

Water into Wine

Please note that this article is also available as an audio file if you wish to hear it read, rather than reading it yourself.

This week's bible reading is from the Gospel of John, chapter 2 verses 1 -11.

Introduction

Love and marriage: two things that are very much at the heart of human relationships and human society. So much of what makes life worth living, revolve around love and marriage. Well, in our reading today, we have a wedding celebration, and it's on this very happy and important occasion that Jesus performs, what John tells us, was his very first miracle.

However, before we explore that further, it's important to bear in mind that Jesus' miracles always serve a serious purpose and are always done for a very clear reason. As I've said before, Jesus didn't go around performing random miracles, willy-nilly, here and there as the mood took Him. The miracles that Jesus performed (or 'signs' as John calls them) always served a 'heavenly' purpose, as well as a practical, earthly purpose -because they are indeed 'signs', telling us something crucial about who Jesus is and why He had come, and that's certainly the case here at the wedding in Cana.

The Wedding

Cana of course, is a real town about 3.5 miles north-east of Nazareth, and the wedding that Jesus attended was an actual event -this is not a parable or a story, but a real historical event, that John has recorded for us – he was an eye witness. He tells us that Mary was there and Jesus' disciples were also present as well. The actual miracle itself only arises, when, half-way through the banquet, the wine runs out. Bear in mind that the whole village would have been present, and such feasts could continue for several days. Running out of wine on such an occasion, was a big embarrassment for the bridegroom and his family. So Mary tells Jesus what has happened, but initially He seems reluctant to get involved.

"Why do you involve me?" Jesus replied.

'My time has not yet come'."

A Mother's Tale

It's a good question. Why did Mary tell Jesus that the wine had run out? What was she expecting Him to do? He could hardly pop down to the local off-licence and buy some more. We know from John that this is Jesus' first 'sign', so we can reasonably assume that even Mary hadn't seen Jesus

perform a miracle yet. But it would seem clear from her approach to Jesus, that she knew that God was with Him in a very special way. Even if she didn't know exactly what Jesus might do, she certainly seemed to know that He could do something. So, even without the evidence of a miracle; without knowing the full extent of His power, Mary was quite prepared to put her faith in Him.

Water into Wine

However, despite Jesus' initial reluctance, Mary quickly began to organise the servants, and Jesus gives orders for six stone jars to be filled with water. Jesus then orders the servants to draw water from those jars and serve it to the Master of the Banquet. The servants were aware that the water had been miraculously transformed into wine, but the guests at the feast had no idea at all. Then the master of the banquet, taking the bridegroom aside, makes the now famous remark – which is the key to understanding this passage. He says:

*“Everyone brings out the choice wine first,
and then the cheap wine when the guests have had too much to drink;
but you have saved the best till now.”*

The Best Till Last

How then, does this verse unlock the passage for us? Well, firstly, it is Jesus Himself who is the best that God has saved till last. And that is one of the main points of this miracle. Jesus is the last Word, the final Word in God's plan of salvation for mankind. There will be no one else to come after Christ.

God started the process of salvation with Noah, when He rescued Him from the flood. Then God made a covenant with Abraham, and then another with Moses when He gave Israel the Law. God also made a covenant with David, making the promise that His descendent would sit on the throne of Israel for ever. And God of course also spoke to His people through the prophets. Then finally, at the end of this whole process of salvation, God sent His only Son, Jesus. God has saved the very best till last. There is no-one else to come after Christ. Quite literally, Jesus is God's last Word.

Now to those of us who are Christians, this might sound like a rather obvious thing to say – but it has huge implications, because even today the world is full of false Messiah's, false prophets and false gods, all of whom by-pass Christ and set him aside. But remember what Jesus said...

*“Watch out that no-one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming,
'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.” (Matt 24:4)*

In the Book of Acts, St Peter makes it clear that there is only one Saviour, one name by which we can be saved, he told the crowd:

“Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given to men, by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12).

It doesn't get much clearer than that. There is only one Saviour and one Gospel –Jesus Christ; everything else is false, a deception. This is radical teaching that will upset many – but that doesn't make it any-the-less true.

However, I'm going to leave that there for now, because there's more to this 'sign' than saying that God has saved the best till last. Because this miracle also tells us something about the nature of Jesus and why He came into the world.

Six Stone Jars

This brings us to the water jars—and they were big, I mean huge; each one holding about 30 gallons. Multiply this by six and you have about 180 gallons. So we're talking here about a huge quantity of wine here. So no matter how much the guests drink now, they were not going to run out of wine again at this at this wedding.

This huge quantity is no co-incidence, it is intended to speak about the abundance of God's provision. It speaks of His boundless generosity; it's a sign that the well of God's blessing will never run dry. Not only has the Lord saved the best till last, but the blessing that Christ has brought with Him knows no bounds, no limits.

The Blood of Christ

But there's another important aspect to these jars that we need to be aware of: they were not used for storage, rather they were used for ritual washing - in particular - purification. Jews who had become 'ritually unclean' for some reason, were barred from taking part in certain social activities. So, until they had undergone the appropriate ritual cleansing, they were excluded from Temple worship or entering the presence of God.

But now that Jesus had come, all this 'ritual purification' would be brought to an end – it would no longer be needed. Why? Because of Jesus. He is now the one who cleanses; He is the one who purifies, who makes us clean. He alone has the power to cleanse from sin. Those who put their faith in Christ, He will make them acceptable to God - pure and undefiled, able to enter into God's presence without fear. No-longer will sin be a barrier between man and God; no-longer will we be excluded from His presence. Metaphorically then, the wine represents the blood of Christ. The cleansing power of His blood will wipe away the impurity of sin.

A Sign for the Whole World

So then, what does all this have to do with us? Well the answer to that is simple – verse 11, the final verse of our reading this morning says it all:

“Jesus thus revealed his glory; and his disciples put their faith in him.”

Jesus performed this sign, not just for the guests at the wedding, not just for the people of Israel, even – but it was a sign for the whole world; for us, here and now. We need to respond to this miracle. Like the disciples, we too need to put our faith in Christ. And I’m talking here, not just about head knowledge, but I’m talking about a real, active, living faith - because true faith in Christ will be life giving and life changing.

Amen.