

Reflections on John 2.1-12

by Will Groben

Day 1 / Memorize: Practice the verses you have already memorized.

Learn: Read John 2.1-12. Why did Mary tell Jesus about the problem? Sure, she must have known his real identity, for his conception was a miracle announced by an angel, Elizabeth had prophesied about him while he was in the womb, in his infancy he was honored by the shepherds, Simeon, Anna, and the wise men, and there were incidents such as his impressing the religious leaders at the age of twelve [See Luke 1-2; Matthew 2]. Yet, was she asking for a miracle here? John seems to indicate this was Jesus' first miracle [v.11], and by then Jesus would have been about thirty-three years old. Some speculate Mary had grown used to relying on Jesus – there is a question about whether Joseph, Jesus' father, was dead by this time – and was merely turning to him for a more human response. In that case, Jesus' answer far transcended the meaning of Mary's question, as would be the case with the questions of several other people later.

Reflect: John's purpose in writing was to show Jesus' identity as the Son of God and the promised Messiah [Christ], so that people would believe and be saved [John 20.31]. One way John did that was by showing seven "signs" – miracles that pointed to Jesus' identity – which all led to the greatest sign of all, Jesus' resurrection. The miracle of turning water into wine was not just a great party trick, it was something that pointed to a deeper reality about Jesus, perceived only by faith. Consider what your response would have been if you had been at this wedding and seen this miracle; and how does reading about the miracle affect your thinking now?

Want more? There are two possible sites for Cana. The most likely is an uninhabited ruin about nine miles north of Nazareth, in the hilly area west of the Sea of Galilee. If you have access to a Bible atlas or to maps on the internet, check out the presumed location of Cana relative to Nazareth.

Day 2 / Memorize: Practice the verses you have already memorized.

Learn: Read John 2.1-12. These wedding feasts could last up to a week. Hospitality was very important in this culture, as was the propriety and generosity of the groom's family regarding the wedding feast. Running out of wine [v.3] was not just embarrassing, it could result in legal trouble for the groom's family, especially if the bride's family filed suit!

Reflect: Mary had the mundane desire of helping the groom avoid embarrassment at his wedding feast. Jesus knew that, but he also knew that his destiny was to become the bridegroom of the church. John the Baptist referred to Jesus as the bridegroom symbolically [John 3.29], the apostle John revealed the church as the bride [Revelation 19.7], and Paul elaborated on the relationship between Christ and the church as bridegroom and bride [Ephesians 5.22-33]. At this wedding, Jesus made good the deficiency of the bridegroom's provision, in anticipation of the perfect way he would provide while fulfilling his role as messianic bridegroom. Take a look at Ephesians 5.22-33. What does this tell you about the character of Jesus as the bridegroom? What are the implications for our own approach to marital relationships?

Want more? Because the text says Mary "was there" instead of "was invited," some speculate she either was staying at the house or she was helping run the wedding feast. In either case, she seemed comfortable commanding the servants [v.5], suggesting the groom's family were either relatives or close friends. Another interesting question is why Jesus *and* his disciples were invited [v.2]. Were the disciples from the same social circle as Jesus and his family [we already learned Nathanael was from Cana]? or was Jesus simply allowed to bring them with him? The first concept might seem far fetched, since many of the disciples were from Bethsaida, more than ten miles away, on the Sea of Galilee [John 1.44]; but then some of these same disciples had been following John the Baptist [John 1.35-40], so they got around. The need for six water pots with 100-150 gallons of water for ceremonial washing seems to indicate a large guest list.

Day 3 / Memorize: Practice the verses you have already memorized.

Learn: Read John 2.1-12. Try a different translation. If you only have one Bible at home, try one of the translations available free on-line, such as the NET at net.bible.org or one of the many others [such as NIV, NASB, or NLT] at www.biblestudytools.com or www.biblegateway.com. Does anything strike you differently in the new translation?

Reflect: Jesus knew the prophets had mentioned a time of deliverance, when wine would flow plentifully in Israel as a result of the work of the Messiah [Jeremiah 31.10-14; Amos 9.13-14]. This sign miracle pointed to the identity of Jesus as that Messiah, as that deliverer for Israel. Many of the messianic promises God made to Israel await final fulfillment

until Christ returns. How does that affect the way you view the future of Israel in God's plans? This miracle also showed Jesus' power over nature, which only a few prophets such as Moses, Elijah, and Elisha had possessed, and they only on occasion. Can it comfort you to know that Jesus is powerful enough to overcome anything in the natural world?

Want more? Consider renting or buying the DVD *The Gospel of John* [2005]. Then, of course, you should watch it!

Day 4 / Memorize: Practice the verses you have already memorized.

Learn: The water pots were used for ritual purification: servants poured water over the hands of guests to purify them from defilement according to Jewish customs. What exactly did Jesus do? Some assume Jesus turned the water in the pots into wine, but because of the Greek verb used in this verse [v.8], it seems more likely that Jesus had the servants "draw" more water from the well and it was this *new* water that miraculously was wine. In that case, how much new water?

Reflect: The water pots being filled to the brim before the miracle might symbolize that the time for ritual purification in water under the Mosaic Law had been fulfilled and now began the time to draw purification from a new source. Jesus used wine to symbolize the new covenant he was ushering in through his blood sacrifice on the cross [Luke 22.20]. In this new covenant, Jesus offers us a permanent cleansing in God's sight by grace. None of us are perfect, so we all need this cleansing. Romans 3.23-24 [NIV] says, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." What does it mean to you that Jesus offers you the gift of this cleansing so you can be reconciled with God?

Want more? The apostle John's motives for including this story might include showing Jesus as superior to the Greek god Dionysus, the supposed god of wine and joy through inebriation. On a related note, the headwaiter's comment [v.10] suggests people were prone to drinking too much at such family gatherings [even though wine back then was diluted to somewhere between one-third and one-tenth strength], but we should not infer from this that Jesus condoned drunkenness. Jesus always honored the true Law of God. Look up Deuteronomy 21.18-21; Ephesians 5.18; Galatians 5.19-23. What is the biblical mandate about drunkenness? What is the only thing that should control us? What does the Holy Spirit provide that is relevant here?

Day 5 / Memorize: Practice the verses you have already memorized.

Learn: When Mary brought the problem of running out of wine to Jesus' attention, he answered in rather extraordinary fashion. First, he called her "woman," which sounds strange in English, but was in a Greek form that was polite. Indeed, Jesus often addressed women this way with no disrespect intended, but even so it was unusual for use with one's mother. Then he mildly rebuked her, saying it was not his problem. Then he took it farther to bring up that it was not time for him to reveal his glory [which would culminate at the cross and resurrection]. Some scholars believe Jesus was indicating a new relationship between them as he entered into public ministry, that Mary must not presume on him, for he must be guided by God alone now. Scholars also note that whenever Mary is in the story, Jesus takes pains to distance himself from her. This does not indicate a lack of love for her – witness his tender handoff of her care to John while on the cross [John 19.26-27] – but rather that Jesus knew Mary must come to him, not as a mother to her son, but as a sinner to her Messiah, that she must accept him as Savior, just as we all must. Consider what that would be like for you, if this was your son!

Reflect: When Mary asked Jesus for help, his first response was to ask the equivalent of, "Why do you involve me?" While Mary might have been thinking of a natural solution to the problem, Jesus was considering the miracle. If his messianic ministry was to start, he would need to be free of human influence and totally reliant on God. In the rest of the gospel narratives, we always see Jesus refusing to be influenced by people, but often later doing what they had suggested or requested because it now was consistent with his mission. Jesus is a good role model: how much are you influenced by what others want, how others view you, advertising and fashion, and other human pressures? how much are you opening up to God's influence in life, through Bible study, prayer, immersion in biblical community, et cetera?

Want more? Jesus performed his first miracle, not in the Temple, not in a palace, but at a country wedding of common folk in an obscure small village in Galilee. What does the fact that this first miracle was at a wedding, involved providing wine, for social reasons only [on a physical level, at least], all show about Jesus' attitude toward asceticism [extreme self-denial and withdrawal from the greater community]? What is the implication for Christians who remove themselves from the greater community today?