

John 2:1–12 (ESV)

¹ On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴ And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” ⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. ⁹ When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. ¹² After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

The Wedding At Cana

This is one of the more well-known stories in the gospel of John - everybody knows about Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding. He does a cool trick, wows a few servants, and his disciples believe in him right? Is that the purpose for including this account here? Based on what we've seen so far, and based on the structure of the book according to the initial outline we saw during the first week, there is more to it than this. It is not simply a story about a wedding and some wine.

John calls this the first sign Jesus did, one in a series of pointers that Jesus uses to point towards who he is and what he's here to do and to engender belief in those who behold the signs.

This wedding occurred in Cana, which is where Nathaniel was from and was a few miles from Jesus' town of Nazareth. John reports that this happened on the third day. **Why might John have spoken of the date**

this way? Several suggestions have been proposed:

- Some just see it as a simple chronological marker. Either
- It was three days after the experience with Nathaniel, which counting from the first day of John the Baptist would make it the 7th day, perhaps symbolizing the 7th day of Creation and the Messianic rest.
- He mentions the third day, bringing to mind the resurrection of Christ which was to occur on the 3rd day.

Weddings in Jewish Culture

Weddings are a big deal in our day - we plan for months or in some cases years and we spent untold amounts of money on a ceremony and celebration with guests. However, the actual event itself usual takes place in one day with a ceremony and reception event. In Jesus' day, the actual wedding event was much more elaborate. The wedding celebration lasted 7 days, and the hosts would invite as many guests as possible, including prominent teachers and other distinguished guests. Running out of wine during the wedding was a major social faux pas and would have brought tremendous shame on the family.

Mary's Request and Jesus' Response

What was Jesus' response to Mary's request? What did he mean?

Mary is likely not asking Jesus to perform a miracle here, but expecting him to do something to help the situation. To my ears, Jesus' response sounds downright rude, but his address is a standard address to a woman in that culture, although an unexpected one for a son to his mother. He is asking, what does this have to do with us? Jesus initially expresses hesitation, since his "hour has not yet come." - that is, he must follow God's timing not his mother's. Throughout this gospel "his hour" always refers to the time of his glorification - which is his death. Basically, he doesn't want to act in a public way that may disrupt the time of God's plan. Nevertheless, either he agreed to help or Mary demonstrated profound faith (or bold presumption) by instructing the servants to do as he commands. Jesus works this miracle behind the scenes, so to speak.

What might have motivated him to act anyway? What does Mary's direction tell us about our what our actions should be when seeking out Jesus for help in our predicaments?

The Jars

John makes it clear that the jars to be used in this miracle were for ritual purification - and that they were huge! Filled to the top we're looking at at least 120 gallons of wine.

The Wine

So Jesus tells them to fill the jars and then take some in a cup to the master of the feast. In the process, the water turns into wine. Unlike what would be expected at a party, where the best wine would be served first and then the worse wine later when it would not be noticed, the new wine that Jesus provides is better than the old. What would have been a great shame to the wedding party is now a point of honor.

On a simple level, Jesus has rescued some teenagers and their families from a socially distressing situation. He has brought his transforming power to bear on this difficult predicament. **Have you ever felt guilty for asking God to help you in some "down to earth" or "non-spiritual" situation? How does Jesus' action encourage us?** Jesus is doing grand things, and in this miracle he is revealing his glory, but he also cares about normal life, and embarrassing moments, and helping friends.

Jesus is known as man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, and this is undoubtedly true. However, it would be a mistake to then conclude that he was always a downer in social occasions. In fact, the opposite seems to be true. This story is one example, but we see others throughout the gospels, where Jesus regular dines and feasts and celebrates with sinners and outcasts, much to the scorn of the religious establishment.

In the context of John, this action of Jesus is the first of several "replacements" that he does, where he takes something of religious significance and fills it with new meaning - namely, himself. In this case, he has taken the old jars of purification and made them obsolete for that purpose. He has come to do a new thing and those old rituals are now obsolete.

At a deeper level, Jesus has done something more significant - he has done himself what the bridegroom failed to do. In this culture, the bridegroom is responsible for providing the wine for the wedding, but this bridegroom has fallen short. Jesus, the true bridegroom, steps in and provides abundantly.

Why here?

Why do you think Jesus chose to begin his messianic ministry on this occasion and with this sign? Why did he choose to reveal his glory to his disciples here at a wedding celebration? Was it simply because he was forced into it or did he have an intention as well?

The Messianic Banquet

Consider the larger story: The great hope of the Bible is that this world - this corrupt and fallen and sinful world, once full of joy and peace now filled with pain and strife - that this world would be set right, that the wicked would be judged, the righteous vindicated, the tears of suffering would be replaced with cries of joy, that the fog of war would give way to the bright sunshine of peace. In a word, that redemption would come. And when the Bible talks about what that redemption looks like, one of the images it uses is that of a great banquet.

For example, consider Isaiah 25:6-9

“On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, “Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” (Isaiah 25:6–9, ESV)

Likewise, in Matthew 22, Jesus describes the consummation of the Kingdom of God in terms of a wedding banquet:

“And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the

wedding feast, but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.”’ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.” (Matthew 22:1–14, ESV)

Psalm 45, which is considered a Psalm of the Messiah in Jewish tradition, as well as the New Testament, is a wedding song about the King and his Queen to be:

“My heart overflows with a pleasing theme; I address my verses to the king; my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe. You are the most handsome of the sons of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever. Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one, in your splendor and majesty! In your majesty ride out victoriously for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness; let your right hand teach you awesome deeds! Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king’s enemies; the peoples fall under you. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions; your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia. From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad; daughters of kings are among your ladies of honor; at your right hand stands the queen in

gold of Ophir. Hear, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear: forget your people and your father's house, and the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your lord, bow to him. The people of Tyre will seek your favor with gifts, the richest of the people. All glorious is the princess in her chamber, with robes interwoven with gold. In many-colored robes she is led to the king, with her virgin companions following behind her. With joy and gladness they are led along as they enter the palace of the king. In place of your fathers shall be your sons; you will make them princes in all the earth. I will cause your name to be remembered in all generations; therefore nations will praise you forever and ever.” (Psalm 45:1–17, ESV)

In Isaiah 54, YHWH describes his love for Israel in terms of a husband for his wife:

“Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the Lord has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,” says the Lord, your Redeemer.” (Isaiah 54:4–8, ESV)

Paul picks up this theme in Ephesians 5, where he says that marriage is actually a picture of Christ and his Church. Finally, in Revelation 19, we find the marriage supper of the lamb, and in Revelation 21 the new heaven and new earth, with the holy city, the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Not only the wedding feast, but an abundance of wine is also used to indicate the arrival of the Lord and his blessing:

“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and

they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.” (Amos 9:13–14, ESV)

The point of this little exercise is to remind us of that grand story, when the kingdom of the Messiah comes into its fullness, when the world is put right, there will be joy and feasting and a great banquet celebration, and this great feast serves as the backdrop for Jesus' inaugural sign and the beginning of his ministry. It is here, in Jesus ministry, in his life, death, and resurrection that this process is begun. The kingdom of God has come near in the person and work of Jesus. **How does the image of a wedding help us understand what's in store for God's people?**

Consider this story that one writer shared¹:

"One Easter I traveled to Jerusalem with my then fourteen-year-old daughter in order to lead a conference in Bethlehem for Palestinian and messianic Jewish pastors. I planned the trip so that the two of us could be in Jerusalem on Easter morning. Many pilgrims were in the city, as were reporters and their video cameras, looking for some way or some place that would make the day meaningful. I walked with Ashley through the Damascus gate and into the markets, winding our way through the Christian Quarter to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the place of Jesus' tomb, and, of course, the place of his resurrection. This site (as the Byzantines and the Crusaders and virtually every other pilgrim believes) is one of the most sacred sites in the world. As we stood looking at the tomb, watching the veneration of crowds of people kissing stone and observing Greek and Coptic religious rites, I could not help but wonder what this tomb has become. Resurrection meant that this tomb lost whatever significance it ever enjoyed. This tomb points elsewhere, beyond death to life. Something tragic and fossilized has happened in Christian rituals that kiss stone in order to embrace a living Lord. 21 The moment seemed fascinating and historic to be sure, but it also seemed sad. People were taking pictures and looking for souvenirs amidst a cacophony of incense and noise. We then walked to a place beneath the church, into a cave where the ancient bedrock from the

first century has not been chiseled away. Together we put our hands on the bedrock, the “living stone” (as some like to call it). Even though the church around us wasn’t here on Easter, I said, this rock was. It was a witness to an earthquake, a tremor, that shook back one closed tomb (Matt. 28: 2). And this bedrock shook too. Easter was about power and life, resurrection, and earthquakes, not about the remembrance of death and the pious rituals of people. This is the message of Cana. Jesus has come to transform what we do religiously, what we do from habit. He is raised from the tomb— and we build a church there and build our rituals. Instead, he wants us to see him as Mary saw him in the garden and to have our religious preconceptions changed.

Do we have any rituals and religious forms in our life that may hinder intimacy with Christ? Where do we see Christ's transforming power at work in our world today.

The actions of Jesus at Cana remind us that we await a great feast and celebration, where we will recline at table with the Lord Jesus, our King and Savior. When Jesus ate passover with his disciples the night before he died, he said,

“And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, “Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” (Luke 22:15–18, ESV)

He had this great Messianic banquet, this feast of the Kingdom in mind as he prepared to go to the cross and die for the sins of the world. His death and resurrection are the only means by which this kingdom can come in. The Lord's supper looks back to his death, the broken bread to his body broken for us, and the wine to his blood poured out for us, but at the same time this meal prefigures that great wedding feast and looks forward to our bridegroom's return, when we can dine with him in the kingdom of his father.

John reports that the wedding at Cana happened "on the third day." Why might he have phrased it this way?

What was the big deal about running out of wine?

How did Jesus respond to Mary's request for help? What did he mean by his answer?

Despite his response, what might have motivated him to act anyway?

Have you ever felt guilty for asking God to help you in some "down to earth" or "non-spiritual" situation? How could Jesus' action at this wedding encourage us?

Why do you think Jesus chose to begin his messianic ministry on this occasion and with this sign?

How does the image of a wedding help us understand what's in store for God's people?

¹ Burge, John, 54