JESUS’ FIRST MIRACLE: WATER INTO WINE

Scripture: John 2:1-11.

In Chapter 1 we heard the Apostle John present his opening statement and he established that Jesus is God. Jesus, who John calls “the Word,” existed from the very beginning and was Himself actively involved in the creation of the world. Next we heard the testimony of several eyewitnesses (John the Baptist, Andrew, Philip and Nathanael). They said that Jesus is the Son of God, the King of Israel, the Messiah whom they had been seeking. At the end of Chapter 1 we heard Jesus Himself, borrowing from the Jacob’s Ladder imagery, claim that through Him we have direct access to God. In the first chapter alone the Apostle John has provided us with some powerful testimony about Jesus, but has yet to mention any of Jesus’ miracles. Well in Chapter 2 John presents the first of eight sign miracles that Jesus performed. These miracles help to confirm who Jesus is – the only begotten Son of God.

What is John’s purpose in writing his gospel? Do you remember? Recall his statement in John 20:31. As part of the proof that Jesus is the Son of God John gives eight different sign miracles. All eight miracles are different. No two are alike. Jesus healed many blind people, but John records only one. Jesus fed crowds of people at least twice that we know about. John records only one. Jesus may have done many of these several times, but John only records them once. John chooses eight sign miracles to show Jesus as God. The first is water into wine in Chapter 2. The second is healing the official’s son in Chapter 4. The third is making the paralyzed man walk in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6 there are two miracles – the feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee. Chapter 9 gives the sixth one – giving sight to the blind. In Chapter 11 there is the raising of Lazarus from the dead. The last one is recorded in Chapter 21 when Jesus (following His resurrection) provides fish in the nets of the disciples. So John gives us eight unique miracles showing Jesus’ power over various aspects of nature.

As we come to Chapter 2 Jesus has just moved up to Galilee from the Jordan River where John the Baptist had been preaching. It’s here in Galilee that Jesus begins His public ministry. This is the area Jesus is from as well as the area where most of His disciples are from. It’s familiar territory.

READ John 2:1-2.

Three days has passed since Jesus called Philip and Nathanael at the end of Chapter 1. The setting is a wedding at Cana. Cana is a little village not far from Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth. The fact that Jesus was invited to this wedding and that Mary His mother is there (apparently she is assisting the host as we will see) indicates that the wedding is likely that of a relative or close friend of the family. So there are people present at this event that Jesus knows personally and probably grew up with.

READ John 2:3-5.

A problem arises at the wedding – the host runs out of wine. I am not going to spend time debating whether this was wine or grape juice. I believe it is fermented wine. The Bible calls it wine and in that culture wine was a staple food. Whenever you read a narrative from history, you must read and understand it in its actual cultural and historical context. That’s the case here. In Jesus’ day they did not have a preservation or purification process for foods so they just let their fruit juices (mostly from grapes) undergo a natural fermentation process. Because there were no preservatives for the wine and because there was no ability to freeze or refrigerate, there was the problem that the wine fermented and, as it did so, over a period of time, it developed a distinctive odor, taste and an intoxicating property. Public intoxication was generally considered a disgrace, though it happened. However, the Bible never condones drunkenness. It always speaks about being drunk in a negative light. Eph 5:18 immediately comes to my mind – “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.” Anyway, I just wanted to set the record straight that I believe Jesus does, in fact, in this narrative turn ordinary water into real wine.

Mary tells Jesus they've run out of wine. So she goes to Jesus and lets Him know there’s a problem. She knows from her own personal experience that Jesus will do what He wants but she believes that He has the power to do anything (note: v 11 tells us this is Jesus’ first miracle). However, based on Jesus’ response in verse 4, I believe she was implying “Jesus, you need to do something about this.” Jesus immediately responded, “Woman, what does this have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.” That’s an interesting response of Jesus to his mother. First of all the term he uses for Mary is not, “Mother,” but “Woman.” It is a more formal term, the English equivalent being “lady.” It is a respectful term, yet it is a distant rather than an intimate term. Jesus is beginning His earthly ministry so, of necessity, there needs to be some distancing of Himself and His relationship with His earthly family. I believe that is what we see here. Mary may have been Jesus’ human mother, but just like everyone else, Mary needs Jesus to be her Savior, he Redeemer. In effect, Jesus is de-emphasizing His human relationship with His mother. There has been a clean break, a transition made, from His private life, the first 30+ years of His life, and His public ministry as the incarnate Son of God.

[discuss what Jesus meant by “My hour has not yet come”] Some might believe that Jesus is minimizing Mary's concern here as being trivial, but I don’t believe that’s the case. Mary understands what Jesus is saying. She believes He is going to act. So she instructs the servants in verse 5, “Do whatever He tells you.”

Let me say something about the miracles that Jesus performed. Jesus never did any of them just to draw attention to Himself. Every miracle He performed had an inherent need behind it – there was either a physical or an emotional need. There was a blind man who needed to see. There was a paralyzed man who couldn't walk. There were some hungry people who needed to be fed. Fearful disciples in a boat who needed to have the storm calmed. You see, Jesus miracles always met a need and they demonstrated who He was. You see the same thing here in this passage.

READ John 2:6.

The Jews had what are called “rites of purification.” Before you ate you washed your hands and your feet. Mark 7:3 says, “For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders.” So these water pots are not just sitting there for looks. They are for the purpose of purification. They are not pots you normally drink water from. There are six pots, so there is approximately 150 gallons of water available when they are filled. It’s a lot of water!

[picture of limestone water pots from 1st Century Israel]

Each water pot was cut from a single piece of limestone and held between 20-30 gallons of water. Empty, each pot weighed around 100 lbs. The weight of the water when full was between 170 and 250 lbs.

READ John 2:7.

Notice that John adds the detail that they filled the water pots up to the brim. So there could be nothing added to the water. Filling the pots was obviously no easy job. There must have been a spring or a well somewhere nearby and a whole lot of servants had to go to a whole lot of effort to transport them out, fill up all those water pots, then transport them back to the wedding. And they got them all full to the brim and brought them back into the house. So this took some time.

READ John 2:8-10.

The master of the feast mentioned here is like the head waiter. He is the one responsible for all the guests and the seating and all the food and making sure that everybody is well supplied with everything. And so they take these pots filled with water to him. He tastes it and he thinks that it is great. He tells the bridegroom, “This wine is fabulous – where has it been?” You can imagine when Christ made it, it was good, I mean, really, really good! That's the miracle. The miracle is that ordinary well or spring water suddenly becomes really good tasting wine. And it's treated as almost being incidental. Look again at verse 9, “When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine…” That’s all it says. It doesn't tell us how it was made. It just says that it was (similar to the Creation narrative – “and let there be light, and there was light.”) And the master of the feast had no idea where it came from. But the servants knew! He calls the bridegroom in and says, “Man, this wine is fantastic! Most people serve the best wine up front, but you have saved it for the end.” That is the miracle that Jesus turned water into not just wine, but good wine.

There are no magical words spoken, no big to do. Jesus does not draw attention to Himself or what he has just done. In this miracle Jesus the Master Creator eliminates all the natural processes. A wine this good requires years to ferment. It would require the best grapes from the finest vineyards in the region. But this wine didn't come from any grapes. No grapes, no vines, no seeds, no dirt, no sunlight, no fermentation process…just good tasting wine. Now that’s a miracle! Jesus Christ created wine out of...what?...just ordinary water. This was a creative miracle. What did God create the world from? Some gases floating around out in space that erupted somehow in a big bang? No. God created the world out of nothing. By divine power He spoke it into existence.

Do you know that when you're dealing with Jesus Christ you are dealing with the master Creator of the world? That is how John began his gospel.

We don't need evolution and millions of years to explain the creative work of Jesus Christ. We need no scientific explanation. By faith we believe He did it. It was a miracle of God. And here Jesus makes wine out of nothing. It was no problem for Him to start with nothing and make a whole world full of everything. You have just a little creation right there in Cana. No grapes, no vines, no time period for fermentation, nothing.

Let's apply this spiritually to our own lives. Think back to when you got saved. Didn't the Lord make something out of nothing back then too? In terms of 2 Corinthians 5:17 where it says, "If any man be in Christ he is...what?...a new creature." He made us completely new. We were spiritually depraved and dead. He made us a new creature. Jesus Christ is the master creator; He is God. He needs nothing to create something good.

Well the head waiter was really impressed in verse 9 and he didn't really know where it came from but he was glad that they had kept it till the last. The thing that interests me is what about these servants. You see that little parenthesis? “The servants who had drawn the water knew.” I wonder why that's included here because when Jesus leaves this wedding, there's nobody with Him, except His mother and brothers and a handful of His disciples. Both the servants and the disciples knew what Jesus did.

READ John 2:11.

This verse sheds light on why Jesus performed this miracle. Jesus did this first sign at Cana for one reason – to manifest His glory. To show who He was – God! And He was targeting one group…for the sake of His disciples and for their faith. It was a private miracle. Only a few people knew what had happened and the disciples believed. Not the servants, but the disciples.

Do miracles still happen today? Sure they do. If you look around you and observe what’s happening with spiritual eyes you will see the hand of God at work all the time, often miraculously.

Has Jesus Christ made any difference in your life? He wants to. He can. He will. Just let Him. And then, when He does miracles in your life, tell others. Tell what great things He has done and is doing in your life. Share Jesus with the world through your own personal testimony.

We wouldn’t know about this miracle if John had not shared it with us.