

“Water to Wine”

The story of Jesus turning water into wine is one of the most well known stories in the Bible.

It is one of those stories that have penetrated the very psyche of our popular culture. This story is also well known, especially in the southern Bible-belt, because of debates about whether or not it is ok for Christians to drink alcohol.

Those who say its ok to drink (mostly mainline liberals and laize-fare evangelicals) are quick to point out that Jesus turned the water into wine. Those who are fearful that the Bible might be portraying Jesus as a “party animal” (mostly Baptists and Pentecostals) say that this wine was not the real stuff, but unfermented grape juice. To say that, in my opinion, is the work of a very creative imagination. No, the water that Jesus turned into wine in John chapter 2 was alcohol.

It is also an evocative story. It is one that is hard to wrap our minds around. Sure we understand what happened- Jesus turned the water into wine. But why did it happen? What was the point? It’s not like most other miracle stories where Jesus heals someone, casts out demons, raises someone from the dead, or saves his disciples from drowning. Those stories have points, so we say. We understand the “practical benefit” of those miracles. But turning water into wine? Big deal. If he didn't turn the water into wine it’s not like these people would have died. The world would not have ended if they ran out of wine; therefore the story strikes us as evocative. It’s mysterious. It’s hard to figure out what purpose it serves.

Another thing that makes this story unique is that it exposes a crisis of belief in the minds of many westerners clinging to the last vestiges of their Christian heritage. What do I mean by this? In short, I mean that there are many people- mainly “enlightened” Americans and Europeans- in our rationalistic, laws-of-nature, empirical evidence addicted, no room for miracles worldview culture who do not believe this story. They think of it in the same way as they do a fairy tale. They might embrace some of the spiritual truths they can squeeze from it, if they can find them, but they do not believe Jesus turned the water into wine. Those things just don’t happen.

Some say that it does not matter if it is not true, so long as we get the moral of the story. But is that really true? Can we really hold to that position and be faithful to the Bible and the core doctrines of the Christian faith?

The greatest miracle in the Bible is not this story but the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The apostle Paul would disagree with those who say that it does not matter. Concerning the resurrection he said that our faith is futile, useless, null and void, that we are dead in our sins, and that we are to be the most pitied of all people if the bodily resurrection of Jesus is not true. (I Cor. 15)

So I declare to you that if God is God, and if it is in fact true that God incarnated himself, fully and completely, in the man Jesus Christ (or as the gospel of John put it in John 1:14- “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us”) then why couldn’t Jesus turn the water into wine? Why can’t God be God and perform a miracle, even if it means that God must break the

laws of nature in order to do so. If God is God then God is free to do as He pleases. If you doubt the miracle in this story then what other miracles in the Bible will you write off? This question must be answered by those to whom this story poses a crisis of belief.

Now let's work on three things that will help us make sense out of this story.

The Purpose of Miracles- Give Glory to God and Prove that Jesus is Messiah

In order to understand this story rightly, we must understand the purpose that miracles serve, not just in this story, but in all the miracle stories of Jesus. The purpose of the miracles is not chiefly for us and our benefit, but for the glory of God and for the vindication of what the Bible says about who Jesus Christ is.

This is easy for us to miss because in almost all the miracle stories people are the great benefactors of the miracle. I already pointed this out- people are healed, raised from the dead, freed from demons, and saved from storms. But even those miracles were not primarily for their benefit- the key word there being primarily.

Sure, it was for their benefit in that God loved his people, and that Jesus was definitely offering the compassionate love of God to them when he preformed those miracles. But that was not the main purpose. The main purpose of the miracles was so that people would give glory to God and so that people would come to know that Jesus is the Messiah, God in the flesh, and then embrace him in faith.

At the end of our story today it tells us in v. 11 that this was the first of Jesus' miraculous signs and that through them he "revealed his glory" and that his disciples "put their faith in him"

This means that even if we couldn't figure out what the "practical purpose" of turning the water into wine was, the miracle itself should still make sense to us, if for no other reason than that it exhibited the power and divinity of Jesus Christ. Only God could turn water into wine. That's the first key to understanding a text like this. The purpose of the miracle, first and foremost, was to show that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, so that people may trust in him for life with God.

The Practical Benefit of the Miracle-God's Approval of the Common Things of Life

The other thing that will help us understand this story is to recognize the fact that there is actually a practical benefit to the people for the miracle.

At the beginning of this message I said this story was evocative (evading, mysterious in its purpose) because it was difficult (at least on the surface) to figure out what was so great about turning the water into wine. Now in order to recognize the practical benefit in the story it requires that we do some reflection and it requires that we know a very basic theological truth that the Bible teaches. I can't really give you a snappy phrase to sum up what I am trying to say here so let me put it to you like this.

God created the material world, all that is in it. God also created human beings and he breathed into them the breath of life. When God finished with His creation He looked upon it and said “it is good.” Of man and woman He said “It is very good.” God also created marriage, He gave Eve to Adam and He blessed the institution of marriage between one man and one woman. God also created covenants. Thus, God created the covenant that is made at marriage.

Here in this story we have a marriage taking place in Cana of Galilee and Jesus, his mother, and his disciples have been invited to attend the ceremony and celebration. It was a neighborhood affair.

Can you imagine Jesus turning down the invitation because as the Son of God he had more important things to do? More serious spiritual matters to address? No. Jesus himself had existed before the very creation of the world as God, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and he himself created the world, man and woman, and marriage, and he called it all “very good.” Why would Jesus repudiate going to a marriage ceremony because he had better things to do? There was nothing better that he could have done than to go to a wedding! After all, he made all of this and called it all good!

So the practical benefit of the miracle s simply this- God’s approval of the common things of life

The Bible does not teach an ascetic (super-spiritual) life that denies the material good of the world. Nor does it deny the common things of life, such as social gatherings, parties, and celebrations. These very common things can be quite enjoyable, when properly observed, and they were given to us by God to be enjoyed. As Christians we are permitted, even encouraged to enjoy the common things of life in ways that are honoring to God.

This is why Jesus was at that celebration- because these things are good and those two people who got married were important to him. By doing this he was loving God and his neighbor. So when they ran out of wine it mattered to him.

Perhaps you can think of a situation that you were in where you ran out of something, or it was simply unavailable from the get go. Think of how awkward, or even embarrassing that might have been. That was the situation at this wedding. Some of what prompted Jesus to act as he did was the fact that he loved people, he loved weddings; therefore he was not going to let a good party go bad if he could help it.

This means that Jesus is not just interested in the life altering events of your life, such as sickness, death, and storms, but also the little things like wedding parties and good wine to drink. For he knows the number of hairs on your head. He cares about the things that you would think God did not have time to care about.

This does not give us permission to turn into self-absorbed spiritual narcissists who are always praying for silly things, it’s just to say that Jesus loved people and the material world that he had created, so long as they were properly used, even the wine!

The Deeper Spiritual Truths that Are Contained in the Miracle

The final thing that will help us to understand this story is to get a grip on the spiritual truths that are contained in it. Again, this can not be neatly explained with a phrase, so let's just dive into it.

Early on in the story the wine runs out and Jesus' mother informs him that all the wine is gone.

To this Jesus gives a strange reply, "Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come."

Now why did Jesus reply in such a way? What did he mean by this?

He meant that his time to be crucified had not yet come.

The idea here in his thinking was that the sooner he began to perform miracles the quicker the people would take an interest in him, including his enemies. This meant he would be crucified sooner, once he started the miracles.

It seems like Jesus was saying that he wasn't quite ready to kick this aspect of his ministry into high gear because there was more teaching about God and the gospel that he wanted to reveal before he launched into performing lots of miracles. This was all about the importance of proper timing when Jesus gave this strange reply.

There is an interesting connection between the fact that there is no wine and Jesus' reply about it "not being his time." When we partake of communion the wine is symbolic of the shed blood of Jesus. Knowing this to be so I think there is a connection between his turning the water into wine and "the hour for which he has come." The text doesn't say this, but I do not think it's not coincidental that Jesus' first miracle was turning the water into wine. It points to the purpose for which he came- to shed his innocent blood for us.

The fact that the wine ran out at a wedding is also not a coincidence. Men and women become husbands and wives at weddings. Likewise God and human beings are also joined together in a marriage when the Lord calls us, forgives us, redeems us, saves us, and brings us into his family as his children.

In the writings of the prophets, most notably Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea, God's relationship to Israel is likened to that of a husband and wife. God is the husband, his people are the wife. When Israel sins and breaks covenant with God she is referred to as adulterous and a harlot, to put it mildly.

In the NT, the relationship between Christ and his church is likened to that of a marriage. Paul does this in Ephesians 5. Jesus refers to himself as "the bridegroom" in the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), and he explicitly does this again when he is questioned about why his disciples do not fast. (Luke 5:34- "Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is still with them?") In the gospel of John, John the Baptist, in pointing others to Christ, says that the bride (us) must be with the bridegroom (Jesus) and not John the Baptist (Jn 3:29). The book

of Revelation refers to the lamb (Jesus) coming to wed himself one final time, fully and completely, to his bride, the church. (Rev. 19:6-8)

I think what Jesus is showing, by intentionally changing the water into wine at a wedding, is that the marriage relationship between God and man that has been ruined by man's sin, can only be repaired through the shedding of Christ's blood. Only the wine of Christ can bring healing and restoration to our divorced, adulterous hearts.

It is also interesting to note that the water jars that contained the wine were once used for ceremonial washings in Jewish religious life. They washed their hands, so as to be cleansed, before entering into any ceremony like a wedding gathering. Nothing wrong with that, I'm sure Jesus washed his hands before the ceremony, but through the wine miracle Jesus was also symbolizing a newer, fuller, and deeper thing that would truly transform how all human beings are now to relate to God. No more need for ceremonial water washings, his wine, the blood, forever cured the true human ailment, not outer filth but inner sin.

Conclusion and Application

In our text today the "master of ceremonies" calls forth the bridegroom and pays him a great compliment (he didn't know that Jesus turned the water into wine) by saying to the crowd, "You have done a great thing. Most people give the good stuff first and the cheap stuff last, but you my friend, have saved the best for last. (v.10)

I have done the same thing in my sermon this morning. I have talked about three things that will help you understand this text. First, the purpose of the miracle was to give glory to God and to validate the divinity of Jesus. Second, Jesus did the miracle because he loved his creation, he loved marriage, he loved the man and woman who were getting married, and he loved the crowd who had gathered. It was a sheer act of grace and kindness on his part. But **in** that third thing, I saved the best for last. It is the deeper spiritual truths that are contained in this text that can give life to our lives.

Jesus Christ, through his blood, the wine, gives us **eternal life** with God when we follow him. He will wed us to his Heavenly Father so that we can be one with the Father, just as he is.

Jesus Christ will also give us a **relationship** with God. Through him you can know God, experience God and walk with God, if you will follow him.

Finally, Jesus will **help us with our problems and struggles** in life.

I can't promise you the alleviation of every problem you have, but if Jesus turned the water into wine he can help you with your struggle. He is a compassionate Savior who knows your struggles and will give you sufficient grace to face them. Jesus Christ will be your source of strength and comfort in your time of struggle, if you will but trust him. He will turn your water into wine.

Would you give him your life today? Amen.