

“Miracle with a Message”

John 2:1-11

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Introduction:

In almost every wedding ceremony, it seems that something almost always goes wrong. Sometimes it is just a simple misstatement, and at other times it is rather funny. Several years ago, I remember telling the bride that she should take her finger and put it on her husband's ring (instead of taking the ring and putting it on her husband's finger). But then other mistakes are more interesting. I have read of one young bride who was very nervous, and so in the days leading up to the wedding, the minister asked the best man to be prepared to read the passage at the start of the wedding. And so after setting it up and saying that the passage applied especially to this bride, the minister asked the best man to read 1 John 4:18, ***“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.”*** What a comforting passage for a terrified bride! However, the best man did not really know much about the Bible, he did not know the difference between John and 1 John, so instead of reading 1 John 4:18, he accidentally read John 4:18 instead, ***“...for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband....”*** Not exactly the passage the minister had in mind!

I have read of another wedding where the young man carrying the rings started coming down the aisle, but he would take a couple steps, put up his hands like claws and growl at those in the audience—two steps and growl, two steps and growl, all the way down the aisle. By the time he got to the front, the audience was roaring in laughter and the little boy was crying. After the service, his mom and dad pulled him aside and said, ***“What in the world were you thinking?”*** The little boy said, ***“They told me that I was the ring bear!”*** The ring bear!

We know that some of the best videos on America's Funniest Home Videos come from various weddings—groomsmen fainting, bridesmaid's hair catching on fire, brides tripping over the dress, drunken uncles stumbling through the reception—there is so much that can go wrong at a wedding. Some of you may remember an outdoor wedding here in Madison several years ago between two of our members, where a fire engine actually roared past right behind us right in the middle of the ceremony—well that made for a very memorable occasion. On our own wedding day more than 16 years ago now, I woke up sick with a fever that morning, and so whenever my dad would pause for a prayer, everyone would bow their heads and close their eyes, so I would use that time to wipe my face and try to keep from passing out. However, I forgot about the video camera. And so for years, whenever we would go to see my

grandfather in Nashville, he would cue up the tape and replay it several times, **“Look at that boy sweat! Look at that boy sweat!”**

This morning, in response to a special request from one of the children of this congregation, I would like for us to consider a passage in the book of **John (John 2—John)**, not **1 John**, **2 John**, or **3 John**, a passage where Jesus went to a wedding, and it was a wedding where something went horribly wrong. In our pew Bibles, the passage is found on **page 1656**. **»PPT»** We find that Jesus was at this wedding with His mother along with His brothers and at least five of His disciples. Please remember that number for later—five disciples. Nevertheless, the event takes place in the tiny little village of Cana in Galilee, and the miracle we are about to consider is described by John as being the **“beginning”** of all of the miracles that Jesus ever performed. Perhaps you have heard all kinds of speculation about Jesus doing all kinds of weird stuff as a kid—making clay pigeons come to life, killing a child for running into Him on the playground, stretching a board to make it fit—but John here says that this is the **“beginning,”** that this is the first miracle that Jesus ever performed. It is also the first of seven miracles in John’s gospel account, and it is only found here in the book of **John**. It is significant because the miracles recorded for us in the book of **John** had a very specific purpose.

Over at the end of the book, in **John 20:30-31**, **»PPT»** John came right out and gave us the purpose as he said, **“Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”** The purpose of this first miracle, then, is to reaffirm and reinforce our faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. That is the reason for what Jesus did here.

However, as significant as this miracle is, and in spite of the main purpose, many people seem to get snagged or hung up on the details, they get pulled off track, and they end up missing the main point. The primary stumbling point here is the issue of alcohol as Jesus changes up to 180 gallons of water into the best wine that at least this one caterer had ever tasted. And so at this point, some people will say, **“Ha! Jesus went to a party where the guests were stumbling around drunk, and then He helped them get even more drunk! Therefore, I can drink as much alcohol as I want to!”** However, the Bible is full of warnings about the overuse of alcohol. We remember the words of Solomon from **Proverbs 23:20-21**, **“Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe one with rags.”** According to King Solomon, the drinking of alcohol (just like the eating of food) can be taken to an extreme. We have a problem in both of these areas today. In the New Testament, we are clearly told in **1 Corinthians 6** that being a drunkard will keep a person out of heaven. Any drinking of alcohol that results in drunkenness, therefore, is a sin and will cause a person to be lost forever.

As I was doing the research for this morning’s lesson, I discovered that some denominational churches will actually force people to sign a covenant before they allow you to become a member—promising to abstain from all alcohol. On the other

hand, I personally know of at least one denominational church that sponsors a beer tent as a fundraiser. Now before you ask me where that church is so you can go join, I would say that the truth is probably somewhere between those two extremes.

One variable that many people miss here is that the wine people drank 2,000 years ago probably had a much lower alcohol content in it than the wine that most people drink today. It has been said that to compare their wine to our wine would be like comparing the donkey Jesus rode to the car sitting out in our driveway. And so we are back to the question: What kind of wine did Jesus make here? Exactly what percentage of alcohol (if any) did it contain? I do not know. But I do know that the Holy Spirit who inspired this passage apparently did not really consider this issue worth discussing. The purpose of this passage is not to justify or condemn the use of alcohol (we can go to other passages for that), but the purpose of this miracle is to establish faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

As I looked in my folder on John 2, I found about 15 articles by our brethren on this miracle. In 14 out of those 15 articles, however, the main point of the article was about how the wine Jesus made must not have contained alcohol. I would say that 14 out of 15 missed the whole point of the miracle! The purpose of this miracle (according to John himself) was to establish faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God! With that, let us please look at the text itself—John 2:1-11...

¹ On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; ² and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." ⁶ Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each. ⁷ Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." So they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And He said to them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it to him. ⁹ When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom, ¹⁰ and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹ This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.

As we look back at these 11 verses, and as we think about the main point of strengthening our faith in Jesus as the Son of God, I would like for us to consider several lessons that will serve as signs—pointing and directing our lives toward Jesus.

»PPT»

I. **One of the first things we realize here is that the miracle started with a crisis—in other words, before having their faith strengthened, THE PEOPLE INVOLVED HAD TO REALIZE THEY HAD A PROBLEM.** »PPT»

In verse 3, Mary comes up to Jesus and says, *“They have no wine.”* Now for us it might not seem like such a big deal, but for the Jewish people, wine was extremely important, and this would have been a disaster—it would have been embarrassing to the family. It would maybe be a little bit like McDonalds running out of hamburgers, KFC running out of fried chicken, or maybe like Woodman’s running out of food. It would be like running out of chips at the Super Bowl party or a little like running out of burgers at a Memorial Day BBQ, and yet unlike tomorrow, the people in Jesus’ time would not have been able to run down the street to Wal-Mart.

The people, then, realized they had a problem. And as embarrassing as it might have been, we also notice that it was still not the end of the world. It was embarrassing but not life-threatening. And really, that is like a lot of problems we have today. We are late for a meeting, we bounce a check, we get stuck in traffic on the beltline—the world will not come to an end, but the situation presents enough of a problem for us to worry about.

The first step in building our faith, then, is to realize that we have a problem. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied”* (Matthew 5:6). The first step to being *satisfied* is being *hungry* and *thirsty*, and the people in John 2 are definitely getting thirsty! It may seem basic, but they realize they have a problem, and that is the first step.

II. **As we continue looking at John 2, we then discover that MARY BRINGS THE PROBLEM TO JESUS.** »PPT»

Not only did she realize that the wine was gone, but she took it to the next level and told her Son about the situation. The Lord had just started a 3-½ year mission to save the world, and yet he took the time not only to attend a wedding reception but also to listen to what (in the big picture) was a pretty trivial concern from his mother.

As we let that sink in, we start to realize that what is important to *us* is important to *God*. In other words, if we have a problem, and if that problem is affecting us (no matter how big or how small it is), then God wants to hear about it. As the Bible says in Hebrews 4:15-16, *“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* If it matters to us it matters to God!

The Lord is not only interested in the big things, but the Lord is also interested in the small things. Maybe it’s a health concern, maybe it’s a financial issue, maybe it’s an employment problem, maybe it’s a family concern, maybe it’s a problem with addiction, maybe it’s a problem at school, maybe it’s a legal issue—if it matters to us

it matters to God, and the Lord wants to hear about it. Some people look at prayer as being like calling 911—you only call in an emergency. I have heard it explained that you only call 911 when you need lights and sirens. And so perhaps in a similar way we think to ourselves, **“Oh, God wouldn’t want to be bothered with my little concerns.”** And yet the Bible says in 1 Peter 5:6-7, **“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you,”** **“...casting ALL your anxiety on Him!”** If it matters to us it matters to God!

Mary, then, must have had at least some idea that Jesus could have done something about this situation. She had seen the angel announcing His conception, she had heard the promise that He would be the Messiah, she had seen the angels worshipping His birth, she had seen the wise men bringing gifts, she had seen Jesus discussing God’s law in the temple at the age of 12, and now her son had just been baptized—with the voice of God saying, **“You are My beloved Son, in you I am well-pleased.”** So she brings it to Jesus. But then we come to verse 4, and the Lord’s response is a little bit surprising, His response at first seems a little bit cold and harsh, because in verse 4 the Lord says, **“Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come.”** It may seem harsh to us, and yet Jesus is simply redefining the relationship. Jesus is basically saying, **“This is now an area of My life where you (as My mother) no longer have jurisdiction over Me.”** The Lord’s time had not yet come, and it was not up to Mary to decide when that would happen. In other words, Mary’s relationship with her Son is now changing—no longer would she be approaching Jesus merely as her Son, but from now on she would also be approaching Him as her Savior (just as any other woman would do). **“Woman,”** by the way, is also how Jesus addressed the woman at the well in John 4, the woman caught in adultery in John 8, his own mother at the cross in John 19, and Mary Magdalene at the tomb in John 20. The Lord, therefore, is now starting a 3-½ year journey that will end with the cross, and family relationships are no longer at the top of His agenda. Jesus wanted His mother to know that if He stepped in and did something here, if He performed a miracle, it would not be because of her, it would not be because His mom told Him to do it, but it would be because His Father in heaven wanted Him to do it.

So, unless you are your mother’s Savior, unless you are getting ready to die on a cross for your mother’s sins and the sins of the world, I would not suggest that our young men approach their own mothers this way. If your mom tells you to take out the trash, **do not respond by saying, “Woman, what does that have to do with us?”** Because if you do, then the time of your departure might come a lot sooner than you think!

III. But with all of this in mind, we move on to the next phase in our faith-building study, because even with what seems to be a rather abrupt response, Mary reacts by saying to the servants, “Whatever He says to do, do it.” In other words, after we recognize we have a problem and after we bring it to Jesus, we are told here to **OBEY HIS COMMANDS.**
»PPT» “Whatever He says to do, do it.”

Mary knew that her Son was a man, but she also knew that her Son was God in the flesh, and as such He has the authority—He is someone to be obeyed. Mary knew that if there was any way out of this embarrassing situation, the best thing to do was to *listen to Jesus*.

In **verse 6**, we find that there were six stone waterpots nearby—each one having a capacity of 20-30 gallons—and in **verse 7** Jesus says to the servants, ***“Fill the waterpots with water.”*** And John then tells us that they, ***“...filled them up to the brim.”*** You know, that is a lot of water! Up front here this morning, we have a 32 gallon trash can. If you can imagine six of these full of water, that is a lot of water. That is a lot of weight! That is a lot of work! Without the pleasure of indoor plumbing, if someone told us to fill up six of these trash cans with water, what would we do? Well, we would have a lot of work on our hands. As far as I know, the closest water supply is the pond off of Acewood Boulevard down on the other side of Cottage Grove Road—about a mile from here. If we had to fill up six of these trash cans, that is a whole lot of work. And yet we find that the servants listened to Jesus and they did as they were told. They started filling those stone waterpots with water and they filled them to the brim. That would have been around 180 gallons of water. For a little comparison, our baptistery downstairs holds 125 gallons. We probably only fill it with 90 for a baptism, so this would have been like filling up the baptistery twice—again, a lot of water and a lot of work!

At this point, my natural question is ***“Why?”*** If Jesus had the power to change water into wine, then He also had the power to get the water. Jesus also would have had the power just to make the wine from nothing. Jesus could have delivered this wine in bottles. Why, then, did Jesus tell these servants to fill up the waterpots? The answer is: God never does for *us* what we can do for *ourselves*! In other words, there is a value to *obedience*. In fact, *obedience* and *faith* are bound together and cannot be separated.

If I ask God for help with my finances, but then I go out and use my credit card to buy a new car and charge more than \$200 a week in eating out, chances are God will not start helping me with my finances. But rather, in each area of life, we need to be willing to do whatever the Lord tells us to do—even if it is not convenient, even if it is something we have never done before, even if it is something that does not make sense from a human point of view. Certainly when Naaman the leper was told to go dip seven times in the Jordan River, that command from God did not make much sense. In fact, Naaman even argued with the command, but eventually Naaman obeyed and he was cured of that leprosy.

And in the same way, hauling in nearly 200 gallons of water probably did not make very much sense to these servants, either, but the Bible says that they obeyed. The lesson for us is that we are to do whatever it is that God tells us to do. The Bible is a book of people who build an ark when there is no rain, it is a book of people who are willing to take their own children to the altar when there is no sacrifice, and it is a book of people who will soak their wood with water before calling down fire for a sacrifice. The Bible is a book of people who are willing to obey God even when it does not make sense at the time. And with that, the servants take the water to the

headwaiter just as they had been instructed to do. What an encouragement, and what an example for us today!

IV. All of this brings us to the end of this process as we find that JESUS PROVIDES FAR BEYOND OUR EXPECTATIONS—AS HE BUILDS AND INCREASES OUR FAITH IN THE POWER OF GOD. **▶PPT▶**

As the headwaiter tastes the wine, he realizes that this is the good stuff—and this man has tasted a lot of wine—but this is the best! And so he calls for the bridegroom, and he speaks in shock and amazement. Normally, a host would serve the best things first and would save the second-rate stuff for later in the week. But the headwaiter tasted the wine and realized that the host had saved the best for last. And please remember: There's a lot of it! We are talking up to 180 gallons of the good stuff! That's a lot of wine! But it is right in line with what the Lord continued to do over the next 3-½ years. He often went above and beyond. It's not that the Lord miscalculated and accidentally made a little too much, but he did it on purpose. We remember the feeding of the 4,000 and the feeding of the 5,000. He did not just provide the minimum, but there were literally baskets of food left over after each meal. In the same way, the Lord provided nearly 200 gallons of wine for this particular wedding feast. Do you know how many 8 ounce servings that is? I did the math, and it looks to me like more than 2,800 servings.

Did you notice the purpose down in **verse 11**? Did you notice what John got out of it looking back on it many years later? John says, ***"This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him."*** The main goal here was not to save the groom's family from embarrassment. The main goal here was not simply to make sure everyone had a good time. But according to John the purpose of this miracle was to manifest the glory of Christ and to cause His disciples to believe in Him. Back in the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah was looking forward to the New Covenant, to the coming of the Messiah, when he said (in **Isaiah 25:6-10**)...

⁶ The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; a banquet of aged wine...and refined, aged wine.... ⁸ He will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth;for the LORD has spoken. ⁹ And it will be said in that day, "Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation." ¹⁰ For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain...

By providing an abundance of wine, the Lord was building faith and was announcing the arrival of God's kingdom. By the way, do you remember how many disciples Jesus had at this point? Five. Five plus the Lord. Jesus looked at those six stone waterpots, he turned the water into wine, and I would say that was probably the most generous gift that any six people had ever brought to that wedding.

Conclusion:

There is no such thing as a perfect wedding. It seems that something almost always goes wrong. And you know what? It is often what goes wrong that makes the wedding so memorable. Those who experienced the “ring bear” probably remember nothing but the bear! And in the same way, those who attended a wedding in the small village of Cana nearly 2,000 years ago may not even remember who got married that day, but know without a doubt that some who were there on that occasion will remember what happened with the wine.

It is amazing how the problems that we face are sometimes able to teach us so much. I would suggest that we realize what our problem really is, that we bring it to the Lord, that we obey His commands, and that we then stand back and allow our faith to be strengthened as a result of whatever happens next.

The question for us is this: How do we respond to this miracle? Do we rationalize it and explain it away like the headwaiter? Or do we respond with belief like the disciples? John says that this miracle was written down for our benefit, so that we can believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

If you have something we need to pray about as a congregation this morning, we hope you will let us know about that. Write it down and pass it to the front. We can pray about it together.

On the other hand, if you are not yet a Christian, you need to know that Jesus is the Son of God. You need to know that we must turn away from our sins. We need to have a change of heart concerning sin—a determination to turn away from it. And at that point we are then ready to submit to Christ in baptism—a burial in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have any questions, we would love to talk to you about that. But if you are ready to obey the good news right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org