

The Gospel of John - The First Miracle

John 2: 1-11. On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there,² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

⁴"Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so, they filled them to the brim.⁸ Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so,⁹ 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 aside¹⁰ 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."

¹¹ 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.

This is the first miracle that Jesus ever performed and it comes with lots of questions. Like, why did he do his first miracle at a wedding? Why was running out of wine such a big deal? What was up between Jesus and His mother? What time hadn't come? Was there anything special about the six jars? Out of all the "first" miracles he could have performed, why this one? Finally, 120 gallons of wine is a lot of wine!

Let's start off with the wedding. In the village culture of Palestine, weddings were important events, announced well in advance and recognized by the entire village. A ceremony could go on for an entire week. Gift giving was carefully considered not simply as a gesture of goodwill but as a means of bringing honour on the couple and their families. Also, legal ramifications followed when customs were not followed because it implied shame on the couple and dishonour for the host.

So, this gives us insight into the concern of the servants when the feast suddenly runs out of wine. This is not merely an embarrassing situation it is a dishonouring crisis for the host. Since these festivals went on for days it is no surprise that such a calamity might arise.

So, it's no wonder that Mary brings it up with Jesus. Which also tells us that the people getting married were probably related to the family, which would explain why they were both there. Mary was probably even involved in helping to put the wedding on, so she tells Jesus about it. Take another look: **3 When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."** **4 "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."** **5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."** John 2:3-5.

At first glance Jesus' response seems rather harsh but it is simply formal. It was the exact same phrase he used for Mary when he tenderly reached out to her during his final moments on the cross. The phrase "Why do you involve me?" doesn't mean what you might think, either. It literally reads, "What does this have to do with you and me?" Or put another way, "How can this matter that concerns you be of mutual interest to us?"

She was probably wondering when he would step forward as the Messiah. Look again at what Jesus said to her: **4"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." John 2:4.** Now at first, that seems a little abrupt, doesn't it? Almost rude? If he revealed himself fully now, declared himself the Messiah, then the hour of the cross would be upon Him. It wasn't time for that.

His mother said to the servants, **"Do whatever he tells you." John 2:5.** She completely turned it over to Him. For him to do whatever he wanted, however he wanted. Pastor James White says, "This really was a moment when Mary went from being his mother to being his follower."

There's lots of little questions with this that people often have. Like, was this really wine and what does that mean when it comes to us and drinking? Also, if it was real wine, why so much? First, yes it was real, fermented wine. It wasn't just grape juice. Nothing else would have been served in a wedding of this sort. Even the master of the banquet comments that not only was it good wine, but that most people don't bring out the good stuff until after everyone had enough to drink so they couldn't taste the difference!

Back then it was diluted to about the strength of about a beer – but it was definitely the real thing. So, does that mean it's okay for Christ followers to drink? The short answer is "yes." Nowhere in Scripture is it forbidden. To say it is forbidden or wrong would be legalistic and adding to what Scripture says. Not only did Jesus make real wine with his first miracle but the Bible records Jesus saying that he drank wine Himself.

At the Last Supper, just before His death, right after passing the cup of wine, Jesus said: **"I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God." Mark 14:25.** Which also suggests that there will be wine in heaven. Which just got some of you more than a little excited.

This doesn't mean that Christians have to drink wine; ...it doesn't mean that you don't show good judgment and discipline on the amount of drinking; ...it doesn't mean there aren't certain times and situations when it's best not to; ...it doesn't mean that you can drink if you are underage – because you are called by God to obey the law; ...it doesn't mean that there aren't some people who, because of their make-up, shouldn't abstain completely. It just means that you can't look to the Bible and say it's wrong to drink wine.

In fact, while there are all kinds of guidelines and principles about its proper use and the dangers it can hold. Wine is celebrated throughout the Bible. For example, in the 104th Psalm, God is thanked for it - it says: **He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate — bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart." Psalm 104:14-15.** In Ecclesiastes, the Bible says: **Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart**

Ecclesiastes 9:7. the apostle Paul told Timothy to drink some wine, because it would be good for him. **Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses I Timothy 5:23.**

Now why did Jesus provide so much wine? Each of the jars is said to have held 20-30 gallons. In today's equivalent, around 600 bottles of wine. Remember, this was a big event for a lot of people, and it lasted several days. So, it's not as much as you might think. Further, the story of Cana carries remarkable symbolism for Jews and their Messiah.

First, Jesus is interested in the commonplace events of our lives. Yes, he is interested in saving souls and renewing lives. However, he is also interested in the ordinary events of our daily lives. The Cana story tells us that we can invite Jesus into the smallest dilemmas of our lives and ask him for help.

Secondly, throughout the Bible, the coming of the Kingdom of God is likened to a wedding feast. In fact, throughout biblical history, both the coming of the Messiah and even heaven itself was often likened to a wedding feast. So that the first miracle, the start of His public ministry, was at a wedding fits.

Then there's the symbolism of running out of wine, revealing that with the coming of Christ, the old ways of religion were empty, and he would bring a new wine for people to drink that would finally and ultimately satisfy their souls. There was now going to be new wine in a new wineskin.

Then there is the symbolism of using the ceremonial jars that were filled with water for ritualistic cleansing. The Messiah has touched them and made them obsolete for purification. Religious instruments and practices that had been used in Israel's history must undergo severe rethinking. The Cana story says, **"God has arrived and Christ desires an immediacy, an intimacy with us that will not be impeded by ritual forms that no longer bring life".ⁱ**

Then there's the symbolism of filling the jars to the very top, showing that the old ways of doing things had run their course. There was nothing more for them to do. There was nothing to be added to their work. They had done all that they were intended to do. Their day was over.

Then there is the symbolism of wine itself. The coming of Christ, marked on that day, would mean feasting and joy. And that's also what's behind the symbolism of so much wine indicating that while the old way of religion could only go so far. The life that Christ brings would be overflowing and abundant and without measure.

Finally, there is the symbolism of the miracle itself. Which John rightly calls a sign. Because that's what miracles were signs. So, if a miracle is a sign, what is it pointing to? What is it supporting? It's a sign that here is God's revelation. That here, God is saying something. This is a God-thing. The point of a miracle was to authenticate God's person, God's message, God's word.

¹¹ 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. What it meant for those first disciples was faith.

We need to remember that miracles didn't have that effect on people in Jesus' day. Lots of people saw him perform miracles and didn't have faith. Because miracles don't force faith – they invite it. Faith is always an invitation filled with grace and love.

ⁱ Gary M Burge, John: The NIV Application Commentary, page 103.