

**THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel - Part nine**

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Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

**THE BEGINNING OF THE SIGNS - THE BEST HAS COME IN JESUS CHRIST**

**John 2:1-11** - "On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. [2] Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. [3] When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." [4] And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." [5] His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." [6] Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. [7] Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. [8] And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. [9] When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom [10] and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." [11] This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him."

The significance of this miracle is stated by the Apostle John in the eleventh verse of our text - "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him."

Notice that phrase, "the first of his signs." It means what Jesus did here is part of an unfolding story. It doesn't reveal everything, but it starts placing the glory of Jesus before our eyes. This is the point where Jesus *began* manifesting Himself. This was the *opening act* of a much longer and larger play on the stage of the New Covenant.

And something else. That word "*sign*" means more than *miracle* or even *wonder*. It means the event described is about *more than the event itself*. That's important when we start dealing with the details of the turning of water into wine. That word sign means the event isn't really about water or wine. It means those elements point to something else. They tell us something about Jesus and His great mission here on earth. We'll come back to this in a minute.

There is a troubling element in this text as well. We are brought face to face with the uncomfortable tone in Jesus' remarks to His own mother. His words feel out of proportion to her simple comments about the wine running out. We'll have to come to terms with that in this teaching.

1) **WHERE DOES MARY GET HER EXPECTATION THAT JESUS CAN HELP WITH HER REQUEST?**

**John 2:1-3** - "On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. [2] Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. [3] When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, They have no wine."

We keep wishing for more details than the Apostle John gives. All we know is Mary, Jesus' mother, comes to *Him*, not the "*master of the feast*" (8), nor the "*bridegroom*" (9). So clearly Mary feels Jesus is the one who needs to know about this situation, even though the text makes clear He is merely an *invited guest* (2).

We also know this is the very *first* sign Jesus performed - **John 2:11** - "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory...." While I've already mentioned this, it's significant here because it begs the question, if Jesus had done no miracles before this occasion, what made Mary think He could help? What was she expecting from Jesus? Where did her faith come from?

And the only explanation plausible is Mary, more than anyone else up to this point, knew something of the supernatural nature of Jesus from the evidence in her own physical body at the time of *Jesus' conception*. She would also have the stored up evidence of the words she had heard years ago from the aged priest, *Simeon*:

**Luke 2:25-35** - "Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. [26] And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. [27] And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, [28] he took him up in

his arms and blessed God and said, [29] 'Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; [30] for my eyes have seen your salvation [31] that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, [32] a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." [33] And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. [34] And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed [35] (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

So Mary knows this much. She remembers the Spirit of God moving on her own body in the miraculous conception of Jesus. She remembers Simeon clearly identifying Jesus as the Christ, God's promised Messiah. She knew from Simeon's words that her Son's mission was to reach the whole world - Gentile and Jew - with God's promised salvation.

And now she comes to Jesus in hope. The life lesson here is store up the truth of God's Word in your heart. Cherish it and meditate on it. Don't squeeze it out with a dozen and one TV programs and movies.

I'm so convinced it is impossible to follow Jesus seriously in this light-weight world unless you develop the habit of reading Christian books that deepen your grasp of God's Word. You will never ever follow Jesus just because you think you *should* or would *like to*. You have to *do something* to keep faith alive in your heart. If you make the effort every day for at least half an hour you will actually *notice* a change in your whole life. Just try it. If you keep the things of God alive in your mind it will give confidence and faith down the road in situations you can't even imagine yet.

## 2) WHEN MARY ASKS JESUS FOR HELP HE SEEMS TO GIVE HER A RATHER COLD RESPONSE

John 2:3-4 - "When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' [4] And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.'"

Really? "Woman, what does this have to do with me?" Not even, "Mother, what does this have to do with me?" What kind of response is that to Mary's question?

And the answer to the *first* part of verse 4 comes from the *last* part of verse 4 - "And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.'" Those words speak of a sense of *calling* and *mission* in Jesus' life.

There are very significant things tied in with this first sign:

John 2:11 - "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him."

And right at the *beginning* of everything else Jesus will do while on this earth it's vitally important that everyone understand He isn't here like some political glad-hander, back-slapper, doing His own thing. It's a vital point of understanding - right at the beginning of His mission - that He's the "Lamb of God...." Make no mistake, Mary, your son is God's Lamb.

And - think about this - quite naturally, the people who would have the hardest time appreciating the *abnormality* of such a divine calling would be those who *most naturally* had the right to assume to control Jesus' life - His earthly parents.

So it's precisely *because* Mary is Jesus' mother that He *must*, for the salvation of mankind, openly display His understanding of the primary authority and mission of His earthly glory and work. This *first* sign of who He is and what He can do isn't up to anyone but the Father in heaven. And it's ultimately most loving and beneficial for *Mary* in the long run if Jesus makes this clear.

We will see this same point needing clarification again a little later in Jesus' life with His parents - Luke 2:48-51 - "And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." [49] And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" [50] And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. [51] And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart."

3)

**IT IS A BEAUTIFUL THING THAT MARY CAN TAKE A REBUKE FROM JESUS AND STILL CONTINUE TO OBEY JESUS**

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

True, there is *timing* that is sovereignly the Father's. But Mary can *trust* even when she has to learn to *wait*. Mary had to have a moment of *humble learning* to submit to her Son, as the Messiah. But having *learned* such humility and patience, she *commends* the same kind of *submissive obedience* to those around her.

She wasn't *miffed* or *self-justifying* in any way. This is the difference between *blowing it for a moment and then quickly recovering* or *having your heart numbed and diseased by missing the simple healing of quickly receiving divine grace*.

Remember, it's what you *do* when you mess up that determines the direction of the rest of your life. Study carefully and don't miss the beauty of the *quick turn-around* that Mary makes - **John 2:4-5** - "...Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.'....'Do whatever he tells you.'" That's beautiful.

4)

**THE MEANING OF THE SIGN - THE BEST HAS COME IN JESUS CHRIST**

**John 2:6-10** - "Now there were six stone water jars there *for the Jewish rites of purification*, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. [7] Jesus said to the servants, '*Fill the jars with water.*' *And they filled them up to the brim.* [8] And he said to them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.' So they took it. [9] When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom [10] and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.'"

Moving quickly, take note of the instruction in **verse 7** - "Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them to the brim." Remember, there was no shortage of *water*. And we're immediately clued in that John means for us to understand this as a miracle of *replacement*, not *creation*.

If the water pots were empty, Jesus could have just *created* wine within them. But Jesus specifically requests that the empty jars be *filled to the brim* with water first. Then the water is *replaced* or *morphed* - you find the better word - into wine.

Why does this matter? I think it explains what this *sign* is all about. It's what makes the *sign* more than just a *miracle*. There is a *meaning* in it. And the meaning, I think, is found in the fact that John stressed the detail that these huge containers were the "...six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification..."(2:6). And the reason John also records the detail of the huge amount of water they held (30 gallons each - times 6 - 180 gallons - **verse 6**) is we're immediately reminded that these Jews performed a *lot* of ceremonial purification washes.

And they were all still trapped in their own sin and unchanged hearts. Still unclean after all that water and scrubbing. But now we have the *very first sign* revealing Jesus' glory as God the Son. And now something better than all that purifying water is finally on the scene. Truly, the best has come at the very last.

In other words, this sign unfolds in visible detail the point the Apostle John made in his introduction to all the events of his account. ***Knowing*** John would open his record with the account of this first sign of Jesus' glory, John prepared us for understanding it in **1:17** - "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

Grace and truth have *replaced* the ineffective water of the law. They make clean what all those washings never could. And this idea of the saving power of the kingdom being likened to wine was reinforced by Jesus Himself:

**Mark 2:21-22** - "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. [22] And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins."

The same idea is unpacked. The old and new don't mix. In the first of John's signs, the water isn't *blended* with the wine. It must be replaced. The law came first, to be sure. There was *water* in those huge purification jars. But the wine *replaces* the water.

No wonder John's first sign wraps up with those words of the master of the feast - ***"...You have kept the good wine until now" (10)***. What a perfect depiction of the situation that has now happily come with the arrival of Jesus Christ. Jesus is truly God's best. To receive Him is to receive the best. To know Him is to know the best.

And **verse 11** makes it clear that the sign isn't about wine. It's about faith - growing, maturing, life-giving faith - in Jesus Christ - **"This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him."**