

WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY

The Wedding in Cana

Breaking Ground

In the past when I've conducted a traditional wedding ceremony, I read these words:

The fact that the miracle was performed at a wedding is also significant. By His attendance, Jesus places His stamp of approval on the marriage covenant, and with His miracle He shows from whence the blessings in a marriage spring.

Like me there have been some that assumed the main message in the story of the wedding in Cana was Christ sanctifying the institution of marriage even to the point that his presence in marriage brings the joy of new wine.

Because the text starts with "*On the third day . . .*" (John 2:1a, ESV), others have assumed that this is picture or a pre-figuring of the resurrection. The Roman Catholic Church falsely interprets the story to exalt Mary's intercession with her Son and her role as a mediator. And of course, many of us have heard that this event gives us permission to drink wine, at least socially. None of these ideas are supported by the text of Scripture.

Our task today is to not just understand the story but determine the message the Holy Spirit has for the original audience and for us. I intend to do that by picking from the text 3 interpretative clues, that when seen together bring an encouraging message. First, let us pray.

Read the Passage: John 2:1-11

3 Interpretive Keys

Key One. First, Luke's comments are more significant than mine or anyone else's. Notice his editorial comment of the story: "*This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him*" (John 2:11, ESV). We can assume, by this inspired comment, that we should be impressed with the glory of God in the person of Christ; and find our faith in Him stirred and stimulated. If not, we have missed the point.

Key Two. Verse 4 is also significant to understanding why we have this story in this Gospel. It has provided lots of discussion and questions; and it is also critical to understanding the story. It reads this way: "*And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come'*" (John 2:4, ESV). The term "woman" is clearly not a demeaning term offered by our Lord. It's a term of endearment, yet a term that maintains a degree of distance. An English word that may be closely equivalent is "Ma'am". The tone is not rude, but it has a bite to it. One might paraphrase it this way: *Ma'am, my intentions for this event are not the same as yours. I am on a schedule designed by my Father and not human agendas.*

We should read this as a courteous rebuke given with affection but assertion. Dr. D.A. Carson's summary helps us immensely: "Now that he had entered into the purpose of his coming, everything, even family ties, had to be subordinated."¹ Jesus had now embarked on his ministry and his ministry is spiritual, not earthy; it is not based upon human ideals, but to do the will of His Father. Therefore, even though the contemporary need is for more wine, we can expect Jesus to engage in something far more profound than that.

Key Three. Now we come to what I would call the decisive key. Notice that the vessels used to perform the miracle are notable, to say the least. "*Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons*" (John 2:6, ESV). The vessels that Jesus used to make wine were, in the kindest terms: gross. These pots were used for ceremonial washing. They would also wash utensils, even the hands of guests for the meal. As Grant Osborne points out: "Their purpose was to render the unclean ritually pure, which would take place when a person dipped their hands and feet in the water (Mark 7:1–5)."² Do you see the point? Jesus took what Jewish tradition used to make things clean and transformed it into something of an entirely different nature and impact.

Do grasp even a little of this startling event. Imagine a wedding reception at a community hall. The wine runs out. Jesus is present. He commands that all the wash basins in the bathroom be filled to the brim with water. That water is scooped out and put in pitchers and as it is served people find that it is the highest quality of wine.

That's not how people made wine in the time of Christ. [Isaiah 5:1-7](#) describes the ancient Jewish method of wine-making. Farming families put enormous labor into harvesting their vines, crushing the grapes and fermenting them. It was a simple operation: they crushed the grapes in a shallow, flat crush pad with their feet, and the juice flowed downhill into a fermentation pit.

It is here that we are starting to get to the point of the story. Jesus used the pots used for cleansing, not just produce something clean, but into a product more glorious than water – wine; and not just ordinary cheap inexpensive wine, but wine that drew the commendation of the host and the bridegroom.

Summary

So, what is the meaning of this story? Why is it in our Bibles?

#1. KEY. The meaning requires that we see the glory of Jesus Christ and our faith in Christ is encouraged.

#2. KEY. The meaning on the story involves the taking of something earthy and physical and seeing it in the light of spiritual glory that honors the Father.

¹ Carson, D. A. (1991). [The Gospel according to John](#) (p. 171). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

² Osborne, G. R. (2018). [John: Verse by Verse](#). (J. Reimer, E. Ritzema, D. Thevenaz, & R. Brant, Eds.) (pp. 64–65). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

#3. KEY. The meaning involves taking a dead, impotent, religious tradition and bringing about a transformation that is gloriously rich beyond expectation.

Main Point

John's point is simply that Jesus will take the purification rituals of Israel and replace them with a decisively new way of purification.

Stated differently, Jesus' ministry is to replace what is an empty religion, that can never truly cleanse a person with a divine miracle that makes a person totally different in nature and totally glorious in value. Let me illustrate this:

A neighbor comes to you and is overwhelmed by their sin – let's say it's a porn addiction. You could take them to the earthly purification pots of this world. You could take them through the various steps designed to help their problem. Guess what, it won't work. Jesus comes along and says, "You don't need to have your hands washed, you need to be remade into an entirely new person, you need to be made into a new creation." You don't need a rehabilitation program, you need to be born again. The first approach is temporary and therapeutic. The second approach is permanent and glorious.

(Just as a side note. This same message is going to be re-enforced as John next shows Jesus cleansing the Temple and then speaking to Nicodemus about the New Birth)

So how is this applied?

Application

To John's original audience. If you were a Jew, scattered by Rome to Asia Minor, separated by a generation from the life of Christ, what would John be saying to you. You are wondering what has happened to your faith, your religion. Your holy city is demolished. Your Temple destroyed. John comes presenting a man called Jesus. He describes him as the eternal, self-existent God in the flesh. But many of your forefathers did not receive him (1:11). John the Baptist told the Jewish leaders that they didn't even know the Christ (1:26). John wrote of many key witnesses who did however affirm Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, the expectant Prophet and King.

But what of our religion? What about our ceremonies and practices? Well John had already prepared them for the reality that this Jesus who created the world, would also bring to pass a new creation, a creation born of the Father. And now John shares with great insight that the old order of things that only accomplished outward and temporary cleansing would be replaced by a work that not only cleaned by brought about a completely different nature and substance; one that was lavish and glorious; one that was exorbitant, satisfying and incredible.

And, that's the message for you and me today, too. Judaism was incapable of bringing about lasting change. Only Christ through the New Birth, through a New Creation could accomplish this. Paul called this work of Christ, glorious. He wrote:

“For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.” (2 Corinthians 3:9–11, ESV)

Compared to the New Covenant, a covenant based upon the transforming work of the Spirit, the Old Covenant has no glory at all in comparison. The work of Christ is not to give you a bath, it is to transform you inside out.

Exhortation

So, my question this morning based upon this story is, “Have you been born again?” What does it look like to be born-again? The New Birth is nothing less than a radical reorientation of life. When a person experiences the New Birth their whole fabric of life is altered. Your thoughts, emotions, choices, and behaviors are all new. The old is not repaired; the old is made new. Do you see that evidence in your life?

Rick has chosen to conclude this service with the singing of Holy, Holy, Holy. That song describes what a Christian longs for. It's a life that from the dawn of the day seeks to walk in harmony with their God. And it's a life that throughout the day seeks to live to the praise of God. It's a hymn of commitment. May it be ours as we sing together.