

## John 2:1-12

“....would you choose, water over wine?.....hold the wheel and drive.....”

Those words appear in the bridge section of a song called “Drive”, as performed by the band Incubus. And, as far as I can work out, the tension in the song revolves around what the writer sees as the choice that lies before us all: - the choice between “driving” your own life, or being “driven” by something else - driven by fear, driven by the agendas of others, etc. And two images that the writer employs to show the qualitative difference *between* these two choices are those of *water* and *wine*. Choosing to be driven by others, as opposed to driving your own life - says this writer - would be like choosing water over wine.

Now I don’t know who wrote the song, and I couldn’t tell you if it was a man or a woman, or anything else about them, but *whoever* it was, when this songwriter chose to employ the water/wine imagery he/she was making use of some pretty ancient realities - whether they knew it or not. Indeed, long before it ever occurred to the writer of “Drive” to pen those words, the Apostle John was recording the historical incident that may very well lie *behind* that imagery - Jesus’ first miracle - one that occurred during a wedding in a place called Cana.

And, in a manner similar to the contemporary songwriter, the Apostle John preserved this incident in which water was *transformed* into wine for the purpose of demonstrating to his original readers the significant differences to be found between the choices that lay before *them*, the choice between the “water” of Judaism or the “wine” of Christianity.

How the Apostle John gets this point across in his Gospel will be the subject of our study this morning. Before we go any further, however, let’s pray.....

*Father in heaven, we thank you that you have preserved us through this week and brought us to this place where we can be here, among your people, to once again hear your Word to us, and for us. And Father, just as these words served a particular purpose for your people when they were first written, would you please employ them in the same fashion with us so that we too might be either brought to faith and belief in the Lord Jesus Christ or else strengthened in that same faith which you have already engendered within us. Knowing that you delight in doing these very things, we have every expectation that you will do them again. In your son’s name we pray, Amen.*

### I First Move

Those of you who have been with us for the past five weeks or so will know that we are still in the early days of a series of studies based on the Gospel of John. In this “gospel” or “good news” about the Lord Jesus Christ, we have seen how John’s overall purpose has been to prepare an account of Jesus’ life that was not so much an exhaustive *biography* but was, rather, a *selective* biography aimed primarily, but not exclusively, at the Jewish peoples who were scattered among the various nations of the then known world, and who had settled in significant numbers in many places, including in the city of Ephesus, from which this gospel was written.

Well, after looking at the opening 18 verses of chapter 1 - which gave us a sort of “preview of coming attractions”, in terms of the content which follows it - we then began working our way through the first half of John’s Gospel which runs from about verse 19 of chapter 1, and continues all the way to the end of chapter 10. And, while a number of scholars have come up with different ways of summarizing this material, the one that I find to be most helpful is Carson’s where he says that these opening chapters are all about *Jesus’ revelation of himself through his words and deeds*.

In other words, in these first ten chapters, John has pulled together a number of events from Jesus life and by both *describing* them, as well as *commenting* upon them, he wants his readers to see what these things shows us about the character and identity of Jesus.

Well, within this larger section that runs from 1:19 to chapter 10 are several smaller sections, one of which we are moving into this morning, and which includes chapters 2, 3 and 4. In these three chapters we will see how Jesus has come to fulfill and surpass some of the things foreshadowed by the Old Testament, beginning with our look at the whole water and wine thing in the passage before us today.

And so, with that very brief introduction, let’s listen to the passage and then begin working our way through.....

**John 2:1-12** *On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. <sup>2</sup> Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. <sup>3</sup> When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." <sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." <sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." <sup>6</sup> Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.<sup>1</sup> <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup> And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. <sup>9</sup> When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom <sup>10</sup> and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." <sup>11</sup> This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. <sup>12</sup> After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers<sup>1</sup> and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.*

## II Second Move

Now, right at the very beginning, there is something here that, in some ways, is sort of a detour in that it does not take us to what, I believe, is at the heart of this passage. And so I’m not going to be spend much time on it but will, at least draw your attention to the *possible* significance of this phrase, “On the third day...”

Simply put, this is a reference to the events just preceding where Jesus has an encounter with Nathanael, and which evidently took place two days earlier. Now many scholars have noted that there is a sort of meticulous carefulness with which John records the passage of days in this opening section of his gospel. And if you work your way backward from here, what you see is that John has kept track of a solid *seven day period* so that the event of Jesus' wine-making miracle is shown to have taken place *on the seventh day*.

Now the reason that scholars have noted this is because for the rest of the Gospel, John does not seem to be all that concerned to maintain the same sort of meticulous carefulness with regard to the passage of days. And so this reality, taken together with the fact that John opens his Gospel with a very deliberate link to the *creation* accounts, causes many scholars to think that John is very deliberately trying to show that there is a parallel between the work of God in Genesis, culminating in a seventh day Sabbath, and the life and work of Jesus which also reached a sort of culmination point in the performance of his first miracle - on the seventh day.

Even further, as the purpose of the Sabbath was for reflection and refreshment and renewal in the Lord, Jesus' participation in a wedding celebration on the seventh day is more than a little bit coincidental. So, there may be some symbolic significance to the recording of these opening days. I leave you to judge that for yourselves.

### III Third Move

Moving on from that sort of "side observation" the first thing I want you to really take notice of is the particular *social situation* that sets the stage for the *performance* of Jesus' first miracle. Jesus, some of his disciples, and his mother, Mary, are all attending the same wedding when a problem arises, namely, *the wine runs out*. The "punch bowl", so to speak, is dry.

Now, in order to appreciate this a bit better, it helps to know a few things about weddings in those days. For one thing, they were much longer occasions than what we practice today, sometimes lasting as long as a week - depending on the circumstances of the parties getting married. And so, if you think catering for a 4 hour wedding reception is a challenge, imagine doing that for a whole week.

And yet, while the task of hosting a wedding was not a simple one, it was a thing for which there were typically high expectations. People back then placed a lot of stock in these things and, in fact, we have some historical records that show people *suing* hosts for not providing for an adequate celebration and thus bringing shame and dishonor upon the family! Even in a country as litigious as our own that sort of thing is difficult to imagine.

And so, given that sort of context, you can understand the *gravity* of this issue of running out of wine. There was more at stake here than people being thirsty or slightly disappointed. What was at stake was the honor and social standing of the people involved, particularly the bridegroom since it was his responsibility to take care of all the wedding preparations.

#### IV Fourth Move

The next thing I want you to notice is *Mary's approach to her son*. In the wake of this potential social disaster, Mary comes to Jesus, to inform him of the problem concerning the wine. Now as for why *Mary* is doing this, we cannot say for sure. However the fact that Jesus, the disciples, and Mary have *all* been invited to the same wedding most likely means that this is the wedding of either a relative or a very close friend. And that being the case, then it is very possible that Mary has some sort of official responsibility with regard to some of the wedding arrangements.

And so she comes to Jesus, and simply tells him that the wine is gone.

Now, again, we don't know for sure what Mary was looking for in giving this information to Jesus. Since he has yet to perform his first miracle, it seems unlikely that she was looking for that - although she might have been. But clearly she expects him to do something.

After all, she can remember what the angel told her about the identity of her son, even if, so far, his life has appeared to be pretty much like that of any other tradesman in that day. Further, she has at least seen enough of her son's life through his growing up years to know that she has never known anyone like him. And so, she comes to Jesus because, frankly, if *he* can't do anything about this situation, then, as far as Mary was concerned, *no one* could do anything about it.

#### V Fifth Move

And this is where things start to get interesting. Notice now Jesus' response to Mary. With words that might come as a surprise to you, Jesus says to his mother, "*Woman*, what does this have to *do* with me? My *hour* has not yet come."

Now, what is going on here? Why *does* Jesus respond in such a fashion to his own mother? The short answer is this: Jesus *had* to respond in this way because he was about to launch his *public* ministry. He *had* to respond this way because he was shifting from merely being *among* the people to distinguishing himself as the Messiah and Lord and Savior OF his people. And that being the case, Jesus needed to send a strong signal *to his own mother* that things could no longer be the same between them. Yes, he would always love his mother and, yes, he would always care for her and see that she was taken care of, even after his death - but the reality was that she could no longer treat or respond to her son as other mothers could. She could not expect or demand things from her son that other mothers might, not any more. Because her son wasn't just anybody. He was the Son of God.

Now, to be sure, *learning* that sort of thing would have been a bittersweet reality for Mary. After relating to a person a certain way for thirty years, you don't just shift out of *that* gear and into another one without *some* degree of difficulty. And you see this reality in the Gospels as Jesus will, on more than one occasion, have to drive this lesson home to his mother.

And so, Jesus is not being cold or calloused toward his mother. Instead, as Carson puts it, he must get this important point across to her that, “she, like every other person, must [respond] to him as to the promised Messiah, as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” - *even her own sin*. His mother needed to see that she *needed* him, as much as anyone else. She needed to see that she was not eligible for any special treatment and that there were no alternative paths to salvation for her, simply because she was his mother.

Sadly, there is a lot of bad theology out there that has lost sight of this fact about Mary - but the truth of it is painfully obvious in many places throughout the Gospels - including here.

And so, in response to his mother’s implied request that he involve himself in a *catering* problem, Jesus first delivers a gentle rebuke to his mother, saying, “Woman, what does this have to do with me?” – and he then goes on to remind her that *his hour* had not yet come.

Now what does he mean by this? Well, if you trace this idea through John’s Gospel you will eventually find out. So, for example, if you look at John 7:6, you find Jesus saying again that his time had not yet come. If you move ahead from there to John 8:20, you see a similar sort of statement being made. However, when you get to the last part of the Gospel of John, which is concerned with the all important final week of Jesus’ life, that is where we are told, at least three different times, that the “hour” HAD finally come. For example, listen to John 13:1

*Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father...*

Or again in John 17:1,

*When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.....*

In short, the “hour” that Jesus is talking about is the event of his death, resurrection and ascension. And so, when you put it all together, this is what you get: Mary comes to Jesus, wanting him to do something about the wine problem and Jesus responds by saying that “the hour” of his death, resurrection and ascension had not yet come.

Now Mary had no way of knowing the fullness of what this reference to Jesus’ “hour” would have meant. Nevertheless, the message that she *would* have gotten out of all this was that Jesus already *had* an agenda for his life, and she need not, and indeed, *must* not continue to try and impose another one on him.

And, to her credit, it would appear that she took this rebuke from her son pretty well. She does not raise the issue with him again but, in the wake of Jesus’ rebuke, says very simply and trustingly to the servants who are nearby, “Do *whatever* he tells you”. Now, given what Jesus has just said to Mary, there is no guarantee that he will tell them anything. That is a very real possibility which no doubt must have crossed Mary’s mind at this point.

However, while this situation has been “thrust upon” Jesus, and even though his mother was wrong to presume upon her son’s ability and willingness to involve himself in this impending social disaster, Jesus nevertheless condescends to intervene and to make use of this providential opportunity as he is able. The fact that Jesus is not *required* to respond does not prevent him from doing something anyway - if he so chooses.

After all, Jesus does love his mother and wants to honor her - as the law requires. Rebuking her is one thing. But *shaming* her is something else, and Jesus does not want this to happen. So he intervenes.

## VI Sixth Move

What happens next is, in many respects, probably one of Jesus’ most “ordinary” miracles, if there is such a thing. Nothing flashy or visually stunning takes place. No laws of gravity are defied, no dead people are raised, no raging storms are calmed. Instead, some servants go and get water, as Jesus has instructed them to do, and fill to the brim six (6) large stone pots that held about 20-30 gallons of water, apiece.

When that task is completed, Jesus gets one of the servants to bring a sample of what is in the pots to the “master of the feast” who, after tasting it, immediately finds the bridegroom to congratulate him for breaking with the usual custom of giving the good wine first and the cheap wine last.

Now, the idea *behind* that custom, of course, was that at the beginning of a celebration people’s senses are sharp and their ability to discern degrees of quality is much better. Later on, after they have had a bit more to drink, their senses are somewhat dulled and, therefore, they are less likely to *appreciate* a finer wine, as well as being less likely to *notice* that the one they are *currently* drinking is decidedly inferior.

But that custom was reversed in this instance because, as a result of Jesus’ miracle, the water in these purification jars was *transformed* into an excellent wine, and one which, no doubt, would have been superior to anything they might have already tasted! And so, what might have been a social disaster, and possibly a point of personal embarrassment has been averted and, indeed, has gone completely in the *other* direction. What could have been an awful *disgrace* was now a rousing and miraculous success.

However, as great as all of that is, there is something *still* greater that John wants us to see in this story. As has already been suggested, there is more going on here than the *mere* resolution of a catering problem. And we see that by looking once more at just a couple of verses. Firstly, look at verse 11, “This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory.” This miracle of turning water into wine, says John, *manifested* - i.e., made clear, made obvious, *demonstrated* - Jesus’ glory in some way. In what way did it do that? Look back at verse 6,

“*Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification.....*”

Did you catch that? "...the *Jewish rites of purification*" Where am I going with all this? Just hang in there - and look back at John's Gospel one more time, going back even further, to verses 16 and 17 of chapter one,

*And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.....*

So what's the point? Simply this: The six stone pots were ones which contained the water used to fulfill some aspects of the Mosaic law that dealt with rituals of purification. By filling these pots all to the brim, and then turning their contents into wine, Jesus was, in effect, *interfering* with their being used for their *original* purposes and converting them to a *new purpose*.

Think about it. Jesus might have turned water into wine in any one of a *dozen* different ways, but he chose to do it *this* way because if he was going to do a miracle, he was going to do one that clearly pointed to the new thing that God was doing in and through him. As one commentator writes, "the water represents the old order of Jewish law and custom, which Jesus was to replace with something better..... the wine Jesus provides is unqualifiedly superior, as must everything be that is tied to the new, messianic age Jesus is introducing. This is the age of which the prophets, like Amos, spoke when they wrote:

*"...Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them on their land, and they shall never be uprooted out of the land that I have given them..."*

## VII Conclusions

For John's original audience, the Jewish peoples scattered in and around Ephesus, this comparison and contrast between what God did through Moses and what he later on did through his Son, Jesus, would have been very important. The Jewish people were a *proud* people and, as such, would not be easily moved from their position of confidence. They would have felt that they were already experiencing the fullness of what God had given and that they already possessed the completeness of God's revelation of Himself in the Law and the Prophets.

And, to be sure, these were great things. God *had* spoken and revealed himself through them, and continued to do so. But with all that God's people already possessed, they were still lacking the fullness of what God had purposed to give them - and that fullness could only be found and known in and through Jesus. And so it is that when Jesus' mother comes to him and says, "They have no wine" *she was speaking better than she knew*. Indeed, God's chosen people, Israel, were a languishing people, a people that had wandered far from him, a people who had lost the plot and who thought that the water they had *was* the wine that was promised.

Friends, we live in a world full of people who are believing the same thing. We live as a small minority in the midst of a vast multitude of people who believe either that they are already in possession of the fullness that this life has to offer, or if they do not already possess it, they believe they know what it looks like and are working to grab hold of it, or they believe they know what it looks like and, at the same time, are in *despair* because they are convinced that they will never be able to attain to it, and will spend the rest of their lives on the sidelines watching those that do.

But, in light of what we see in this passage, and as God's messengers and ambassadors, we are *compelled* to echo Mary's prophetic words and speak - and continue speaking them - into the midst of this culture because: *THEY HAVE NO WINE*. To the ones who think they have it, we have to say, "No, you don't. You may *think* you have it, but you don't. At best, what you have is cheap, watered down wine. At worst, it's just water." To the ones who don't believe they have it, but are pretty sure they will, we have to say, "The path you are taking will not get you to what you really want and need". To the ones who don't believe they have it, and are convinced they never will, we have to say, "Do not despair. The thing that you envy is not what you imagine it to be. And the fullness you desperately desire is actually within your grasp."

That is the message we have to bring into a blind and thirsty culture that foolishly imagines that there is a fullness that can be had apart from Jesus. No, there isn't. Even further, that message, the image of the Gospel as the expression of the goodness and exuberance and lavish generosity of God is one that we need to put before people.

And this is so counter-intuitive within our culture, isn't it? To those who stand looking at Christianity from the outside - it appears that what we are offering is not freedom and fullness, but poverty and bondage. Ironically, it is the ones who are the *most* in bondage who are the *least* able to see it.

Tell me, who is freer, the person who is slavishly bound in idolatrous pursuit of the American Dream, or the person who can see past the pursuit, to the place where it leads, and knows what lies at the end of that road? Tell me, who is freer, the person who exercises her liberty to claim her rights, or the person who is so free, that she is free to *relinquish* her rights, even when she might well do otherwise? Tell me, who is freer, the person for whom this life is all there is and, therefore, must furiously run to and fro, cramming every possible thing into every available moment, or the person who sees that there is an eternity beyond this "bus stop" that we call life, and is therefore free to selflessly give up his life in the service of something bigger than himself?

Is what Jesus offers in the Gospel a form of bondage? Or is it more like the key, that unlocks the door to a prison which, until that moment, we have been incapable of seeing?

The miracle at Cana - the water become wine - is a picture of the abundance, the fullness, the celebration, the joy and *the freedom* that is made available to all who embrace the Lord Jesus Christ both now, and in the future. For a day is coming, when those who have responded to this good news of the coming of God's Kingdom in Jesus, will find *themselves* at *another* wedding feast - indeed, the greatest of all such feasts - the marriage supper of the Lamb - at which we will see the culmination of the goodness of God - a place where there will be laughter, and no tears, and the wine will flow, and God's people will dance, and the Lord Jesus Himself will be right there, in the middle of it all.....

If that sounds like an invitation, it's because it is. The Lord Jesus, through the Gospel, invites you all to come. I hope every one of you will be there.....