

4. The First Miracle of Jesus

John 2

The Gospel According to John

As we have said on previous studies in John's Gospel, his intent in writing his Gospel is to prove that Jesus is the promised Messiah. So that his readers will believe and place their faith in Christ, John now gives us the first of several sign miracles.

¹On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ²and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." ⁴"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied, "My time has not yet come." ⁵His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. ⁸Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, ⁹and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." ¹¹This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him (John 2:1-11).

The Stigma that Mary Endured

We don't use the word *stigma* very much today, but the word describes a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance that a person has experienced. Before we look at the miracle, let's try to put ourselves into the shoes of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Since she had become pregnant, there had been a stain on her reputation, a social stigma she had lived with now for around thirty years.

In those days, if a woman was found to be pregnant outside of marriage, she was stoned to death for infidelity. Joseph never accused her publicly for this reason, but it must have been difficult for him to understand. How could Mary be pregnant without knowing a man? Admittedly, this question must have been the subject of hushed conversations among her family and those who knew her well.

She had been falsely accused of sex outside of marriage, a grievous sin for a young Jewish girl. Joseph had been told about her miraculous conception by an angel, but she still had to bear the shame, for without divine revelation, who could believe such a story? How could she explain, even to her own family, that she was a virgin at the birth of Jesus?

How do you think Mary felt when she heard that Herod murdered every baby boy in Bethlehem less than two years old? (Matthew 2:16). This young mother faced the genuine fear that her son would be hunted down and perhaps killed by Herod if her baby was suspected of being the promised Messiah.

Matthew's Gospel records that an angel had warned Joseph about Herod's murderous intent and that he was to take Mary and the baby Jesus to Egypt for a time (Matthew 2:13). They obeyed the angel's warning, and after Herod died, Joseph and Mary went back to Nazareth in Galilee in hopes of living a quiet normal life. What a journey this young family had experienced already! Following Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and the subsequent trip to Egypt, they now faced the challenge of settling down and making a place in the community of Nazareth, although it is certain that Jesus grew up with the stigma attached to those whose lineage was questioned. A person's bloodline and family heritage was all-important at the time in which Jesus lived. In social terms, it defined who you were to others.

It seems that the Pharisees and Jewish leaders who hated Him had sent their spies to Nazareth to check out His birth details or pedigree. In a heated conversation with Jesus, the religious elite intimated that He was illegitimate, **"We are not illegitimate children, they protested. The only Father we have is God Himself"** (John 8:41). In another place when talking to the man born blind who had been healed by Jesus, they said: **"Give glory to God, they said. We know this man [Jesus] is a sinner"** (John 9:24).

I'm sure Mary longed for the truth to come out about Who Jesus was and for her vindication to be complete. When Jesus said His goodbyes to His family in Nazareth on His way to be baptized by John the Baptist, Mary perhaps felt that at last her vindication had come.

The Wedding at Cana of Galilee

The occasion was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, a town around four miles from Mary and Jesus' home city of Nazareth. We can assume that, because Mary, Jesus, and His disciples were invited, the wedding was of a close friend or relative. Joseph, the husband of Mary, must have died at some time after Jesus' twelfth birthday, the last recorded time he was with Mary and Jesus (Luke 2:41-51). It is very likely that, at whatever time Joseph had died, financial responsibility rested on Jesus as the eldest, to be the breadwinner for the family until His brothers had grown up. Mary had four sons after Jesus' birth and at least two daughters and that Jesus was known as the carpenter's son (Matthew 13:54-57). We don't know who was responsible for the catering of the wedding at Cana, but it is logical to assume that Mary felt some level of care and responsibility, for she was the one told that the wine had run out instead of the master of the banquet. The master of the banquet certainly knew nothing of the problem as evidenced by his lack of knowledge when the water was changed into wine (Verse 9). The way the stewards looked to Mary for direction is, perhaps, an indication that the wedding was the occasion of a relative, close friend, or even one of Jesus' half-brothers.

Hospitality was and still is, all important in the Middle East. In that culture, it was the groom who was responsible for the wedding expenses. The bride's parents could sue the family if people left the festivities unsatisfied or thought that the catering was under par. People drank wine because it was safer to drink because of the purifying process it went through; water was more suspect, as sewage systems were not as they are today. One never knew what had happened to the water upstream.

Being drunk was frowned upon, however, and often the wine, if the alcoholic content was high, it was watered down. Wine with dinner was the norm for adults in the Mediterranean region and the Middle East. Many years ago, on a short-term mission trip that took us through France, Spain, and Portugal, visiting and helping church planters and pastors, we visited one pastor in Portugal, and while we were eating, I declined wine with the dinner. He told me how alien it was to the culture of the region not to drink wine with dinner.

Wine was essential to a marriage celebration in the Middle East. The Bible says, “**Wine gladdens the heart of man**” (Psalm 104:15). Rabbis had a saying: "Without wine, there is no joy." This view was typical of religious life before Jesus came. The religious elite had converted Judaism into a heavy burden, and the joy had gone out of it. In Jewish culture, a glass of wine was the emblem of joy to partake with friends.

The wine running out had a symbolic meaning at this wedding. It was as if Mary was saying, “Their joy has run out.” Life can be like that; it can become a daily grind, a lack of joy in life with nothing to which to look forward. “**If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed...**” (Ecclesiastes 10:10). Our lives get dull through overwork, and our energy is drained away when there are little play and no joy. Many people seek for joy by chasing success, but I have never heard of a person saying on their deathbed, "I wish I had spent more time at the office."

Others go through financial challenges, which tempt them to work harder and take less time for the fun things in life that don't cost anything, such as enjoying close relationships with family and friends. (If you don't have family and friends nearby, start a small group!) Open your home to others. Let the joy of the Lord become your strength by living a life, which includes the pleasure of relationships and shared family time:

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost (Isaiah 55:1 Emphasis mine).

In the passage above, Scripture is not talking about real wine; we are to buy the wine of joy without money and cost. How do we buy it without cost? We are to come to the fount of all Living Water, the true Vine (John 15:1), the Lord Jesus Christ, and drink deeply of Him. We can do this by spending time reading His Word, the Bible, and through devoting personal time in prayer. The transaction is made when we pay with our poverty and spiritual bankruptcy, giving ourselves into His hands to receive the full life He promises us. Doesn't that sound like a good trade? You could never find such an excellent deal on the stock market!

If we are to be wise about buying and selling in this life, we will realize that it has more to do with what we devote our lives, exchanging our limited resources for His wealth of unlimited resources. Many are looking for happiness in this life, but the word *happiness* comes from an old English word *hap*, and it refers to the things that happen to us. Joy doesn't depend on our circumstances, i.e., what happens to us, but real joy flows out of receiving new life in Christ. God promises that, if we come to the well of Life, we will never be thirsty. He has promised us life in abundance (John 10:10).

Question 1) Think back to a time when you enjoyed life the most. What was it about that time that made it so enjoyable?

The most enjoyable times of my life have been when I have been in close relationship with others and with God. My favorite thing to do in life is to sit around a table over a meal with friends. Times of celebration with friends are among the most memorable times for most people. The dilemma at the marriage feast of Cana that day needed a solution. Mary did something about the problem. She went to Jesus and said, “They have no more wine” (John 2:3).

Did Mary know what Jesus would do about the problem? In our passage in John 2, verse 11, this was His first miracle, so we do not know if she expected anything miraculous, only that she was relying on Him in a tight situation, hoping that He would have an answer. Perhaps, she was expecting Him to make up a decent excuse to those attending or give a speech of some sort to get people’s minds off drinking while the bridegroom went to buy more wine.

Up until this point, as far as we know, Mary had no idea what Jesus was capable of doing. The Scriptures indicate that it was at His baptism by John the Baptist that the Spirit came upon Him like a dove. Luke records that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit as He returned from the Jordan River baptism (Luke 4:1, 14). She had never witnessed Him move in the miraculous up to this point.

After His baptism when Jesus came to His hometown of Nazareth and preached and healed the sick, the people responded with surprise, saying: “Where did this man get these things? ...What’s this wisdom that has been given him, that He even does miracles?” (Mark 6:2). Their testimony was that all the time He had been living among them, they had never heard of Him doing any miracles. We must remember that, to the people in Jesus’ hometown, He was still just the carpenter’s son.

However, Mary had always cherished His true identity in her heart, knowing that He was the Messiah. Perhaps, at this wedding, she wondered if it was finally time for this fact to become apparent to others. Mary was confident that Jesus was more than capable of fixing the problem. In responding to Mary, however, Jesus' answer at first seems to be negative; “Dear woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied, “My time has not yet come” (John 2:4). In English, to call your mother “woman” is not a good term to use, but in the culture of the time in Israel, it is similar as us using the word “Madam” or “Ma’am.” It would not be disrespectful.

Question 2) Now that the Spirit had filled Jesus at John's baptism, what did Jesus mean by the phrase, "My time has not yet come?"

My Time Has Not Yet Come

He did not come to seek His glory but the glory of the Father, and that chief act of glory was to give up His own life for the redemption of man. Jesus was focused on His mission. Christ knew that He would draw the attention of the religious leaders. His purpose was to end with the sacrifice of His life. There was only one way that man could be bought from slavery to sin, and

that was for Christ to give His life as a substitute in man's place. This substitutionary sacrifice could not be a mere mortal because how can a man pay for the sins of the whole world?

⁷No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him- ⁸the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough- ⁹that he should live on forever and not see decay (Psalm 49:7-9).

God alone can win the salvation of man. A normal man could not pay the ransom payment. God stepped in and became man so that the Father alone would be glorified. Coming into a right relationship with God is the only thing that can restore real joy, and the only One who can do it is God Himself—Jesus, the divine Son of God. He has opened the way of salvation to us by His payment of the just punishment for sin—death!

Jesus said to Mary that His time or hour had not yet come; what did He mean? He was talking about how He was to glorify the Father through His substitutionary death on the cross. When Palm Sunday came, just a few days before His crucifixion, a party of Greeks came to see Jesus. It was at that time that Jesus told them that His time or His hour had come:

²³Jesus replied, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.* ²⁴I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. ²⁷"Now my heart is troubled, and *what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'?* *No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.* ²⁸Father, glorify your name!" (John 12:23-28 Emphasis mine).

God is most glorified when we, also, fall into the ground and die to ourselves. This act of dying to self means that we pick up our cross and follow Jesus. If we die to ourselves, then there will be a harvest that God will bring. What happens to a seed when it is buried in the ground? The outer husk breaks open, and the life that is within the seed starts to be made manifest and grow. Jesus' hour had come, and He obediently gave His life, so the ransom price for our sin was paid. Four other times in John, we find Jesus saying that His hour had not yet come (John 7:30; 8:20; 13:1; 17:1).

To whom do you turn for advice or help when you have a problem to solve? Some turn to their credit cards. Others turn to their intellect or their natural abilities or strength. There are also those who would look to Mary the mother of Jesus for help, but what was Mary's only commandment ever recorded? "**Do whatever He tells you**" (John 2:5). It is good advice from Mary for us to look to the Lord and know His guidance to the problems we encounter in life. We have resources, i.e., the Word of God, prayer, and the Spirit of God. If we seek His will, we can rest assured He will reveal His ways to us.

The Lord saw six stone water jars used for ceremonial foot and hand washing. It is significant that they were empty (v. 7); they had to fill them with water. The jars were made of stone, which speaks of the cold hard man without Christ. We need His Word and presence to bring joy back to life. Each of the six jars held twenty to thirty gallons of water (John 2:6). The Lord told the stewards to fill each pot to the brim and then take some of this water to the master of ceremonies.

They must have wondered what Christ was thinking. Why would they serve the guests water with which they were meant to wash?

Imagine the surprise of the servants who had bucketed water from the stream to each water pot. When a spoon was dipped in, out came wine, and not just good wine, but exceptional wine! The master of ceremonies was quite surprised at the quality of this wine and was so impressed that he said to the bridegroom: “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now” (John 2:10).

Mark testifies that Jesus “has done everything well” (Mark 7:37). Knowing this, why should He make cheap wine, especially considering the bride and groom would always remember this day and speak of their wedding story the rest of their lives? I like to think that Mary went around with a smile on her face, saying to everyone at the wedding, “That’s my boy!” like a proud Jewish momma. Don’t you think that Mary went home feeling vindicated and proud of her Son that day? Whoever went home with the rest of the 120 gallons of the best wine, was blessed and happy, I’m sure! The Scripture says that He revealed His glory and that His disciples put their trust in Him with this first of His miraculous signs (John 2:11).

Jesus Clears the Temple

¹²After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days. ¹³When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market?" ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" ¹⁹Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." ²⁰The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" ²¹But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. ²³Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. ²⁴But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. ²⁵He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man (John 2:12-24).

It was the annual celebration of Passover. Josephus, the Jewish historian, stated that as many as 2½ million visitors would throng Jerusalem during this solemn time of remembering Israel’s departure from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. Imagine that you were one of the many pilgrims who had saved your money for years to visit the God of Israel at His Temple in Jerusalem.

People would travel by road and by ship for many weeks to go to this impressive building built by King Herod on top of Mount Moriah. This mountain was the place where God tested

Abraham to offer up his son Isaac (Genesis 22:2). As one of those pilgrims, you would be longing to experience the presence of God and enjoy the quiet courts of the Lord to pray and experience God's peace.

King David, (Solomon, Hezekiah, and Nehemiah, had all lived here and walked where men were now walking. Generations upon generations have visited this Holy site. I have been up to the Temple Mount several times and have felt awe as I looked at the ancient stones on the retaining wall dating back to Herod's Temple. Some of the stones weigh as much as 200 tons. It is an impressive sight, i.e., awesome in the true meaning of the word. As one climbs the steps up to the Temple Mount itself, the presence of God Himself seems to linger, even though the Temple itself is no longer there.

As Jesus walked that day into the Court of the Gentiles of the Temple, His heart sank as He looked at what was happening. The whole Court of the Gentiles had been taken over by moneychangers and merchants, hired by Annas, and Caiaphas, the High Priests at that time. If you were a Gentile (Non-Jew), this Court was the closest place you could get to the Temple Mount where one could experience the presence of God. The Gentile could advance no closer. Jesus was angry when He saw birds and animals being bought and sold at exorbitant prices to line the pockets of Annas and Caiaphas. The Temple Mount was being commercialized and turned into a marketplace!

Question 3) Religion is highly marketed today. How do you feel about the things of God turned into great profit? What danger do you see coming from this type of practice?

Instead of the worshipers experiencing the presence of God, there was a noisy market atmosphere inside the courts of this holy place. Those who were poor and brought a perfect lamb to sacrifice at Passover, had their lambs inspected and refused for no reason other than the fact that the High Priest, Annas, wanted only the animals that he had for sale to be bought and sacrificed.

Annas and Caiaphas had quite a moneymaking operation going on in what should have been a place of worship. An animal bought inside the temple courts would cost fifteen times more than an animal bought outside. Annas presided over everything that was going on and was responsible for this system of purchase and trade that exploited the poor. The Temple tax also had to be paid. Visitors from different nations would be short-changed.

It was an unfair and dishonest practice. It would have saddened any true worshiper who understood how people were treated in the Name of God. As Jesus approached the Temple Mount, it was confrontation time! The Lord stood against the High Priest, his family, and other corrupt officials who were overseeing this money-making scheme.

His passion for His Father's Name and glory burst forth in controlled anger. Jesus was outraged at their audacity and greed. Just picture the scene! The money was rolling everywhere, and people were scrambling for all they could grab as tables were overturned. Doves were set free instead of used for dishonest profit. The picture was one of chaos inside the Court of the Gentiles.

Can you imagine the outrage of the Jewish officials being challenged by someone whom they believed to be an illegitimate man from Nazareth? Where did He get His authority to act in this way? They may have thought, "How can He assume to tell us we cannot sell our goods in the Temple precincts?" Surely Jesus must have known that His behavior would not earn him any friends or favors in the Temple Courts. His brave actions exemplified His passion and enthusiasm for His Father's house. Again, we see that He is singular in His mission to glorify the Father.

Jesus demonstrated love and concern for the poor, the helpless, and those who were isolated from society. As Christ's representatives, do we give the same consideration to people? Sadly, we are often influenced more by the culture around us than the Christ within us. We do not always see the injustice done or the opportunities we have to meet needs in front of our eyes.

We can become desensitized to sin when we live in the midst of it. When God arrives in a situation, He brings to light those things done in secret. Some of those things may have become accepted and tolerated, but there will come a day when He will tolerate them no longer. The Scriptures say that judgment must first begin at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17). He is a defender of the vulnerable. When the Day of the Lord comes, He will bring justice with Him.

4) What things do you think Jesus would change about our culture if He were to suddenly appear on the scene as He did in this passage?

When the Jews demanded a sign from Jesus to prove His authority to cast out all the moneychangers and animal sellers, Christ responded by saying, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19). Of course, He was not talking of the Temple but about His own body, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Each of us as Christians is an individual with the same temple of the Holy Spirit. Paul the Apostle, in his first letter to the Corinthians said:

¹⁹Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

The Holy Spirit wants to banish from His temple everything that corrupts and inhibits the peace within a man's life. Today might be a good day to invite the Lord Jesus to come again to your temple by His Spirit and cast out whatever displeases Him. We may not even be aware of what offends the Lord if it is something to which we have become desensitized. One of the tasks of the Holy Spirit is to enlighten us to those areas that God would want to change. Take the time to consider what things God would cleanse from your life to bring you into greater spiritual freedom.

Prayer: Father, I can think of no other mission in life greater than to be involved in what You are doing. Thank You for the strength and the joy You give me as I choose to follow You.

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