

Bible Study Guide: Week of 1-10-2022

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” ⁶Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. ⁹When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

This is the first public act of Jesus’ ministry and the first of his “signs.” John uses this term “signs” to refer to Jesus’ acts of power or miracles. In John’s gospel Jesus’ “signs” are significant because they point beyond the acts or deeds themselves and to Jesus’ identity and mission. In other words, for John, Jesus’ signs matter not because they are very great or powerful acts (which they are), but rather they matter because they signify or symbolize a deeper truth about Jesus. Perhaps significantly, Jesus’ first sign happens “on the third day.” We, of course, know that it was another “third day” that was the day of the Resurrection—the greatest of Jesus’ signs, so to speak. Likewise, it is significant that Jesus’ first sign occurs at a wedding celebration. Later in John 3:22ff John the Baptist uses the image of a bridegroom to describe Jesus. Throughout the gospels there is wedding imagery and throughout the New Testament there is language describing Christ as “the bridegroom” and the church as “the bride” of Christ.

³When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

The mother of Jesus is always referred to this way in John’s gospel. Never does John call her “Mary.” Evidently, she had some reason to have inside knowledge about the state of the wine supply at this wedding. She may have even had some role in the festival preparations herself, as she tells the servants to “do whatever [Jesus] tells you” and they obey her. Ancient Near Eastern weddings were days or weeks long affairs and it would have been a serious cause for shame for the family hosting the feast to run out of wine. So Jesus is not just keeping the party going on longer, but is actually bailing the hosts out of an embarrassing and socially costly predicament. Jesus’ address to his mother as “woman” may sound cold or offensive to our ears, but this is a typical way Jesus addressed women throughout the gospels and would have been a common and proper way to speak in Jesus’ day. It is slightly unusual that he refers to his own mother as “woman,” as this seems to put some separation between Jesus and his mother. Likewise, his question “What concern is that to you and to me?” was likely a common semitic idiom in the same way we might say something is “not our problem” or is “above one’s paygrade.” The most important part of his reply is his insistence that his “hour has not yet come.” Jesus refers to his passion, death, and resurrection as his “hour” throughout John’s gospel. Therefore, Jesus’ mother seems to be asking him to intervene miraculously and Jesus seems reluctant to do so since he knows that it is not yet time for God’s glory to be revealed in full. Nonetheless, Mary has faith that Jesus will do something (which she signals by instructing the servants to do as Jesus commands them.)

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Aside from Mary's faith that Jesus would act powerfully, the servants show faith (or at the very least obedience). Their task was not a small one. They were dealing with up to 150 gallons of water. Even with modern plumbing this would be a heavy and difficult task that would have taken a lot of time and energy. The sheer quantity involved symbolizes God's abundance. They filled the jars "to the brim"—another sign of God's abundance. They also showed faith in obeying when Jesus commanded them to take water from the purification jars (akin to bathwater or sink water in our day and age) and to allow the chief steward to taste it.

⁹When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

The chief steward provides a contrast with the servants and the disciples. The servants knew what Jesus had done and his disciples knew and believed in him, but the chief steward remains totally in the dark about the wine. He seeks a natural explanation for this tasty new wine. This prompts him to marvel to the bridegroom that he's been holding out on the whole party saving the best wine until now. Again, this is a sign—it points beyond the sheer power of the miracle itself and points toward God's abundance through Jesus. Jesus himself is, in a sense, the best wine saved until the final hour or, as John said in chapter 1, "grace upon grace."

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. What other miracles or signs of Jesus does this story remind you of? What do they have in common?**
- 2. Why do you think Jesus was initially reluctant to get involved in the wedding party's problem of running out of wine?**
- 3. Whose faith do you admire most in this story? Why?**