



On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

"Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

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. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

**What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him (John 2:1–11).**

One of the fun things about being a pastor is I frequently have the joy of officiating at weddings. It always starts with bright-eyed couples coming into my office or home who are so happy they're barely able to touch the ground. Then at the wedding itself I have what's even better than a front row seat. I see things no one else can see. I see trembling hands and beads of sweat pouring down the groom's face. I see the furtive glances that pass between bride and groom as they face me. I see the panicked look when they forget their vows or notice the flame on the unity candle has flickered out.

Quite honestly, I've witnessed some rather bizarre things. At one outdoor wedding at the South Carolina coast we were all attacked by these tiny, fierce gnat-like bugs. At another, the best man fainted and would have fallen into the ivy if a groomsman didn't catch him. At another, someone put on the wrong song and the bride walked down the aisle to Elvis Presley's "Love Me Tender." Maybe the worst of all was one of the first weddings

I ever did. I was about 26 years old and when it was time for the exchange of the rings I dropped the groom's wedding band. Unfortunately, it fell onto a hardwood floor and began to roll. It rolled and rolled with me on my hands and knees trying to track it down. We didn't rehearse that! Since then, I try to never touch the rings.

### **The Setting: Jesus was Welcomed at a Wedding in Cana**

This must have been what the guests were feeling that day at the wedding in Cana. In those days and in that culture, the wedding celebration was one of the greatest events in all of life. Life was a grind for many people back then, especially for common people, so an occasion like this was long anticipated and very exciting. The wedding celebration would start on a Wednesday and continue for seven days. The entire village would be invited along with friends and relatives who lived elsewhere. There was food and wine and dancing. It was a time of great joy.

In verses 1–2 John tells us that Jesus' mother was invited, as was Jesus and his disciples. At this point, Jesus only had five disciples: Andrew, Peter, John, Philip and Nathanael. I think it's interesting that Jesus would be invited to such an event and that he'd actually accept the invitation and attend. You see, there was a tradition back then for holy men of God to avoid such celebrations. They were called *ascetics*. An ascetic was one who believed spirituality was attained by renouncing physical pleasures and personal desires. They were big on fasting and celibacy. John the Baptist was an ascetic. Yet we see here that Jesus wasn't in that category. People didn't see him that way and he didn't act that way. The Son of God could go to a wedding and enter into the celebration and laugh and have fun. Like Max Lucado says, "The Almighty didn't act high and mighty. The Holy One wasn't holier-than-thou. The One who knew it all wasn't a know-it-all." In other words, he wasn't a killjoy.

We shouldn't be either! We can have fun. We can enter into celebrations. We should be people who others **like** to have around at such events because we enter in and enjoy ourselves. It's unfortunate that some believers would never allow themselves to do this. If they go to such an event, they look very grim and seem to suspect that the cause of all the fun is either illegal, immoral, or fattening. Again, Max Lucado says, "What happened to us? What happened to clean joy and loud laughter? Is it our neckties that choke us? Is it our diplomas that dignify us? Is it the pew

that stiffens us? I must confess; it's been awhile since I've been accused of having too much fun. How about you?"

Jesus **was** accused of this. On one occasion he shot back at his critics with this, comparing himself with John, *"For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners'"* (Luke 7:33–34). It seems Jesus was accused of being kind of a lush. Of course that wasn't true, but it was true that he enjoyed eating and drinking.

### **The Problem: The Wine Runs Out**

So this was a wonderful celebration, but then disaster strikes. I don't think we can overdramatize the panic in Mary's words, *"They have no more wine."* This was a genuine crisis. In a Jewish wedding feast, the groom's family were the hosts. They paid for the whole thing. Having married off two daughters, I wish that was still true today! It was the groom's responsibility to provide wine for the entire week. To run out of wine would bring shame and disgrace on his family. I get this. We just put on a wedding last July for one of our daughters. How would we have felt if we ran out of food before all the guests got served? It would have been humiliating! In Jesus' day, to run out of wine at a wedding was a breach of hospitality and a social nightmare. A lawsuit could even be filed against them if they failed in this responsibility.

In the Bible, wine is a symbol of joy. The ancient rabbis said, "Without wine there is no joy." A wedding is all about joy. To run out of wine was almost like saying this will be a joyless marriage! Psalm 104:5 says, *"Wine gladdens human hearts."* Ecclesiastes 9:7 says, *"Go eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart..."* This isn't encouraging us to go out and get drunk. The Bible also warns about the abuse of alcohol (Proverbs 23:20; Ephesians 5:18). It's worth mentioning that wine in Jesus' day was diluted with water and the alcohol content was less than that of beer today. There are many good reasons today for people **not** to drink, but in the Bible wine isn't a bad thing; it's a good thing; it's a sign of joy and blessing. So, again, to run out of wine at a wedding was a nightmare.

Most of you know this story. You know what's going to happen, right? Jesus will save the day and turn the water into wine. This was important because down in verse 11 John says, *"This was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory..."* As we go through John 1–12 we'll see seven of these signs. That word "sign" is important. This was a miracle, but it was more than a miracle because like a sign it pointed to something; it pointed to something about Jesus and what he came to do. The apostle John, who is telling this story, is always thinking about the deeper spiritual meaning of events. For example, he mentions in v. 1 that this all happened on the third day. Why does he add

that? Well, Jesus was raised on the third day. This is a hint of the significance of this miracle: it was a miracle of transformation, of bringing life out of death. There's also a deeper meaning in these words, *"They have no more wine."* We're being invited to reflect on our own experience of life, especially life apart from Christ.

Life without Christ is life without wine, and without wine, there's no joy. Apart from him, the joy of life runs out. No matter who you are, no matter how good the wine is that you've tasted, there comes a time when the joy runs out. Often, it's when life is at its very best that we discover that. When our life is full of all the things we thought would make us happy, like wealth, friends, family and success; that's often when somehow the wine fails and life loses its sparkle.

I heard a story about Alan Shepard. In 1961 he became the first American to travel into space. Ten years later, at age 47, he piloted the Apollo 14 mission and became the fifth person to walk on the moon. During the mission he hit two golf balls on the lunar surface. One day, after all that success and notoriety, he was sitting in Frank Sinatra's backyard in Palm Springs. It was a beautiful night. Shepard was drinking a martini and someone looked up into the desert sky and pointed at the moon and said to him, "Can you believe it? You've been there and back!" Shepard looked down, stirred his martini, and then said, "That's why I drink." He wasn't joking. He was saying, "What's left after that?" He was saying, "There's no more wine."

You can make that discovery when you're a teenager, a college student, a 35-year-old with two kids, or in middle age. Eventually, it happens to everyone; the wine runs out. The joy and exhilaration of life is gone. People cope in different ways. Some folks just grind it out and pretend to be fine. Others keep looking for the next exciting fix. Still others just grow old and bitter. But it doesn't have to be that way. That's what makes this sign so important.

### **The Solution: Jesus Turns Water into Good Wine**

Let's get back to the story. Mary tells Jesus, *"They have no more wine."* Mary seems to have an agenda. This is her oldest son. We don't know how long her husband had been gone, but as her oldest son she'd been depending on Jesus in situations like this for years. I don't think Mary was expecting a miracle here, but she was expecting him to somehow fix the problem, like I'm sure he had many times before.

Jesus' response sounds harsh. *"Women, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come."* To us that sounds rude. That's no way for even the Son of God to talk to his mother. But in that day "Woman" was a title of respect. He'll use the same form of address when he speaks to her from the cross and makes provision for her care. It's like calling someone "Ma'am" today. At the same time, this is an unusual way to address your own mother! Jesus does distance himself a bit here from Mary, *"Why do you involve*

me?" He wants her to know that she doesn't have a hold on him. He's now taking his marching orders from his Heavenly Father. In John 8:29 he says, *"I always do what pleases him."* When he mentions that his "hour" has not yet come he's looking forward to the cross. Even this early in his ministry, Jesus knew why he came and where that would lead. He knew that when his public ministry began, the clock would start ticking. Until the timing was right for him to act, he wouldn't do a thing. His Father would determine the "when."

Mary accepts that. She tells the servants, *"Do whatever he tells you."* Mary hasn't given up hope, but she's now willing to just leave it in his hands. She's yielded, but still expectant. She's not trying to dictate her son's actions, but she does still have hope he'll do something. Mary teaches us something here about prayer. She's an example of genuine faith. Several times in the gospels Jesus initially says no to a request, but then later fulfills that request in response to a person's faith. In prayer there's this curious balance between making bold requests and at the same time surrendering to God's will and timing. Mary does that.

So Jesus tells the servants, *"Fill the jars with water."* He's talking about the six stone water jars that were used for Jewish ceremonial purification. Each of them held about 30 gallons. So they filled them to the brim and Jesus tells them to draw some out and take it to the head waiter. They did just that and when the head waiter tasted the water that had turned into wine he found the bridegroom and said, "Sir, you've got this thing turned around. You're supposed to serve the good wine first and then when the guests are feeling good you serve the cheap stuff because they won't know the difference. Yet you've saved the best 'till last. What's the deal?"

It's quite a miracle, you know. Unfortunately, most of us have read the story so many times it's like no big deal. But the water really did become wine! In his book *Miracles*, C. S. Lewis says every miracle of Jesus is simply a kind of short-circuiting of a natural process; a doing instantly something which normally takes much longer. He says, "Each miracle writes for us in small letters something that God has already written, or will write, in letters almost too large to be noticed, across the whole canvas of nature." That's what Jesus does here. He overlaps the elements of time, of growth, gathering, crushing and fermenting. He takes water, an inorganic substance, and without a word, without any laying on of hands, in utter simplicity, the water becomes wine, an organic liquid, a product of fermentation, belonging to the realm of life. Thus he shows he's Lord of creation and has the ability to master the processes of nature. John says down in verse 11 that it was signs like this that revealed his glory and brought the disciples to believe. Believe what? That he was indeed the Son of God, the Word made flesh, the One through whom all things came into being. William Temple said it best: "The modest water saw its God and blushed."

So the head waiter questions the bridegroom about why he saved the best for last and the story ends there. We're not told what the bridegroom said. It seems he was smart enough to keep his mouth shut and to take credit for the whole incident! He's like, "Yeah, I saved the Silver Oak for last. What's it to you?"

### **When the Wine Runs Out, Jesus Supplies What's More and Better**

The point of the story is when the wine runs out, Jesus supplies what's more and what's better. At the most basic level, this story reveals how the new wine Jesus brings surpasses the plain water of religion. The Jewish vessels of purification are now being filled with new things, better things. The wine that's been served already through Jewish religion and ritual is exhausted and Jesus' new wine is replacing it. Jesus changes the water of religion into the wine of his kingdom, and it's more and better.

Religion can't purify us from sin. Religion can make you look good. It can wash the outside of your life, but it can't cleanse you deep within. Later in this very gospel, Jesus will take a cup of wine and say to his disciples, *"This is my blood which is poured for you."* That's how we're cleansed. Isaiah said, *"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool"* (Isaiah 1:18). Only Jesus can do that. Only he was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Nor can religion empower us to do what's right. It can tell us what's right. It can hold a hammer over our head and threaten that if we don't do right we're going to pay dearly, but it can't enable us to do it. Paul wrote, *"I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out"* (Romans 7:18b). But the new and better wine that Jesus brings can really change us. Later Paul wrote, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation. The old has gone, the new is here!"* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

I met with a woman this week who is waiting for a liver transplant. Several years ago she was working as a nurse and was stuck by a needle which resulted her getting Hepatitis C. Then that resulted in cancer. The strange thing about it is that she's full of joy! She told me she's really torn. On the one hand, she wants to stick around because she loves her family. On the other hand, she wants to be with the Lord. There's no bitterness. She's not blaming anyone for what happened to her. There's a sweetness to her presence. She's fully surrendered to what God wants, but she's full of life and joy. I've seen people in the same situation react so differently. Where does that come from? That comes from the presence of God in her life. That's not her; that's him in her.

Religion can't provide a motive other than guilt and fear, but Jesus gives us a new motivation—love and gratitude. Which would you rather see in your own children? Do you want them to obey you out of guilt and fear, or out of love and gratitude? In

the same passage from 2 Corinthians I quoted above, Paul said, *“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised for again”* (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

In short, the water of self-effort, legalism, failure, guilt and fear is transformed by the wine of forgiveness, freedom and joy. Sometimes, though, even as believers, the wine runs out. We start out with so much joy, but something happens. What was once new becomes old and routine. The things we once did out of love and gratitude become dreaded obligations. Reading the Bible, going to church, serving in ministry, witnessing to our friends—it all becomes perfunctory. We lose our sense of awe. We lose the freshness in our relationship with him. I’ve certainly experienced that. I believe in those times we can come to him and say, “Lord, fill the jars again. Fill them to the brim. Turn the plain water of all my religion into the new wine of your kingdom. The wine of joy.” I believe he’ll do that. When the wine runs out, if we come to him he’ll supply what’s more and what’s better.

But we have to come to him. We have to stop pretending and confess our need. We have to put our faith in him. John reminds us in verse 11 that not everyone recognized his glory through

this sign. The servants saw the sign but not the glory. It was the disciples who not only saw the sign but by faith saw God’s glory behind the sign and believed. They put their faith in Jesus. Even though the entire town enjoyed the wine, only a handful of people understood the significance of God’s glory.

One thing we know, if we put our faith in him now the day will come when our joy will be made full and it will never run out. Perhaps it’s no mistake that this first sign happened at a wedding. You see, there’s another wedding we look forward to. When Jesus gave his disciples the wine at the last supper he said to them, *“I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes”* (Luke 22:18). He was looking forward to what we call the wedding feast of the lamb. John wrote about this later in the book of Revelation. He said, *“Let us rejoice and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready”* (Revelation 19:7).

The day will come for his followers when the wine will never run out, but until that time arrives, keep coming to him.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

© 2013 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA  
Catalog No. 1384-3FC