

THE GOOD WINE
John 2:1-12

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Two thousand years later, it's still true. People try to impress their friends and family with all-out, full force, over-the-top wedding celebrations. The bigger, the bolder, the brassier the better.

As a result of all the pretentious airs and demonstrative displays, many have come to where they really don't care to go to weddings. I can remember my grandfather never attended a wedding with my grandmother, unless it was family. I was at his house one day when she entered the room and asked if he was going to attend a wedding with her, to which he replied, "I wouldn't have attended my own wedding unless I had to."

And the wedding in Cana wasn't the last to have problems. Bo Culkeen of Florida described a family wedding this way:

At my girlfriend's cousin's wedding, the groom and all the groomsmen wore black denim jeans, cowboy boots, and hats. The ring bearer was their two-year-old chocolate Lab, who was dressed in a tux made for dogs. The father of the bride had to stand up in the middle of the ceremony to take the dog out of the very conservative Southern Baptist church because the groom was paying more attention to the dog than his soon-to-be wife. The groom reeked with alcohol and was slurring pretty badly. When he bent over to pick up his new bride, his mother noticed a small, half-empty bottle of Jack Daniel's in his back pocket and went ballistic. The bride started to cry as the groom proceeded to swear at both his mother and the pastor, who was trying to calm him down. When the father of the bride stepped in, the groom hit him in the face really hard. The next couple of hours were filled with lots of tears and arguments and shouting about alcoholism and divorce.

One bride described the following seven events happening on her own nuptial night:

1. The pastor's wife went into labor the morning of our wedding. We had to find another pastor.
2. My fiancé lost our marriage license before the wedding.
3. The vocalist cancelled.
4. It rained all day.
5. The sister-in-law from heck (though she didn't say "heck") decided that my favorite aunt was her "maid for the day."
6. My father-in-law told my dad, "Your daughter isn't much to look at, but she has a delightful personality."
7. My new mother-in-law told my former mother-in-law (the bride was a young widow at age 28) that the bride didn't need two mothers-in-law, so "Get out. Get lost."

Well, here's the progress report on that one. They've been married 23 years, have two sons, age 21 and 19. And by the way, the bride's dad never did speak to the groom's dad again, not until this day.

As someone who is officially "in the wedding industry" by default of having the authority to say, "I now pronounce you husband and wife," and as a result of watching over the beautiful facilities of this blessed church, I have always been amused with the movie *The Wedding Planner* starring no less than Jennifer Lopez and Matthew McConaughey. While the lead actress, Lopez, plans the most extravagant and extraordinary wedding events known to humanity throughout the movie, at the end of the day, at her own wedding ceremony, it is all sweet, simple, and short. The way I have become convinced that a wedding ought to be.

Sometimes we are quick to forget that we are worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ at a wedding and neither the bride nor her mother who, somehow in the cacophony of confusion think that their very social self-worth is somehow attached to this, the most significant event known in the history of humankind.

In fact, so absurd have the requests become that after every wedding it seems that we're having to rewrite our wedding policies. We are working on a revision as I speak. Just when you think you've heard it all, another ridiculous request comes flowing down the pipeline of paperwork. "No," I've had to say, "you cannot sing 'Making Love in a Doublewide Trailer' at your wedding in the sanctuary of First Baptist Church." And, "No, your Pomeranian puppy cannot be the ring bearer down the side aisle." Both actual requests through the years.

Thus, I thank the Lord that his very first miracle occurred at a wedding, for if we ever needed the Lord's presence at any event these days, it certainly would be at these nuptial nightmares.

Now, my grandfather would be disappointed to learn that our Lord did go to weddings. Look at John 2:1. "There was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; and Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the wedding."

I want you to notice the place of the wedding. It's in Cana. John 1 closes with Nathanael declaring that Jesus is the "Son of God" after Jesus demonstrated that He knew everything there was to know about Nathanael before a word was exchanged between them. Nathanael, we learn in John 21:2, was from Cana. John switches his focus from Nathanael of Cana to a wedding in his dear city.

The wedding happened on the third day. I don't want to make too much of it, but "on the third day" has to resonate with disciples, with believers – reminding the Church of her own great third-day experience in the resurrection of Jesus. By the simple phrase, "the third day," John gives our story concerning the beginning of our Lord's public ministry in a nondescript barrio of a town a hint of the glorious consummation of the gospel.

Cana is about eight or nine miles from Nazareth. No surprise that the family of Jesus could attend.

But there is a tragic event at this wedding. Look at verse 3. “The wine gave out.” Wine always does, doesn’t it? It always gives out. My mother used to say, “All good things must come to an end.” That’s another way of saying “the wine gives out.” Mary, the mother of Jesus, is in an absolute panic. They have no wine.

Now, Mary might be a bit of a busybody here, but that’s the way women who, in that culture and ours, play the role of hostess respond to the embarrassment of emptiness. We’ve all been at a party when the food runs out, where the goodies are gone. We all know the intensity of embarrassment that occurs when the host or hostess has not provided enough. They’ve been stingy, and we walk away unsatisfied. If you think that we have it difficult today as hosts and hostesses, you need to know that in the first century the wedding feast could go on as long as a week.

The wine ran out. Perhaps they’re poor and can only make a minimal provision, hoping against hope that it will last. And, in fact, the bridegroom’s family could be liable to a lawsuit. By the way, I think we ought to go back to the biblical tradition. I do want you to notice that in the first century the reception would have been hosted by the groom’s family. We have a very unbiblical custom today, expecting fathers of daughters to pay for the whole affair. The Bible demands otherwise, as the family proceeds from the bride’s house to the bridegroom’s house for the religious ceremony and joyous celebration. (The fact that I’m the father of three girls had nothing to do with that previous statement – the Bible says what the Bible says.)

Up until this moment, there had been no miracles in the ministry of our Lord. Mary, nonetheless, has complete trust in her son Jesus. Let’s not forget – she knows that His birth was a miracle, for she had spoken to angels concerning her expectations. Can’t we assume that His mother, of all people, would have some knowledge of all the events surrounding His ministry? She’s there at the beginning, and she’s there at the end, even at the foot of the cross. Not only at birth, she was probably there at baptism, where His ministry was inaugurated and the heavens, themselves, thundered their pleasure.

“Jesus, this is going to be an embarrassing situation. Now hurry up and do something!”

His response has been greatly misunderstood (v. 4). “Woman, what do I have to do with you? My hour is not yet come.”

First of all, don’t interpret “woman” as some sort of derogatory term for the mother that He loves greatly. In fact, at the end of the gospel, when He is hanging on the cross, crucified, He looks at Mary and calls her the same thing: “woman.” That’s when He is making sure that John is going to take care of her. Or when he speaks to the Samaritan woman at the well, He calls her “Woman.” A better interpretation of the response would be something like this: “Mom, you can’t set My agenda. My hour has not yet come. I can only do what the Father calls Me to do.”

Jesus’ “hour” is often a reference to His crucifixion and glorious resurrection, the Passion weekend. And in reality, the “hour” is the center of every story of Jesus, as the cross is the center of every decision concerning our Lord.

Mary doesn't feel rebuffed, nor does she feel belittled. In fact, her trust in Him is unwavering. His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."

I want us to look at several truths in this passage.

I. Do whatever He tells you to do.

Put plainly, Mary says to the servants, "Trust Jesus." In fact, Jesus Himself said, "This is the work of God, that you trust the One He sent" (John 6:29-30). Whatever He tells you to do, do it.

Isn't that the ultimate trust? Obedience is, isn't it? Yielding to the commands of our Lord simply because He said so.

Did your parents ever use that line on you when you were growing up? "Why...Why...Why," we inquire as children. "Why have you told me to do this or that?" "Why these instructions?" "Why now? Why not later?" "Why not this way instead of your way?" As children, we all have those conversations with our moms and our dads, and every mom and dad in this room has, at one time or another, replied, "Because I said so!"

Isn't that the ultimate relationship that you can have – to trust someone so much that you'll do whatever they ask you to do. Isn't that the way our relationship ultimately should be with God? Whatever He tells us to do.

As the story unfolds, there are six stone water pots. They were there for the Jewish custom of purification. They each held about 25 gallons, so we have a total of about 150 gallons or more. The pots were there for the purification before the meal – water poured over the hands of every guest. They were filled to the brim (v. 7). The teller of this story wants you to realize there is nothing that could be added to this water. There is no powder punch in the miracle. The pots are filled to the brim.

II. Don't make it complicated.

First of all, do whatever He tells you. Secondly, don't make it complicated.

In this first miracle, it's so simple – fill, draw, take. Notice the command. "Jesus said to them, 'Fill the waterpots with water.' And they filled them to the brim. He said to them, 'Draw some out now, and take it to the headwaiter.' And they took it to him" (v. 7-8).

Fill. Draw. Take. No abracadabra. No magic words from a Merlin-type messiah. No incantations. The conditions for the miracle are nothing less than ordinary. Nothing extraordinary. In fact, throughout the gospels, Jesus' divine interventions are exquisitely simple. Trust by doing something simple. Fill. Draw. Take.

In reality, most of discipleship is simple, simple obedience. That's not really the way we want to follow Jesus. We want a mystery religion. We want some secret society. We want to know another way. We want to break the code, find the secret.

Well, here's the secret: Fill, draw, take. Do whatever He tells you to do. All good things come to disciples who don't make it complicated, who walk in simple obedience.

Do whatever He asks you to do, and don't make it complicated.

There is not, at last, the great book in the bookstore that is going to make you "get it." There is not a movie that is going to change your life forever. There is not another seminar, a great teacher, or a weekend discipleship experience that is going to make you be who God wants you to be.

Don't make it complicated.

I think we make it complicated because obedience is way too challenging. To crucify ourselves and take up our crosses daily and follow Him – the burden is too big. Surely there has to be another way. Surely there's a secret way around obedience as a disciple.

There's not. Don't make it complicated.

III. Know the source of all good gifts.

Now, no one actually sees the miracle happen. It is tasted, not seen. In fact, the headwaiter didn't know he was talking about a miracle when he made his great proclamation, "You have kept the good wine until now." The head waiter didn't know. The bride didn't know. The groom didn't know. The guests didn't know. But they knew. Look at verse 9. "...but the servants who had drawn the water knew." Later we learn the disciples know what has happened.

God is the source of all good gifts.

Don't be like the bridegroom, not even knowing who is providing the wine at your wedding. Don't be like the headwaiter who is in charge of the festivities, ignorant of the source of the good wine. Every good gift you have in your life comes from God. It may come through people God has placed in your life, but ultimately it all comes from God – the One who created you, redeemed you, and sustains you, the One who knows the plans He has for you.

All good gifts come from God.

IV. Discipleship is a daily decision.

Look at verse 11.

This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.

What Luke or Matthew might call "miracles" or "deeds of power," John calls "signs." *Semeion*. By calling them "signs," John is saying the miracle points to some truth greater than itself. The great truth is not that water can become wine if you fill the pots to the brim. The truth of the

matter is that Jesus is the giver of all good gifts, and He can take our wash water and make the wonderful wine.

His disciples, notice, believed “into” Him. That’s a literal translations. The disciples believed “into” Him. Almost every time John talks about believing, he says that “we believe into Jesus.” We might translate it, “put their trust in Jesus.”

Now, haven’t they already decided to follow Jesus? Haven’t they already been called, like Peter and Andrew in chapter 1. Hasn’t Jesus already said to Philip, “Follow Me”?

Now, to be sure, there was for Peter, Andrew, Philip, and those who follow Jesus that moment when they decided to cast their lot with Him. We saw that in chapter 1, when Jesus looked at Philip and said, “Follow Me,” and he did. In fact, Jesus has already given Peter his new name in John 1 – from Simon to Cephas, the rock.

Yet, despite the fact that we all have that moment when we cast our lot with Jesus, the reality is believing “into Him” is a daily choice, for the deceiver will try to convince us every day that He is not the giver of good gifts; we don’t have to do whatever He says; and there is that secret shortcut. Trusting Jesus is a living, repeated, daily decision. Like breathing and walking every day, we follow Him every day.

If the disciples get it somehow, we learn later that His brothers, who are with Him and His family, miss it. You know, you can be in the midst of a miracle and miss it. The brothers of Jesus did on this occasion.

So there is our first miracle. The good wine.

Do whatever He tells you to do.

Don’t make it complicated.

Know the source of all good gifts.

And make the daily decision of discipleship.

Let us pray.