

Sunday 18th January 2015 AM What could possibly go wrong – John 2v1-11

Title: What could possibly go wrong – John 2v1-11

Purpose: To learn lessons we can from a wedding party that turns to Jesus for help.

INTRODUCTION

- The weather was gorgeous
- The guests were happy
- The bride & groom were very much in love & excited

Q. What could possibly go wrong?

“O you of little imagination!!”

*****PLAY VIDEO CLIP OF WEDDING DISASTERS*****

Some background

Well, the setting of a wedding is a pretty familiar one, the hotel reception (if you are amongst the lucky ones – the family members, the close friends) or the typical disco reception in the evening. There all those photographs that have to get taken, typically quite a bit of waiting around – and then there’s all the speeches that are usually given by those who truly are “Unaccustomed to public speaking – and that for a good reason”, however we give them a healthy dose of slack so long as they obey the classic rule – “Stand up, speak up and all importantly – Shut up!”.

The problem we do have, however when we are now getting shipped off in John 2 to Cana for a Wedding is that we tend to ship our own cultural experiences across as well. So let me just try and restore what a 1st Century Jewish wedding was like:

- FIRST OF ALL – we need to recognise that the focus of a wedding was on a family AND on a local community. Marriage was very much about securing the next generation, having plenty of children and in this way adding to the commonwealth and strength of that community.

So a wedding really was **NOT** an individualised affair strictly rotating around 2 individuals tying the nuptial knot.

- SECONDLY – because it was such a BIG COMMUNITY OCCASION, this meant that it would typically last a full week and not just a day or half a day.

And we see a little of the organisation there with the mention of this “master of the banquet” who would perhaps be akin to our modern day MC (Master of Ceremonies).

- THIRDLY – that we do well to be aware of is the HONOUR-SHAME type culture of the day. The focus was not individual, it was family/community based and the worst thing that could happen was that SHAME or DISHONOUR was somehow produced.

And here on this occasion, the running out of the wine, part way through the whole week long affair was

not just a slight mis-calculation – in so many ways it meant **FIRSTLY** that the party was effectively over and **SECONDLY** that **SHAME** was being brought upon the **FAMILY**.

It really was a case of a **CATASTROPHE** in the making.

- And whilst we are making a few observations let me just **ROUND OFF BY SAYING** – that this is a very skewed wedding account.

Q. What do I mean? Well fancy giving an account of the wedding without telling us anything about the bride, the speeches, the food or even what the dowry was!!

It really is a very clipped and focussed account and what is right at the heart of things is a **MIRACLE** and that is where I want to take up for our first part.

So #1:

1. The Miracle

Now very obviously water into wine is a miracle – and [Verse 11](#) states this, in case we are tempted to think that just maybe there could be some natural explanation for how it happened.

However, that said, what is **not** quite so obvious, is why Jesus chose this moment to produce the very first miracle of his ministry.

Now it could be that there was not really any other way of practically helping this family to save face before the whole community – you might think couldn't Jesus have just despatched a few of his disciples to go and purchase a bit more wine to bridge the gap.

I think it doesn't fit what we know of Jesus' life and ministry to assume that somehow Jesus was a bit cornered into making this his **DEBUT MIRACLE!**

His calling card

No! I would go further to say that this **OPENING MIRACLE** is a lot more like a carefully designed **CALLING CARD**.

[Dr Don Carson](#) in his commentary on John gives us a few helpful pointers regarding this opening miracle:

“John prefers the simple word ‘signs’: Jesus’ miracles are never simply naked displays of power, still less neat conjuring tricks to impress the masses, but signs, significant displays of power that point beyond themselves to the deeper realities that could be perceived with the eyes of faith.”

The glory was not visible to all who had seen the miracle; the glory cannot be identified with the miraculous display. The servants saw the sign, but not the glory; the disciples by faith perceived Jesus’ glory behind the sign, and they put their faith in him.

What is clear is that this first sign is linked with the summary statement of the purpose of the book in [John 20:30–](#)

[31](#).

“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But 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.”

Carson goes on: In both places (that is at the start and the end of the book), the disciples saw and believed (2:11; 20:29). The time would come when blessing would be pronounced on new generations of followers who could not possibly see these events, but who have nevertheless believed and seen something of the glory of the Son.”

Jesus is Lord of the Festival

This miracle is BOTH a FIRST sign and a FAR sign:

- Jesus is saying when you encounter me I want you to know that **“I am the Lord of the Festival”**.
- Jesus is saying: “I have come **to set everyone laughing and pinching themselves** because of unbelievable joy.”

Remember that great passage in Isaiah

On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare
a feast of rich food for all peoples,
a banquet of aged wine—
the best of meats and the finest of wines.
7 On this mountain he will destroy
the shroud that enfolds all peoples,
the sheet that covers all nations;
8 he will swallow up death forever.
The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears
from all faces;
he will remove the disgrace of his people
from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.
9 In that day they will say,
“Surely this is our God;
we trusted in him, and he saved us.
This is the LORD, we trusted in him;
let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.”

The SENSE aspect of this SIGN

One other thing is that is worth noting is that this miracle carries with it what you might call a SENSE ASPECT.

What I mean is that Jesus desires that we might come to KNOW HIM and this should happen in a way that is TANGIBLE and beyond something purely rather ABSTRACT.

Psalm 34 gives us a flavour of this type of KNOWING:

“Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

Ok so we've said a few things about this FIRST or PRIMARY MIRACLE here in John – I want now to move on from the Miracle to the Means.

So #2:

2. The Means

Now Mary is the one who speaks first – Verse 3 “They have no more wine.”

I'd love to know what she was thinking:

- perhaps – “What a disaster!!”
- or maybe “Who on earth did the planning for this thing?”
- or maybe just “I know someone who can sort this all out”

But perhaps more interesting than speculating about Mary, is to try and sift through the meaning of Jesus response:

Verse 4 “Dear woman, why do you involve me?” ... “My time (or hour) has not yet come.”

Now depending on what translation you have, Jesus words do seem more or less IMPOLITE even rather SHARP:

The [NKJV] has it like this: “Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.”

But there is nothing actually untoward here, in fact Jesus uses the very same form of address when he is dying on the cross and is passing over her care to his beloved disciple John (the author of this gospel – John 19v26).

No the key to this slightly enigmatic statement is in the last part “My time (or more literally ‘my hour’) has not yet come.”

Whenever Jesus speak about **HIS HOUR** he is talking about his death or resurrection.

It does make you think – if Jesus was thinking about his death at a wedding feast that means that he was nearly always thinking about his death.

Well Jesus’ eyes focus back on the immediate surroundings of the wedding and he zooms in on 6 large water jars, which, the passage informs us, were the type used by Jews for ceremonial washing and which held between 20-30 gallons each.

I’m really glad John includes this sort of detailed information because you know it must be relevant (given he was not interested to tell us the names of the bride and groom, or how many guests were there etc.). There’s at least two things we learn:

- **FIRST** – we’re told how big the jars were and how many – and so with a simple bit of maths you can figure out that if a gallon is approximately 6 bottles of wine then Jesus has just gifted them around 1,000 bottles of best vintage wine.

It’s as if Mary comes to Jesus and says:

“O guess what? They’ve just run out of wine!!”

“No problem” says Jesus, “I’ll just give them **AN ENTIRE WINE CELLAR!!**”

So right up front we have a **very clear note of ABUNDANCE**.

They filled them to the brim – as [John 1v14](#) says [“Jesus is full of glory and grace.”](#)

This shows us that **Jesus is never some sort of “STOP-GAP MEASURE”**.

- **SECONDLY** – the water of these jars is to do with **Spiritual cleansing**.

For the former disciples of John the Baptist, seeing ceremonial washing water converted into feasting wine must have been not only very SHOCKING but also rather JARRING (forgive the pun).

If you go to Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, you can see what remains of what was probably a community of the Essenes – a harshly disciplined community who would have got on pretty well with the likes of John the Baptist – and **one of the things that is apparent in the remains there is the number of cisterns and washing pools that have been excavated**.

Throughout the OT there is great emphasis placed on the need to be ceremonially clean before you come to worship the Lord. To take great care lest you be under a curse.

Now we should remember that [John chapter 2](#) is not the only miraculous conversion of water into something red – do you remember Moses’ bringing of curses on Egypt and turning the water of the Nile into blood – something which was a clear curse.

Q. So how is Jesus able to wash sinful unclean people and bring them into the FEAST rather than into a PLACE OF JUDGMENT and of CURSE?

Well this is what Jesus’ COMING HOUR was all about – the death on the cross would secure for us the WINE OF THE FEAST and *NOT* the BLOOD that speaks of JUDGMENT BEING METED OUT.

One person ([Dr Edmund Clowney](#) from Westminster Theological Seminary) put the essence like this:

“Jesus sat amidst all the joy of the wedding sipping the coming sorrow
so that today you and I who believe in him
can sit amidst all this world’s sorrow sipping the coming joy.” (Let me read that again)

The apostle Paul puts the flesh on the bones for us when he says:

Galatians 3 verse 13&14 “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” 14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”

Ok, we have looked at the MIRACLE and at the MEANS and I want to end up by being clear about #3:

3. The Message

Reading from Verse 7:

“Jesus said to the servants, ‘Fill the jars with water’; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, ‘Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.’ 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.”

This section begs a question really – and that is:

Q. At what point did the water turn to wine?

We might assume that as soon as the servants did what Jesus asked and had filled up the 6 jars right to the top, then Jesus took over for a moment and then finally got them to go and take the obviously changed water to the Master of Ceremonies.

My gut feeling is that this is more likely to be where Jesus requires FAITH:

That **ONLY AS** they are obedient with the water **ONLY THEN** does it clearly show itself as wine.

Q. Now was this act of faith IMPOSSIBLY HARD?

No, I don't think so, especially as Mary had already given them something to go on with her words in Verse 5 “Do whatever he tells you.”

Mary forewarns them to not be put off

Mary has helped them because she is sort of forewarning them that things might have the FIRST APPEARANCE of being foolish BUT as the saying goes: “FIRST IMPRESSIONS CAN BE WORST IMPRESSIONS”.

New wine & old wine

Let me tell you a couple of things about wine:

- the FIRST is that there is both OLD WINE and NEW WINE:

Back in the 1980's there was a bit of a craze going around for a particular wine called Beaujolais Nouveau – which was Red wine from the Beaujolais region of France which they would release on the third Thursday of November. It really was NEW wine as it straight of the wine presses!!

However this Beaujolais Nouveau, although it is very fruity, is not too everyone's taste – especially if you are accustomed to a more aged and refined vintage.

Q. Do you remember that Jesus told a parable about OLD and NEW wine?

(Luke 5v37-39) “...no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.

And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, 'The old is better.' ”

And this is a sobering fact, that you may well say, that Jesus New Wine is simply not to my taste. You may say, I like things the way they've always been, I don't want to change – I'll keep with the old wine.

The cannot avoid the implications that come with Jesus. You cannot in real life just BOLT JESUS onto your existing life infrastructure – Jesus will not be CONTAINED, he will burst your Old and inflexible wineskins, he demands, new categories and new ways of thinking.

Q. So what do you think of the Beaujolais Nouveau that Jesus brought on that Wedding day at Cana? The Master of Ceremonies did not realise that this was Nouveau wine – he simply did what you should do – judge it by its quality, judge it for itself.

He tasted and saw that this was the CHOICE WINE. The best had been saved to last.

- A SECOND thing about wine – comes from Scripture and there we see that wine is connected in two different directions.

Sometimes we are reading of the wine of God's wrath e.g. [Jeremiah 25 verses 15ff](#):

“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: “Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them.” So I took the cup from the Lord's hand and made all the nations to whom he sent me drink it: Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a ruin and an object of horror and scorn and cursing, as they are today;...”

Or speaking of Jesus' rule – [Revelation 19 verse 15](#) “Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.”

The other connection of wine is to do with that which is directly opposite – it is the wine of joy and of God's blessing:

[Genesis 14](#) tells us of Melchizedek that Priest of God Most High who brings out bread and wine and then proceeds to bless Abram and then Abram responds by giving him the first tithe mentioned in Scripture.

Or [Jeremiah 33 verse 11](#) puts it in negative form “Joy and gladness are gone from the orchards and fields of Moab. I have stopped the flow of wine from the presses; no one treads them with shouts of joy.”

The question for us then is which WINE we have in us:

- the choice new wine of gladness & joy
- the age-old wine of the fury of God's judgment and wrath

CONCLUSION

So there we are: his **FIRST MIRACLE**.

And Jesus has left us his **CALLING CARD** as **Lord of the Feast**.

He has given us his **CHOICE WINE** of **the New Covenant**.

At the end of the day: you will drink wine:

- EITHER wine of the Fury of God's wrath
- OR the New Wine of Joy & Blessing

The choice is yours – choose well.

AMEN