

## **Wedding, Water & Wine**

### **John 2:1-11**

Do you like a good wedding? Presumably most Australians do. Think of the media-hype that surrounds some celebrity weddings.

- They try to hold them in some secret location.
- They try to sell the rights to exclusive photos to some women's magazine.
- The rest of the paparazzi are buzzing round in helicopters with huge lenses on their cameras trying to get scoop photos.

They only do that because they know it sells magazines. They know we want to know. I use "we" rather loosely there, because I couldn't care less. But I assume I'm in the small minority. They don't pay big money if they know it won't sell.

### **The Wedding Process**

John tells us a story about a wedding – although the wedding's just the backdrop to what's going on. The story's really about Jesus and what Jesus does. John's built up the expectation so far.

- He's told us about John the Baptist – and how he did his job of preparing the way for Jesus.
- He's told us how several guys got to meet Jesus – and tantalised us with a whole string of different titles they use to describe Jesus.

Now he gets down to business. He wants us to believe in Jesus. So he goes about presenting the evidence as to why we should believe in Jesus.

Now, not everyone does weddings the same way. For example, in Papua New Guinea, a big part of the mar-

riage process is the payment of what we Westerners call the "bride-price". It's a complicated process.

- First, the actual amount's negotiated between the father of the bride and his clan and the groom and his clan. That could take some time. It could also involve threats, angry outbursts, lots of bargaining and insults of the bride's abilities.
- Then, the groom collects the agreed amount from among his relatives. He does this even if he can afford to pay the entire thing himself.
- When the amount's collected, there's an elaborate ceremony where the groom's clan delivers it to the bride's clan. Usually it ends with a feast.

The process cements the new relationship between the two clans. That's its main purpose. It's totally foreign to how we do things.

In first-century Jewish culture, they also did things a bit differently from us. One has to do with the length of the celebrations.

- For us, everything's usually over on the day of the wedding. We have the ceremony. We have the meal. The bride and groom go off on their honeymoon. All the guests go home. You miss that day, you've missed out altogether.
- For them, the celebrations could last for a week. They had their ceremony and then they feasted and feasted and feasted. Invited guests didn't necessarily stay for the whole week. They could come and go. This feast may have been going a few days before Jesus and His disciples arrive.

Another difference. For us, it's traditional for the bride's parents to be responsible for the food and the groom's

parents for the drink. For them, the whole responsibility lay with the groom. It was his job to make sure everyone got enough. To run out of supplies caused great shame for the groom. It could even lead to a lawsuit from the bride's parents. You can imagine the ads on TV.

You've just lost your daughter to that handsome cad. There's a big hole that she once filled. We know money can't replace her, but it can distract you from the pain. Were you satisfied with the feast at the wedding? Did your son-in-law kick you out before you were ready to say good-bye? We can help you get that wedding-blues overseas holiday.

Another difference pops up in verse 6: six stone water jars. I don't think I've ever seen anything quite like that at an Australian wedding. Normally, these jars would have water in them. The water was used for the ritual washing of various utensils and the guests' hands. We use kitchens and bathrooms instead.

### The Second Difficulty

So, they did some things a little differently. Jesus and His disciples are at this wedding when a difficulty arises. Verse 3:

*When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to Him, "They have no more wine."*

That's what I'm going to call the first difficulty. Stories have to have some difficulty – something that causes some tension. If I say to you:

The sky was blue. The grass was green. The flowers were blooming.

It all makes sense – but you wonder why I'm telling you. There's no tension – no problem – nothing to be solved – nothing to get your interest. You're waiting for the *but*.

Well, this is the *but* in John's story. The wine ran out. This is the social blunder. Will this groom be able to show his face in public again? Are the guests about to lynch him? Are the bride's parents already looking for the phone number of that lawyer?

But, before we get to that, I want to deal with what I call the second difficulty. Verse 4:

*Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come.*

The first bit's difficult to translate. Literally, Jesus says: *what to me and to you*. The sense is:

- What have I to do with you?
- What have you to do with me?
- What do you and I have in common?

Is this a proper way for Jesus to treat His mother?

- The form of address – *woman* – is courteous; but it's not the way a son would normally address his mother. It's too formal. It implies more distance in the relationship than would be usual.
- And there is a rebuke here – relatively gentle and formally courteous, but a rebuke nonetheless.

When you boil it down to basics, Jesus is letting His mother know that she's not setting His agenda.

Why does Jesus come? He's pretty clear about it later. Flick over to John 6:38

*For I have come down from heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent Me.*

Who is it who determines what Jesus does? Every Tom, Dick and Harry that crosses His path? Every person who's got plans for the Messiah and wants Jesus to fit into

those? Anyone who's good at manipulating people and getting their own way? None of them. It's God who determines what Jesus does and doesn't do.

Now, I'm not suggesting Mary was being manipulative at this point – nor that she had any agenda other than to help her friends. I'm not even sure what she expected Jesus to do about it. None of that changes what happens here. He makes it quite clear His agenda won't be set by her. She doesn't have an "inside track". Neither does anyone else. It's all about His divine mission.

He picks it up here by saying: *My time [or My hour] has not yet come.* This is a significant statement in John's account. John keeps drawing our attention to the fact that Jesus' hour has not yet come – until you get to John 12:23 when Jesus says:

*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*

The Son of Man's a title Jesus uses to refer to Himself. It too comes from the Old Testament – but we're not going to look at it this morning. How is Jesus glorified? Well, He goes on to tell us.

*I 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.*

And down to verse 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. Father, glorify Your name!*

Jesus' time – Jesus' hour – Jesus' glorification – is His execution and resurrection. That's why He came – to die. That's how He fulfils His mission. Back here in chapter 2, that hour hasn't come yet. That hour won't be deter-

mined by His mother – nor by any other human. They don't set Jesus' agenda.

### **The First Difficulty**

So, back to the first difficulty. While that hour hasn't come, still Jesus sees here an opportunity to provide an acted out parable – a sign. And so He does something about the socially embarrassing situation.

Most people know about this story. Jesus turns water into wine. Unfortunately, the reason most people know about this story has something to do with alcohol.

- People who want to argue against alcohol try to cut this story out of their Bibles – or explain it in some other terms.
- People who want to argue for alcohol – especially those who tend towards an unwise use of alcohol – love to point to this story.

That's part of the story – but if that's all you see, you've missed the main point by a long way. You've put up a smokescreen. All you see is the smoke. You miss the fire.

This is a miracle. It's not a fairy-tale with a moral in the end. It's not some legend that grew over time. It's real-life history. Now, I don't know if you've ever tried to do this yourself. You know those things you see on TV where they put up the warning:

This is dangerous. Filmed under strict conditions.

Don't try this at home.

This isn't like that. If you're old enough to have a bath by yourself, I give you permission to try this one out. Just one piece of advice: you may want to wait till everyone else is out of the house – for your own sake, not theirs.

Get a bucket of water – or, if you think a bucket's a bit big, try it with a glass. Concentrate all your mind's power on it and see if you can turn it into wine. If you want to add a few actions – wave your arms around, walk round the bucket three times, that sort of thing – feel free. Add some words if you like. Ever tried it? I suspect not. We know we can't do it. We don't waste our time.

Maybe you've seen a magician turn a glass of water into something that looks like wine. You know there's some trick to what he's done.

- Maybe he secretly switched glasses.
- Maybe he used mirrors.
- Maybe he had something up his sleeve.

You may not know how he did it, but you know he hasn't really turned water into wine – that's just not something we can do.

But it's what Jesus does. He literally changes water into wine – H<sub>2</sub>O into CH<sub>3</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>OH. No party tricks. No mirrors. Nothing up His sleeves. From what John tells us, Jesus doesn't even go near the water or the jars. He does it to meet a real need. He does it quietly – most of the people at the wedding don't even know what's gone on.

How can He do that sort of stuff? Who is this man who can do such things? Think back to the opening verses of John's book. John's already told us:

- He's the Word who was in the beginning with God and is Himself God.
- He's the Word through whom all creation came into existence.

- He's the Word become flesh.

He made all this stuff in the first place. He made it out of nothing. He has the power of creation. What's changing a few molecules around compared with that?

John concludes this incident in verse 11:

*This, 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.*

He uses some very significant words.

The first is *sign* – the NIV translates it *miraculous sign*. I don't think that's a helpful translation at this point. It's not that it's a wrong translation – the Greek word can have that sense. But the basic meaning is simply *sign* – the idea that it's showing something significant.

Please note: it's not that I don't think it's a miracle – I've already clearly said it is. And there's nothing wrong with seeing it as a *miraculous sign* – as such it points to something very significant.

- It points to an impressive show of power.
- It points to Jesus' ability.
- It points to who Jesus is.
- It signifies that Jesus truly is the Word become flesh – it has that sign value.

That's all true. I'm not questioning that.

And John does intend us to see that. He shows us that by using a second significant word here: *glory*. This is an important word for John – he uses it quite a lot in telling us about Jesus. Remember back to John 1:14

*The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and*

*Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

The Word who was with God in the beginning and is Himself God and who therefore is glorious beyond our wildest imaginations. There's nothing to compare with His glory. Think of all the positive superlatives you can dream up – they're all applicable. This One became flesh and lived among us. The Infinite clothed Himself with the finite. The Glorious covered Himself with ordinary humanity. Yet, His glory was still shown. This wedding at Cana is one of those occasions when John saw Jesus' glory. For those with eyes to see, it's a demonstration – a sign – of His God-ness.

But if that's all we see – I hesitate to put it that way, because that's a pretty big thing – and if that's all you see you've still seen something absolutely crucial and it would be enough. But if that's all we see, I think we've missed something fairly significant that John wants to tell us.

There's also something a bit more subtle here. Back in verse 6, John tells us about the six stone water jars. He could have left it at just that. That's all we needed to know to understand the miracle. But he doesn't leave it there – he explains what these jars are. They're *the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing*. They're part of the Jewish religious laws and regulations and customs and culture.

Remember, there are expectations in the air. The Jews had been waiting ages for the Old Testament prophecies to be fulfilled – for the Messiah to come. John the Baptist stirred up their hopes. One of the images the Old

Testament uses to speak of the new age God would bring is new wine. You can see it in Joel 2:18-19

*Then the LORD will be jealous for His land  
and take pity on His people.*

*The LORD will reply to them:*

*"I am sending you grain, new wine and oil,  
enough to satisfy you fully;*

And then down to verses 23-24:

*Be glad, O people of Zion,  
rejoice in the LORD your God,*

*for He has given you*

*the autumn rains in righteousness.*

*He sends you abundant showers,*

*both autumn and spring rains, as before.*

*The threshing floors will be filled with grain;*

*the vats will overflow with new wine and oil.*

Or, we read earlier from Amos 9:13-14

*"The days are coming, " declares the Lord,*

*"when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman*

*and the planter by the one treading grapes.*

*New wine will drip from the mountains,*

*and flow from all the hills.*

*I will bring back my exiled people Israel'*

*They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them.*

*They will plant vineyards and drink their wine;*

*They will make gardens and eat their fruit.*

Jesus' *hour* has not yet come – but He gives a sign that points towards it. He is the Messiah. He is the Promised One. He's the One bringing in God's new age.

These six stone jars remind us of the old order of Jewish laws and religious practices. This was a good thing. Don't downplay this. Don't think you can come up with

something better – as if something we made up would be better than something God established. This was something God Himself provided to prepare people's minds and hearts for the coming of His kingdom. But it was never intended to be permanent. God always knew it would give way to what He'd do in Jesus.

This Jewish system spoke of purification – that's good for we humans certainly needed purification. Our supposed goodness is pathetic in God's sight – and we're stained filthy by all our failure to truly treat God as God. We needed purification and this system spoke of it. But it failed to deliver in any permanent way. The people had to be purified again and again. There was no finality to it; no permanence; no ultimate relief from the need to be purified again and again.

Jesus brings God's kingdom. He replaces the old water of Jewish religious practices with the new wine of God's feast. The new age has dawned because Jesus has come – but it's also still coming because His *hour* has not yet come. When it does come, true purification will be provided – purification that deals with our filth completely and permanently.

### **The Appropriate Response**

What's the appropriate response to all this? That brings us to the third highly significant word John uses in verse 11: *faith*. Lots of people have trouble with this word. They think it's a special religious word. They think it's something difficult – something religious people have to work up to, but ordinary people just can't get there.

But it's not like that – at least, not what *faith* describes.

It's an ordinary, everyday sort of experience. It's simply another word for *trust*.

- If I say trust your word, it's the same as saying I have faith in your word – that I believe what you say, that I'm willing to rely on it, that I'll act on the basis that you've said it.
- If I go mountain climbing with a group of people, I'll need to trust their ability and the equipment we use – or I'll need to have faith in their ability and have faith in the soundness of the equipment.

That's all faith is. And so the important question is not so much trust or faith – it's what I'm trusting or putting my faith in. Is it reasonable to trust that person or that thing? Do I have good grounds for thinking they're reliable?

John tells us these disciples saw what Jesus did – they saw the evidence of His glory – and they put their trust in Him. What they saw confirmed the things they hoped for back in chapter 1. They thought they had pretty good reason to trust this Messiah. Was their trust perfect? No – you find that out as more events unfold. Yet they did trust.

But John doesn't tell us this incident just so we can see his faith – so that we can think what a wonderful person he was for trusting Jesus. That's not it at all. He tells us his reason at the end – John 20:31

*These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.*

*Believe* is another word like *trust* and *faith*.

John writes in order that others also may believe – that I may believe; that you may believe. So that's the question:

Do you have faith in Jesus?

- Do you recognise what John writes about Jesus is true?
- Do you acknowledge Jesus as the Word become flesh – the One who has the power to change water into wine?

If you have, you'll know it's changed your life – as radically as water being changed to wine. You'll have seen His glory. And having seen His glory, you'll know the only option is to submit to Him. In a very real sense, that's another word for *trust*.

- When I come across an expert – someone who knows more about something than me – I trust his opinion; I submit my thinking to his expertise.
- When I come across God – someone who is the expert in every area – I trust His opinion; I submit my thinking to His expertise. I don't continue to think I know better than He. I don't presume that I can give Him advice.

If you don't have faith in Jesus, then you've missed the sign. And a question for you to consider – especially if you want to disagree with this eye-witness account of John: Do you have good evidence not to believe in Jesus?