jesus.

Prayer partners will be waiting for you after this service. They want to walk with you to Him, to share your burden. I invite you to meet them.

Some of you are sitting on the proverbial fence.

This morning I encourage to notice the sign. Heads up! Jesus has come. He is coming again. He is bringing a New Creation. And He wants you to be part of it. He calls you to surrender ---- surrender your objections, surrender your questions, surrender your "yes-but's".... let yourself go into His care.

Invite Him to be a part of your life.

Others of you have made that commitment.

I challenge you in the name of the Lord to be like those servants. Hear the words of Mary - "*Do whatever he tells you.*"

Whatever he says, do. Wherever he sends, go. Don't question, don't debate, don't argue, don't indulge yourself one more time... do what he tells you.

Be willing signs for Jesus.

Please pray with me:

"Take my life, that I may be, Consecrated Lord to thee,
Take my moments and my days, Let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands and let them move, at the impulse of thy love
Take my feet Take my voice take my lips take my intellect
Take my will and make it thine
It shall be no longer mine...
Take myself and I will be...Ever, only all for thee."

Amen