

The Wedding at Cana: John 2:1-11

1. Why did Jesus make his inaugural sign a miracle which is hidden from any but the disciples? Why make it contingent on Mary's persistence? If Mary hadn't made her request and persisted after Jesus' first reply, would Jesus still have performed this sign which is so central to his message about the end of the ceremonial law and the coming Messianic feast (cf. Isaiah 25)?
2. Mary knew Jesus, and knew to press even after his first response. What is Mary telling us about Jesus?
3. What is the honor-shame dynamic in this passage? Remember that Jesus didn't just provide an abundance of fine wine, he also made it impossible for the guests to both remain at the wedding and participate in ceremonial cleansing rites.¹
4. Several passages lie between the first and second signs. Are these any ways in which the following passages recall or expand on the Wedding? (a) *Jesus cleanses the temple* (2:13-25); (b) *Jesus and Nicodemus* (3:1-21); *John the Baptist and Jesus* (3:22-36); (c) *the Samaritan woman* (4:1-42).
5. Jesus has warned of hardship for those who follow the Son of Man, who has no place to lay his head (Lk 9:58). At the same time Jesus dined with dozens of outcasts, fed thousands of followers and probably healed as many or more, and here we see him providing more excellent wine than one person could drink in a year. One could easily conclude that if Jesus is able to generously answer our requests, he is very glad to do so. Is this a fair conclusion? Is it the Jesus you have experienced? If not, is that because he has said no or because you haven't asked?

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Fun fact: Virgins were married on the fourth day of the week, Wednesday, and widows on the fifth.

Further fun fact: Jesus brusque reply to Mary, literally "what to me and to you", is the same Semitic expression used by the demons in Mark 1:24, and "Legion" in Luke 8:28.

Fun archeological fact: "The discovery of stone vessels became a routine matter in our work, for whenever we approached a stratum of the Second Temple period, and a building which was burnt during the destruction of the city in AD 70 began revealing itself, they invariably made an appearance as well. Thus, even in the absence of other specific chronological cues, we were often able to date a structure as Herodian solely on the basis of the presence of even a single stone vessel" [Avigad, *Israel Exploration Journal* 12 (1962), 174].

Final fun fact: Bernard of Clairvaux, in the 11th century, saw in the six stone vessels the six monastic duties of chastity, fasting, manual labor, vigils, silence and obedience.

¹ A typical village family would have one such large stone jar. The others were likely borrowed from neighbors (Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 69). Given their size, 20-30 gal, filling and moving them would be a challenge.

Extra questions:

1. Why did Jesus refer to his “hour”?
2. If this is a “sign”, what does it say?

Leader's Intro:

Today we switch from Ephesians to the signs of John's gospel. It is appropriate as we enter Advent to focus on material meant to tell us about who Jesus is and how he is uniquely qualified to meet the spiritual needs of his people.

There are seven miracles in John which was referred to as "signs", and play a structural role in the first half of the book which has, for this reason, been called the "book of signs" (the second portion of the book being the passion). John generally follows the signs with material that expands upon the signs. John himself says the purpose of the signs was to convince people that Jesus was the Son of God, the Christ (20:30-31).

Instead of giving a lot of background on John, I'll mention two things. First, John's gospel has the smallest vocabulary of any of the gospels, but has tremendous depth, and can generally be read on multiple levels. Second, John is always writing with the reader in mind. Writers like to say, "show, don't tell," and that describes John's style well. Because of this, events in John may function as acted-out parables. It also means that John *wants* us to ask why a person is there, why he or she does what he or she does, why someone else responds differently, etc.

The first sign is the wedding at Cana. This sign wins the award for the miracle we would be least likely to predict if it hadn't been recorded by John, and for the miracle involving the most alcohol. Appearing as it does at the beginning of the gospel account, it's clearly important to John and to us.

Notes

I. Background

- a. John
 - i. John's gospel has the smallest vocabulary of any of the gospels, but has tremendous depth
 - ii. John is always writing with the reader in mind and is never working on just a single level
 - iii. Because of this, events in John may function as acted-out parables

- b. The signs [σημεῖον (*sēmeion*)]
 - i. There are seven miracles in John which was referred to as "signs", and appear to play a structural role in the first half of the book which has, for this reason, been called the "book of signs" (the second portion of the book being the passion)
 - ii. John generally follows the signs with material that expands upon the signs
 - iii. John himself says the purpose of the signs was to convince people that Jesus was the Son of God, the Christ (20:30-31)

- c. Wine
 - i. Sirach describes well the cultural view toward wine in that day: "Wine is very life to human beings if taken in moderation. What is life to one who is without wine? It has been created to make people happy. Wine drunk at the proper time and in moderation is rejoicing of heart and gladness of soul." (31:27-28; see also Ps 104:15; Judges 9:13).
 - ii. The wine of Jesus' day was cut with water weakening it by ~x3, but was nevertheless capable of making one drunk
 - iii. "Jesus remembers that the prophets characterized the messianic age as a time when wine would flow liberally (e.g. Je 31:12; Ho 14:7; Am 9:13-14...)" (Carson).
 1. On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine-- the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever . . . In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us . . . let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation." (Isaiah 25:6-9)

- d. Possible interpretations:
 - i. "The new age had dawned, the true bridegroom had appeared, and his followers were to rejoice and make merry" (Blomberg—and see his "The Miracles as Parables" in *Gospel Perspectives* vol 6, 1986: 327-359 for references to the silly interpretations below)
 - ii. It teaches about the conversion of sinners (Tenney)
 - iii. Jesus' positive attitude to human life (van der Loos)
 - iv. His blessing on the institution of marriage (Armerding)
 - v. A retrospective meditation on Pentecost (Grassi)
 - vi. An anti-Baptist polemic (Geysler)
 - vii. Reflection on God's power and love in meeting human needs (Westcott)
 - viii. Something Jesus did because he didn't have another wedding gift (Derrett)

- e. Weddings
 - i. That Jesus and his mother and disciples were all invited to the same wedding suggests the wedding was for a relative or a close family friend.
 - ii. Virgins were marriage on the fourth day, Wed, and widows on the fifth (BBC)
 - iii. It included seven days of banqueting (BBC).
 - iv. The custom of the day was for wedding celebrations to ideally last seven days, and many friends of the bride and groom remained for the full period. Well in advance of the wedding celebration, the couple would have been betrothed—a legally binding commitment that

could only be broken through actual divorce proceedings. The wedding day was the day the groom took the bride to his home or his parents' home. On the evening of the first day, the bridal party gathered at her father's house and the bridegroom's party at his. Under the direction of the "friend of the bridegroom"⁴ or best man,⁵ the groom and his friends fetched his betrothed from her father's house and proceeded to his or his parents' house, where the wedding feast was held. That night the bride retired to her own room. The next day was a celebration, and at the end of the day, a festive meal was eaten. On that night, the couple consummated their marriage in the bridal chamber.⁶ (From <https://directors.tfionline.com/post/jesushis-life-and-message-wedding-and-wine/>)

f. Purification rituals

- i. "The description of the stone jars indicates that they contained enough water to fill a Jewish immersion pool used for ceremonial purification. Although Pharisees forbade storing water in jars, some Jews were less strict; thus these large jars were being reserved for ritual purposes. Stone jars were common because they were less likely to contract ritual uncleanness than those made of other substances." (BBC) "Using the jars for another purpose would temporarily defile them..."
- ii. The purpose of the water jars was for the rites of purification. We can see an example of some of what these rites entail in the Gospel of Mark: Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.)²² The jars were large containers used to hold the water needed for the regular cleansing required for individuals to be ritually clean. Both the water and the jars had to be ritually clean. If either became contaminated in some way, it made both the water and the jar ritually unclean. When this happened, if the jar was made of clay, it had to be destroyed. If the jars were stone, it wasn't necessary to destroy them. They could just be cleaned and used again.²³ Generally a home would have one or two such water jars, so on an occasion like this, some of the jars were probably borrowed from others in the village. (From <https://directors.tfionline.com/post/jesushis-life-and-message-wedding-and-wine/>)
- iii. "Nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean.' . . . For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, . . . greed, malice, deceit, envy, slander, arrogance . . . All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'" Mark 7:18-23
- iv. "Woe to you . . . you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Matthew 23:25,26
- v. Luk. 11:38 And when the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal.
- vi. Dennis: Rabbinic hand-washing:
 1. Ceremonial uncleanness
 2. - Gentiles
 3. - Dead things
 4. - Conveyed by touching
 5. - Method
 6. - Avoids imbibing evil

- vii. Dennis: The bigger picture:
 - 1. - People prefer to relate to God formalistically
 - 2. - Following a ritual, lighting incense, candle, or reciting could be devoid of moral content
 - 3. Performing a ritual:
 - 4. - Easy
 - 5. - Predictable
 - 6. - Often impersonal
- viii. Dennis:
 - 1. When humans devise religion, they turn to formalism and legalism
 - 2. When God reveals the nature of a true faith, it centers on a personal relationship with him
- ix. Regarding the stone vessels, this site provides a wealth of helpful and well referenced information: <http://trivialdevotion.blogspot.com/2014/06/how-jesus-turned-water-to-wine-john-26.html>

II. Words and Phrases

- a. “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?” (2:4) is literally “what to me and to you?” (*ti emoi kai soi*). “This expression, common in semitic idiom (Jdg 11:12; 2 Sam 16:10) always distances the two parties, the speaker’s tone overlaid with some degree of reproach (cf. the demons addressing Jesus, Mt 8:29; Mk 1:24; Lk 4:34; 8:28). The tone is not rude; it is certainly abrupt.”
- b. “Woman” was also not rude but not endearing.
- c. “*My time has not yet come*, he says: the word ‘time’, literally ‘hour’ (*hora*), constantly refers to his death on the cross and the exaltation bound up with it (7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1), or the consequences deriving from it (5:28-29), so it would be unnatural to take it any other way here.” (Carson)
 - i. Because Jesus’ ‘hour’ in John refers especially to the cross, here Jesus is saying, ‘Once I begin doing miracles, I begin the road to the cross.’” (BBC)

III. Themes

- a. What role do miracles play in our faith and belief?
 - i. Jesus refuses to work miracles when asked for signs: “The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him. 12 And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, “Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation.” 13 And he left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side.”(Mk 8:11-13, Mt 12:38-42)
 - ii. “Just as parables both concealed and revealed, Jesus’ miracles, especially those over powers of the natural world, not only triggered misunderstanding but also revealed the in-breaking of the power of God’s reign” (Blomberg)
 - iii. John’s clear about the purpose of the signs: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” (Jn 20:30-31)

- iv. But Jesus also says belief without seeing a miracle is “blessed”: “Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”” (Jn 20:24-29)

IV. Observations

- a. This passage has some resonances with Mk 2:18-22:
 - i. 18 Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, “Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” 19 Jesus said to them, “The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20 The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. 21 *“No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. 22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.”*
- b. “Everywhere Mary appears during the course of Jesus’ ministry, Jesus is at pains to establish distance between them (e.g. Mt 12:46-50)” (Carson).
- c. Jesus is likely not separating the Law from tradition, but using tradition as an indication that the Law needs to be replaced and will be, by something better (see Carson 173, end of the page, and Mk 7:3-4).
- d. “The sheer quantity of water turned into wine then becomes symbolic of the lavish provision of the new age.” (Carson 174)
- e. “The servants saw the sign, but not the glory; the disciples by faith perceived Jesus’ glory behind the sign, and they *put their faith in him.*” (Carson 175)
- f.

V. Questions

- a. Why have, as your inaugural “sign”, a miracle which is kept secret from any but the disciples present (which may have been as few as the 5 mentioned already)?
- b. If this is the first of Jesus’ miracles (2:11), why did his mom expect a miracle? Or was she just expecting him to handle the situation somehow?
 - i. Remember that Joseph was probably dead, so Mary was likely used to relying upon Jesus
 - ii. “...from a literary point of view, John repeatedly records Jesus’ interlocutors operating at a purely human, natural level, while Jesus himself transcends their questions, demands or expectations (3:3, 4; 4:15, 47; 5:6-7; 6:32-33, 41; 11:22-24).
- c. What is the honor-shame dynamic in this account?
- d. How is the central message of this passage reflected in the passages following it?
 - i. **Jesus cleanses the Temple:** The old Mosaic law is outdated (perhaps) and abused; parallels the W@C in its condemnation of the traditions
 - ii. **Nicodemus visits Jesus,** and identifies Jesus as from God because of his signs, and Jesus points out he can only see this because of the Spirit; parallels the W@C because it describes how to view Jesus’ signs
 - iii. **Jesus and JtB:** because Jesus’ disciples were baptizing people and JtB’s disciples objected, and JtB identifies Jesus as the groom and himself as the friend of the groom
 - iv. **The one from heaven**—only one from heaven talks of heavenly things and speaks the words of God, since he has been given the Spirit
 - v. **Jesus and the Samaritan woman**—Jesus exhibits miraculous knowledge of her situation and she believes; Jesus identifies himself as the Messiah and says the temple will pass; parallels W@C in its pointing toward a new work of God
 - vi.

- e. “This sort of pattern occurs elsewhere in John: Jesus initially refuses a request for assistance, then proceeds to help in his own way, often in response to a further demonstration of faith (4:47-50; cf. 11:21-44). In short, in 2:3 Mary approaches Jesus as his mother, and is reproached; in 2:5 she responds as a believer, and her faith is honored” (Carson 173). What does Mary’s interaction with Jesus (and Nicodemus’) tell us about how we should approach Jesus in prayer?
- f. Why did the servants respond differently from the disciples, given they had both seen the same miracle?
- g. The purification rites were meant to clean someone so he could come close to God without danger due to God’s holiness (see passages about God’s being a consuming fire). We rightly observe that because of Jesus we are clean and can approach God, but we may inadvertently forget that God is still a consuming fire. Is anything lost when we do? Is it sufficient for us to see Jesus as our friend (as John says) and leave it at that, or is there value to remembering God’s divine holiness?
- h. The purification rites were a way to avoid evil and uncleanness. But they easily allowed Jews to fall into honoring God externally but not internally. How much effort do we put into ensuring our relationships with God are healthy?

VI. To do

- a. Read Ken Bailey on Weddings and purification rites
- b. Read other Jewish sources
- c. Read Brown
- d. Jesus’ teachings which use weddings as a metaphor

(Old) Leader's Intro

We have just finished studying Ephesians, for which power is a central topic. In Ephesians believers are empowered by God to withstand suffering, to withstand the “rulers and authorities” and to achieve unity through the Spirit (cf. 3:1-13 and 3:20). Paul specifically prays that the readers would know “the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power”, the same power by which he raised Jesus from the dead. Paul tells the reader to be strong in God’s “mighty power” when facing the Enemy and prays that they might be strengthened in their inner being by power from the Holy Spirit (3:16), including the power to comprehend God’s love (3:18) and demolish the Enemy’s lies (or “strongholds”, 2 Cor 10:4). The resurrection power also empowered Paul’s ministry (“For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me”--1:29) and can empower ours. It was by God’s power that Paul became a servant of Jesus. Elsewhere Paul says that God’s power is manifest in our weakness (2 Cor 4:7; 12:9). For Paul, this power is not peripheral, but central: “My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God” (1 Cor 2:4-5). This is not to say that Paul diminishes the role of miracles, but rather that all miracles serve the goals of spreading the gospel and sanctifying the people of God by building up Christ’s body in love.

Introduction

This morning, we begin a series on seven miracles in the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John is the fourth book of the New Testament, and John was a disciple of Jesus, eye-witness of these events, and author of 5 New Testament books (Gospel of John, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Revelations). John organizes the first half of his gospel (chapters 1-12) around seven miracles performed by Jesus.

Someone said that John's gospel is "shallow enough for babies to wade in, but deep enough for elephants to drown in." There is a marvelous clarity and simplicity that makes John easy to grasp. But there is also a depth and profundity that produces ongoing awe and delight. This is especially true of the seven "signs."

On one level, these miracles were personal, supernatural expressions of Jesus' love and ability to meet these people's physical or social needs.

But they were also far more than that. They were "signs" (*sumeia*). As the word "sign" suggests, they are "attesting miracles," pointing beyond themselves to Jesus' divinity and his unique ability to meet our spiritual needs. At the end of his gospel, John makes this crystal clear (read 20:31).

Such is the case with Jesus' first miracle, recorded in John 2:1-11. On one level, he rescues a newly married couple from social disgrace by supernaturally changing water to wine. But this same miracle teaches reveals that Jesus is far more than an emergency caterer. Let's take a look . . .

The Setting

The setting is a wedding reception in Cana, a very small village only nine miles north of Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. Read 2:1-3.

This was a serious problem for the bride and groom. In ancient Near Eastern villages, wedding receptions were key social occasions—often lasting up to a week. To run out of food or drink was a major violation of hospitality which would subject to couple to social disgrace that could shadow them for the rest of their lives. And there was no easy way to remedy this situation, since you couldn't send someone out with your Visa to the local grocery store to buy more of those cardboard boxes of wine!

So Mary, who probably learned of the problem from the couple, informs Jesus before the rest of the people at the reception find out. She obviously expects him to do something.

Read 2:4. This sounds awfully disrespectful to Mary and insensitive to the couple—like "Hey old lady, what do I care about your plans? I don't have time for this." Actually, Jesus' answer is neither disrespectful nor insensitive.

On the one hand, my translation (NASB) has not done a good job of communicating the sense of "woman" (*gunai*). The NIV does a better job here by translating "dear woman." It was a term of endearment and respect.

As to the rest of Jesus' answer, Jesus is evidently responding to Mary's real intent in making her request.

“My hour” refers to the time when Jesus would publicly manifest himself as the Messiah. Mary, who knew Jesus was the Messiah, evidently saw this situation as the opportunity for Jesus to perform a dramatic miracle that would introduce him as Messiah.

Jesus refuses to handle the situation this way. “What have I to do with you” is a Hebrew idiom that means in this case “I have plans that are different than yours” or “I’ll handle this my way, not your way.”

Mary responds properly (read 2:5). She expresses her trust in him by deferring to his judgment on how to handle the situation. By doing so, she serves as a model of how we should approach Jesus in our requests to intervene: feel free to ask, believe that he is willing and able to help—but then trusting him to handle it in the best way vs. demanding, manipulating, etc.

And Jesus does intervene—not in a public way, but in a quiet, behind-the-scenes way so that only a few people realized that he saved the day . . .

The Miracle

Read 2:6-9. Imagine the bridegroom’s angst when the headwaiter called him over! Read 2:10. Instead of being rebuked for his poor planning, he is praised for his ingenious and lavish generosity! “Most people serve the Yellow Tail first, and then when the guests have drunk freely (so that their taste buds are dulled), they introduce the Gallo to cut costs. But you started with the Yellow Tail, and you’re ending with the Rothschild’s!” How did the groom react to this compliment? Did he express shocked surprise? Did he shrug and say, “It’s nothing, really?” John doesn’t tell us in his highly compressed account.

At any rate, the result was that Jesus in a very quiet way rescued the bride and groom from disgrace—and supernaturally produced over 120 gallons (60 cases; 750 fifths; 2400 4 oz. glasses) of fine vintage wine. This was far more than the guests (probably no more than a few dozen) could drink, so the considerable amount of leftover wine became a “liquid asset”—Jesus’ wedding gift.

By the way, what does this miracle tell you about Jesus’ attitude toward people enjoying a good time—including social drinking? How different from the Jesus I grew up hearing about (KILL-JOY; MORTICIAN)! Of course, the Bible warns against drunkenness and enslavement to alcohol—and those who cannot observe these limits shouldn’t drink at all. But appropriate social drinking was blessed by God in the Old Testament and by Jesus here.

The "Sign"

But this isn’t the only point of Jesus’ miracle. Read 2:11. The disciples realized that this miracle was a “sign” that revealed Jesus’ uniqueness so that they entrusted themselves to him as the Messiah. What else did they see in this “sign?”

The key is the way that Jesus performed this miracle 2:6 (read again). In a very compressed account, John gives us lots of detail on this issue. John wants us to know that these pots were not for ordinary drinking water, but rather water used for “the Jewish custom of purification.” Jesus could put the wine in other containers; he could have created new containers to hold the wine; he could have created it directly into people’s empty glasses. But *he chose to perform this miracle in a way that affected this custom*. If you want to understand what the disciples understood about this miracle, you have to understand the “Jewish custom of purification.”

This custom had nothing to do with germs and hygiene. It was a religious custom—*not* prescribed by God in the Old Testament, but rather invented by religious leaders who had a profoundly wrong view of spirituality.

They believed that the main spiritual problem was the threat of contamination by contact with bad people—“sin kooties,” if you will. If you touched something that bad people had touched (or even breathed air that they breathed), you could become ritually unclean. So the solution, the key to spirituality, the main way to approach God was through performing a ritual of cleansing or purification. Observant Jews had to wash their hands in very specific ways several times in the course of a meal.¹ No wonder they had so many water-pots on hand for the reception!

Does this sound familiar to you? This mentality is at the heart of most world religions, including (tragically) most people’s understanding of Christianity. *You must clean yourself up if you want to relate to God.* Whether by performing certain rituals in the right way at the right time, or by obeying detailed rules of external behavior, or by avoiding contact with certain kinds of people, etc.—the assumption is that you have clean yourself up to come to God.

Jesus’ first miracle implicitly condemned religious self-cleansing. By filling these waterpots with water and then changing the water into wine, he made it impossible for anyone at the reception to ritually purify himself. From this point on, Jesus explicitly rejected and condemned this approach to God. He said you can’t put new wine into old wineskins (Mk. 2:22). He condemned it as superficial and promoting hypocrisy (Mk. 7:18-23; Matt. 23:25,26).

Jesus didn’t come to provide an improved method of self-cleansing. He came to replace this with a radical new way to approach God. By turning the water into wine, Jesus replaced a symbol of human religious self-cleansing with a picture of his gift of abundant spiritual life.

Wine was associated in the Old Testament with God’s presence which brings joy and life (see Psalm 4:6,7; 104:15). Even today, Israeli’s toast their wine with “To life!” By making an abundance of fine vintage wine, Jesus communicated that he is the Giver of abundant spiritual life that brings joy to all who receive him (Jn. 10:10).

More importantly, the Old Testament predicted that when Messiah established God’s kingdom, he would provide a lavish banquet for his people—including an abundance of fine aged wine—to celebrate his victory over death (Isa. 25:6-8). The heart of God’s kingdom is personal relationships—living in God’s presence and celebrating this with God’s people. Jesus’ first miracle was a foretaste of this banquet. Through it he was saying, “I am the Messiah, and I am offering you a secure and personal relationship with God *right now.*”

SUMMARIZE: *You don’t have to clean yourself up to come to God. You can come to Jesus just the way you are and receive his gift of spiritual life that will assure you of God’s forgiveness and enable you to experience God’s life-transforming love. It’s as easy as drinking a glass of wine—just call out to Jesus and say, “I believe you are the Messiah who came to forgive me and make me alive to God. I now take this gift into my heart.” Will you receive this gift today?*