

February 13, 2011

Living Out The Gospel In Real Life

The Beginning of Signs

John 2:1 – 11

In John's prologue we read: *And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.* John 1:14 This is not just some theological sentiment – John was an eyewitness of the Son of God's glory. And by writing this I think he meant that we should be invited into that witness of the glory of Jesus Christ, full of grace and truth. When John penned this gospel, he included eight different miracles that were intended to not only testify to who He was but also to show us the glory of the Son of God. Jesus performed many miracles, but the point of the miracle was never to rest on the wonder of the supernatural or the benefit to the one on whom the miracle was performed. The miracles of Jesus always had as their emphasis, the witness or validation of His Deity and the display of His glory.

With that in mind, you would think that John would fill his gospel with the miracles that Jesus performed, but he didn't. Perhaps he thought we might become too enamored of the supernatural and turn the miracles of Jesus into some kind of religion, as some do. In any case, John apparently sifts through all the miracles that Jesus performed to give us just eight representative examples, as it were. Jesus miraculously fed multitudes on at least two occasions – John records only one feeding in chapter 6. Jesus healed many blind people during His ministry – John records only the one in chapter 9. Jesus raised at least three people from the dead – John records only the raising of Lazerus in chapter 11. And of all the miracles John records, no two are alike – they are all different. He heals the nobleman's son from a distance in chapter 4 – He heals the paralytic up close and personal in chapter 5 – He walks on water in chapter 6 – He provides fish for Peter and the crew in chapter 21 – and here in chapter 2, He turns water into wine. But Jesus did countless more miracles than these. John himself says that : *Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book ;* John 20:30 So the question is, why just these eight?

John answers that question in verse 11 of chapter 2: *This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.* John 2:11 He turned the water into wine so that His glory as the Son of God might be manifested – and so that His disciples would believe that He was the Son of God. And each succeeding miracle is chosen for the same reason. And then in chapter 20, John tells us that he is writing this gospel so that those of us far removed in time from those events would be brought into the same revelation of His glory and also believe: *but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ; and that believing you may have life in His name.* John 20:31 John could have filled his gospel with miracle after miracle, but he didn't, and so these eight must be representative and point out something unique in each case. So as we go through this first beginning of signs – this first recorded miracle of Jesus, don't forget the main point – **it is to point to His glory and to cause us to believe in Him – and highlight some important truth about God.** The word **signs** here means miracles in the natural sphere that are designed to express spiritual realities so John is intending to reveal some spiritual truths through this miracle.

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. John 2:2 In a purely historical sense, the third day refers to the fact that there were three days between the time Christ called Philip and Philip went and got Nathanael and they joined Andrew and Peter and John, and perhaps, John's brother, James around Jesus. Now where they were in relation to where the wedding took place was perhaps a couple days journey for them. How they got the invitation we really don't know, all we know is that Jesus and His disciples were there along with Jesus' mother. Some Biblical historians have speculated that the invitation may have come through Nathanael since he was a native of Cana, as John records in John 21:2. By the way, this Nathanael is most likely the Bartholomew mentioned as one of the twelve disciples in the other gospels. It was not uncommon then, as now, for people to be known by two different names. In fact, the name Bartholomew actually means, Son of the ploughman, and was probably Nathanael's family name.

But John makes a point of telling us it was the third day. **The third day is the day of resurrection.** On the third day in creation, the earth emerged from the water and life appeared; on the third day of being cooped up in the belly of the fish, Jonah was resurrected to life – and Jesus links that historical event with His own death and resurrection in Matthew 12: *for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.* Matthew 12:40 The prophet Hosea links the third day with our coming resurrection as believers: *"He will revive us after two days ; He will raise us up on the third day, that we may live before Him.* Hosea 6:2 And on the third day, the Son of God was raised up out of the grave triumphant and victorious. And so I do not think John was just throwing that little fact in there. We don't see him do that in the rest of the gospel so we have to think that this is an important detail and he is trying to tell us something about the importance of this miracle.

John also gives us the only miracle recorded in the gospels that happened at a wedding. Because he only chose eight of the Lord's miracles to highlight, we must assume that the wedding setting was important. I think it is important for a couple of reasons. First, by being there, **Christ is sanctifying the marriage relationship.** Marriage was ordained by God in the garden and here Christ is putting His stamp of approval on it. Notice that John doesn't identify anyone in the wedding – we don't know if it was a close friend, a relative, or a friend of a friend that got Jesus and His mother and disciples invited – John just says, *there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee.* And that tells us it is the marriage relationship universally that God blesses, not just this particular one. The fact that Jesus was invited to the wedding shows us that **His presence is essential to a happy and successful marriage.** Further, the fact that we aren't even told who the bride and bridegroom are is intended to focus our attention on Christ who is the real Bridegroom and we who are the real bride of Christ.

Now the scene is set with Jesus and the disciples and His mother at the wedding, and everybody is having a great time – and then the wine runs out. This was probably a bigger deal than we think. Weddings in those days were huge affairs and they could last anywhere from three or four days to two weeks, depending on the wealth of the individual. And wine was really the staple drink in those days, even the more so during celebrations like this. Wine in this context speaks to the joy of living. In fact this story is often titled, 'Joy in Cana'. And there was great joy here, until the wine ran out. As human beings, we have a certain human reservoir of joy, but it is limited – it is not inexhaustible. And however great our reservoir of joy – eventually it runs out. And one of the things John is pointing out is that **real joy, lasting joy, requires the presence of Christ.** *In Your presence is fullness of joy ; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.* Psalm 16:11

And so here at one of the most joyful occasions of human experience, the joy is gone. *When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."* John 2:3 The very question seems to indicate that she expected Jesus to do something about the lack of wine. She knew He wasn't a wine distributor – He didn't have warehouses He could call to get someone to deliver some more wine. She must have expected Him to display His Son of God powers and produce some wine. She had been holding the promise of God for thirty years: *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.* Luke 1:35 She had the word that Jesus was the Son of God and had most likely been waiting for that to be revealed. Remember, as far as her friends and neighbors knew – Jesus was an illegitimate child and the burden of that concern must have been with her all these years. What better time to vindicate her and announce to the world who He was?

And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come." John 2:4 Jesus' answer reveals a couple of important things. First, He addresses His mother as '**Woman**'. He wasn't dissing her as some might think. The word would be similar to saying, 'Lady'. Obviously not as warm and intimate as 'Mom'. But certainly not disrespectful. But had He said 'Mom' instead of 'Woman' He would have been emphasizing His human relationship to her. And John, throughout his gospel is determined to get across the point that this man Jesus was the very God incarnate. Mary was the mother of Jesus humanly speaking, **but Mary needed her Son to be her Saviour.** And this is what Jesus is pointing out. 'Mary, I'm leaving the private life of your Son and you are now talking to the Son of God'. Jesus's last words to her on the cross in chapter 19 of John were '*Woman, behold your son*' talking about John the apostle, into whose care He gave His mother. **His answer emphasized the fact that He was the very God incarnate.**

Furthermore He says, *what does that have to do with us?* Jesus was letting her know that He understood her motives here. 'What does the fact that they are out of wine have to do with us'. In other words, He is saying '*I know you expect Me to perform a miracle here and vindicate you in the eyes of everyone.*' But He adds, *My hour has not yet come.* In other words, '**I am not regulated by the need of the hour – but rather by what pertains to My mission**'. Jesus was never motivated to do anything because of someone's need.

Everything He did and everything He said was regulated by His Father in heaven. A little later in chapter 19 we see Him saying: *the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing ; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.* John 5:19 And later in verse 30: *"I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge ; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.* John 5:30

We will see later in chapter 11 that when Jesus gets the news that His very good friend Lazerus is sick, the Scripture records *when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was.* John 11:6 **He never operated on the basis of mere common sense or emotional appeal or circumstantial need.** Everything He did or said was regulated by His Father in heaven. **Jesus had come for a specific purpose, an appointed hour, and everything in His life was directed toward that hour.** That hour was His appointment with the cross and six times in this gospel we see Jesus' life in connection with this phrase.

Here in John 2:4, again in John 7:30 – where it says *So they were seeking to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come.* John 7:30 And similarly in chapter 8 in the Temple: *and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come.* John 8:20 In chapter 12 we hear Him saying, **The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified...Now My soul has become troubled ; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour '? But for this purpose I came to this hour.** John 12:20, 27 And finally in chapter 17 as He is praying before the cross: *Father, the hour has come ; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You* John 17:1 **The hour to which everything in His life was subject was that hour in which He would be subjected to the will of man, delivered up by the hands of sinners.** But until that time, He was not to be ordered by others, even His mother. Instead whatever He did, He did by the will of God.

So Mary accepted the rebuke, recognizing His right to act in accordance with His mission and left the matter entirely in His hands: *His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."* John 2:5 We are much too prone to dictate to God – too often disposed to tell Him what ought to be done; instead of committing our way to Him and then leaving Him to supply our need in His own good time and pleasure. We need to be like Mary, saying, *'Whatever He says to you, do it.'*

Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each. John 2:6 The number six in Scripture is the number of man, and so we understand that John is going to say something to us about the human condition. Cleanliness was next to godliness for the Jews. They were always washing themselves. And these waterpots, representing between 100 and 180 gallons of water were sitting there for the guests to use in the ceremonial rite of purification.

This custom had nothing to do with germs and hygiene. It was a religious custom—**not** prescribed by God in the Old Testament, but rather invented by religious leaders who had a profoundly wrong view of spirituality. They believed that the main spiritual problem was the threat of contamination by contact with bad people—"sin cooties," if you will. If you touched something that bad people had touched (or even breathed air that they breathed), you could become ritually unclean. So the solution, the key to spirituality, the main way to approach God was through performing a ritual of cleansing or purification. Observant Jews had to wash their hands in very specific ways several times in the course of a meal.¹ No wonder they had so many water-pots on hand for the reception! Interestingly, they had lots of water but they ran out of wine.

The striking thing in this story is that Jesus could have called up lots of wine without using these pots. Jesus could have put the wine in other containers; he could have created new containers to hold the wine; he could have created it directly into people's empty glasses. But **He chose to perform this miracle in a way that spoke directly to their efforts to be clean and right with God through their own efforts.** **This first miracle implicitly condemned religious self-effort.** By filling these waterpots with water and then changing the water into wine, He made it impossible for anyone at the reception to ritually purify himself. From this point on, Jesus explicitly rejected and condemned the outward washing without the inward reality. **Jesus didn't come to clean us up on the outside. He came to renew us from the inside out.** By turning the water into wine, Jesus replaced a symbol of human religious self-effort with a picture of the transformation of new life. What the stone pots represented was the dead religious effort of external cleansing – and Jesus demonstrates that what they needed was a living internal change.

Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." So they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it to him. John 2:7-8 I want us to notice a couple of things here. Firstly, Jesus doesn't do any of the work – all He did was speak. All the labor is done by servants – they filled the waterpots, they drew it out and they took it to the headwaiter. One of the things this says to us is that for His own good pleasure, **God is pleased to use His servants to carry out His plan and purpose.** He uses weak, frail, fallible men and women to bring His purpose and plan to perfect completion. And the other thing we need to understand is that it is **the word of God that is the power of God.** Jesus didn't pray over the pots, He didn't lay hands on the pots, all He did was tell the servants to fill the pots. And they poured in water, but they took out wine. In the beginning, God spoke – and the universe leapt into existence.

When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom, and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now." John 2:9 – 10 Jesus is always turning things upside down. The good wine was always served first because by the time people had drunk through the good stuff – the inferior stuff didn't taste so bad. That is how it is with us. The world, the flesh and the devil offers the best first and keeps the worst for last. The deceit of sin is to disguise the fact that the pleasures of sin are only for a short time, but the bitter wine of the consequences lasts forever. First the pleasures of sin for a season – and then the wages of sin in the end. Isn't that our experience? But when we have drunk through all the best the world has to offer, and we then turn to Christ, we discover that His is the best, and we wonder why we ever thought that other stuff was any good to begin with. In God's economy, He saves the best for last. First the wilderness, then the promised land. **First the cross, then the crown.**

Finally, the fact that Jesus turned the water into wine, not only demonstrated that our real joy and satisfaction is found in Him, but that **redemption and cleansing comes from His blood shed for us.** The only reason our joy can be full is because Jesus poured out the wine of His life, His blood, on Calvary. At the last supper, Jesus told His disciples: *And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.* Matthew 26:27-28 His turning the water into wine, showed at once the impotence of those pots designed to provide any real cleansing, and where true cleansing from sin comes – the blood of Jesus.

Look again at the picture presented here: Jesus took those dead, stone waterpots, symbolic of man in his deadened condition, and filled them up with water, symbolic of the water of the Word of God that awakens dead souls to new life, and through that word produces good wine, symbolic of the divine cleansing through the blood of His sacrifice, and witness to the divine joy that fills the soul of everyone who believes in Him. And this was the beginning of His signs – the first miracle. And certainly this is the first miracle every believer experiences – the miracle of new birth

This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him. John 2:11

*Our gracious God and heavenly Father,
No human mind could conceive or invent the glorious message of the gospel. Acting in eternal grace, You are both its message and messenger, lived out on earth through infinite compassion, applying Your life to insult, injury, death that we might be redeemed, ransomed and freed. We praise You, O Lamb of God for opening the way to life eternal and joy unspeakable. Help us to secure this mighty blessing. Strip us of every pleasing pretence of righteousness by our own works and labor. Grant us the grace to renounce every darling lust and submit our hearts and lives to Your will. Let it control our affections, shape our understanding, and guide our living. Let Your word birth new life within and fill us with the wine of Your joy that we might be a people who delight in God through Jesus Christ spreading His joy through the gospel to all people we pray, in the life-giving name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*