

**The Jesus Way** / THE WAY OF FAITH  
**Transformation**  
John 2:1-11

Some time ago a young man – let’s call him Andrew – began thinking of marriage. He was freaked out about the whole thing, but he knew what he wanted in a wife, and he started looking. He went out of his way to meet new girls, but only one stole his heart – let’s call her Anna. He worked his way into a relationship with her, and to his great joy, she returned his affection. They fell in love and one evening he proposed. Their families were thrilled, and word spread quickly among their friends. Andrew and Anna couldn’t hide their joy as they started planning their wedding. They chose the date. They contacted the minister. They talked about the flowers and the candles and the ceremony and the food. Then the guest list: whom to invite? They started compiling names. Their parents and grandparents and relatives, of course. Their friends. Their work associates. And then Andrew said something interesting, or maybe it was Anna. “What would you think if we invited Jesus Himself? Let’s add him to the wedding list just as we would invite anyone else. Let’s send him a formal invitation to be a part of our marriage.”

So they did. And Jesus Christ came. Now, when Jesus attends a wedding, you never know what will happen. What happened on this occasion is recorded in the Gospel of John, chapter 2. Jesus took the opportunity to perform his first miracle – the turning of water into wine. We pick up the account in verse 1.<sup>1</sup>

On the third day<sup>ii</sup> a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. 2:1a

It all happened at Cana in Galilee. That’s like saying that Jesus’ first miracle took place in Dallas, *i.e.* Dallas, Oregon! When my daughter first introduced me to her husband-to-be, she said he was from Dallas. Having lived in Dallas, Texas I just assumed that’s what she was talking about. Not being a native Oregonian, I learned for the first time some things about Dallas, Oregon. Same name, just a slight difference in population (by about four million people). Cana of Galilee was like that. In fact, that’s why it’s always referred to as “Cana of Galilee” (2:1, 11; 4:46; 21:2). Otherwise, nobody would know where it was! In fact, biblical scholars took 1800 years before they could figure out just where this town was. The most probable site is about 9 miles to the north of Nazareth. Jesus ministry, like his birth, began in a small, unimportant town, among common every day folk like you and me.

**TRANSFORMATION:** It’s not for the sophisticated, but the simple - those humble enough to recognize their need.

The context of the story is a wedding feast. In Jewish culture, this could last up to a week. Following the engagement, which could last up to a year, the bridegroom – accompanied by his friends – would go to the home of the bride. This often took place late at night, as seen in the parable of the ten virgins of Matthew 25. He would then lead his bride back to his home, the way lit by torches. Nuts, oil and wine would be distributed to the guests and festive music played along the way. Once back at the home of the bridegroom, there is feasting with music and songs (Jeremiah 24:8; 34:16). That is what we see here in John 2.

Verse 1 goes on to tell us that Jesus' mother was there.

Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.  
2:1b-2

Jesus' mother was there, but no mention is made of Joseph. It may be that he had already died by this time. And then Jesus arrives, possibly a day or two after the week-long festivities had already begun. His very presence at this happy event says a lot. Not only does it say that Jesus honored marriage and family life,<sup>iii</sup> but he also approved of having fun. He liked parties (Matt. 9:14; 11:19; Luke 15:2). In fact, he liked parties so much that he was accused (wrongly so) of being a "glutton and a drunkard" and (rightly so) "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 11:19). Jesus is the kind of guy you want at your party. No one ever accused Jesus of promoting a rigid, legalistic, party-poopier religion.

I suspect Jesus was a personal friend of this family, since he was personally invited to this wedding feast. Maybe the family of the honored couple had bought wood products from the "Joseph & Sons Carpentry" shop. Jesus had been invited, but *not* his disciples. Contrary to the English translation of this verse, the invitation had been extended to Jesus alone. The disciples were simply tagging along. These five disciples – Andrew, John, Peter, Philip and Nathanael – had only been following Jesus for two days. The wedding invitations had been sent out long before that! I have a hunch...though I can't prove it. It may well be that these five unexpected guests are the reason that the wine ran out! Look at verse 3.

When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." 2:3

No doubt about it, this passage is about *wine*, not grape juice. Otherwise, the comments about being *potentially* drunk would have little meaning. But was this wine comparable to the French *Beaujolais* or Oregonian *Chardonney* of today? As I've studied this again over the past week, I've been impacted with the fact that the wine of the Greek and Jewish world in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century was diluted. The common ratio was 2-3 parts water, 1 part wine.<sup>iv</sup> However, it could be as high as 20 parts water to 1 part wine or as low as 1 part water, 1 part wine. In Jesus' day, drinking wine unmixed was looked upon as a barbarian custom. Even wine that was 1 part water, 1 part wine was considered "strong wine." To put this into perspective, to consume the amount of alcohol in two martinis, you would have to drink over 22 glasses of the diluted wine (3 parts water, 1 part wine) of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. That would probably affect your bladder long before it affects your mind!<sup>v</sup>

Now this was an embarrassing situation – the wine had run out! This was a blatant social faux pax that could in some cases result in a lawsuit by the bride's parents against the family of the groom! This was no small mistake. Maybe Mary was thinking, "Look, Jesus. We sent out the RSVP's months ago. We had no idea that you would be bringing along unexpected guests. See the predicament we're in? Your rag-tag band of followers has caused this mess, now fix it!"

She could have been thinking that. But I believe her reasoning went more along these lines: "Jesus, I know you were born supernaturally. I saw your response in the Temple at the age of 12 and your need to be 'about your Father's business.' And I believe that even now, our problem is

nothing that a miracle can't cure. So Son, now is your opportunity!" I get that from the following verse:

"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." 2:4

Jesus' reply has often been misunderstood. The term "woman" is not a term of reproach, but of respect. Today it would be equivalent to our "Ma'am" or "Madam." The question "Why do you involve me?" means more literally, "What do you and I have in common?" In other words, Jesus is saying, "Mom, you and I are no longer on common ground." "Mom, I'm not just the son of Mary; I'm the Son of God."

But then Jesus adds: "My time has not yet come." More literally, he says, "My *hour* has not yet come." Jesus often refers to his "hour" in the gospels. And when you compare all the passages, it becomes clear that he's talking about the period of time from his crucifixion to his coming reign on earth.<sup>vi</sup> You see, Mary's focus was on the crown. Mary wanted her son to show himself in such a way that would usher in the Kingdom...*now*. But for Jesus, the cross comes before the crown. His "hour" had not yet come.<sup>vii</sup>

Mary wanted the crown without the cross. Jesus' disciples wanted the crown without the cross. You and I often want the crown without the cross. But for deep transformation to happen, there is a price to pay.

Though put off, Mary still expects a miracle.

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 2:5

"Whatever he says to you, do it" Just Do It! Jesus is about to work a miracle. But it doesn't do it without human agents. Jesus could have just snapped his fingers and made fresh wine appear in everyone's cup. Wouldn't that have been impressive? But that would not involve any step of faith or obedience. It's been said, "Without God, man cannot; without man, God will not." God wants to work in your life and through your life. But it takes a step of obedient faith.

"Do whatever he tells you." What is God telling you to do? Well, you don't have to look too far to know. It's written right here. "Lord, show me whether or not I should divorce my spouse" Stop it! In 99.9% of situations, the Lord has already given you the answer. "Don't do it!" Do whatever he tells you, and he tells you right here in His Word. So here's where things get exciting.

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. John 2:6

Before a meal, servants would pour water over the hands of every guest. This was not so much for hygienic reasons as for ceremonial reasons. John goes out of his way to say that these water jars were used for "ceremonial cleansing." In other words, they represent the ceremonial laws of Judaism that were burdensome and oppressive. While the Old Testament does speak of ceremonial cleansing for priests, later Jewish tradition added on all sorts of burdensome rules extending the regulations to everyone. These are recounted in this book, the *Mishnah*. The entire

sixth tractate is dedicated to these rules. Such ceremonial cleansing could clean the outside, but it was powerless to cleanse the inside.

Today, we may not ceremonially wash our hands. But we are experts at making things look good on the outside. We might get a new hairdo or a new wardrobe. We might lose weight or lift weights to look better. But Jesus doesn't want to change your looks; he wants to change your heart. He doesn't want to give you a new clothes, he wants to make you a new person. He doesn't want to rearrange you, he wants to transform you. You want to look better on the outside, and he wants to make you new on the inside. And when that transformation takes place, it will show on the outside.

Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. 2:7

John makes it clear that these servants filled the huge water jars "to the brim." In other words, there's no room for Jesus or his wanna-be followers to sneak around and secretly add enough solution to make it *look like* a miracle had happened. Nor is there the chance that these jars had the residue of grapes in them. They had been strictly used for ceremonial washing. No, when Jesus changed the water into wine, he did not just change the color and fool the people's taste buds — he actually and miraculously changed the water into wine. The entire process of planting, growth, fruit bearing, harvest, and production of the wine itself is compressed into a fragment of time.

Something else I see here. Jesus could have said, "Well, they've run out of wine. Poor organization, guys! You always need to plan for more than you expect!" Not so. Jesus is concerned with the everyday things in life that we face.

If he were a little god he would only be able to take care of the big things. But since our God is a big God he is able to take care of the little things...like the lack of wine at a wedding party, like the bumper fender you had the other day, like the bill that is overdue, like the .... You name it! He sees every sparrow that falls to the ground. He keeps track of the number of hairs on your head. He calls the stars by name. He is a great God who is too big *not* to be concerned about the everyday, little things of your life.

Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." 2:8

The "master of the banquet" is the fellow who was both MC and head waiter, the expert connoisseur. He would be the one who would be the most qualified to objectively determine both the quality of the wine as well as the reality of the miracle.

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." 2:8-10

Obviously, the waiter is surprised that the best wine had been saved until now. The normal procedure would be to serve the best wine first, and then after the guest's tastes were dulled, to serve the inferior wine.

Jesus always saves the best till last. The culture around us puts its best up front and things go downhill from there. But when God shows up things go from good to best. "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Now some have concluded from this passage – and particularly the remarks of the Master of Ceremonies – that Jesus condoned drunkenness. Remember, we're talking here about 120-180 gallons of wine! But this couldn't be the case. First of all, as we've seen this is diluted wine. Second, while the Bible nowhere teaches total abstinence, it clearly condemns drunkenness.<sup>viii</sup> As for the MC's comment, these are simply the words of a professional connoisseur. He's simply stating that this is the normal procedure. It does not imply that on this occasion Mary and the other people attending the wedding feast were drunk by this time.

Well, the passage concludes by saying:

This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him. 2:11

This was Jesus' first miraculous sign. In other words, all the fanciful miracles referred to in what are called the Apocryphal gospels (that have become so popular lately) are only the figment of one's creative imagination. But the fact that this miracle is a "sign" says that there is more here than meets the eye. Not only does this miraculous sign point to the fact that Jesus is who he claims to be, the Son of God. But it says more. It says that in this miracle there are important lessons for you and me. These have to do with *transformation*.

Let me ask you: Do you want this deep transformation in your life?

It's for the simple, not the sophisticated. It's for those who are humble enough to recognize their need.

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<sup>i</sup> I am indebted to the excellent article on this passage by Stanley Toussaint, "The Significance of the First Sign in John's Gospel," *BibliothecaSacra* (January – March, 1977, Vol. 134, no. 533), 45-51.

<sup>ii</sup> John tells us that this well-known event took place on the "third day." We've already seen in chapter one that several days have been mentioned in this the first week of Jesus' public ministry (John 1:29, 35, 43). During the first two days, the initial five disciples were called and began following Jesus. It's now the third day.

<sup>iii</sup> The Book of Common Prayer refers to marriage as a "holy estate" which Christ "ordained and beautified with this presence and first miracle that he [performed] in Cana of Galilee."

<sup>iv</sup> See Norman L. Geisler, "A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking," *BibliothecaSacra* (January-March, 1982, Vol. 139, No. 553), 46-56; Robert Stein, "Wine-Drinking in New Testament Times," *Christianity Today* (June 20, 1975), 9-11.

<sup>v</sup> A statement coined by Robert Stein in article "Wine-Drinking in New Testament Times."

<sup>vi</sup> John 7:30; 8:20; 7:6-8; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1.

<sup>vii</sup> What was foreshadowed at Cana became a reality at the cross. For parallels between the two events and the crucial role of Mary in both, see James M. Howard, "The Significance of Minor Characters in the Gospel of John," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (163 (Jan – Mar, 2006): 63-78.

<sup>viii</sup> Hab. 2:15; Luke 21:34; Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18.