

What Do Marriage And Wine Tell Us About Jesus?

A Brief History of Cana:

The location of the Cana visited by Jesus is disputed and not known for certain. Kafr Kanna is the most traditional site and has the following factors in favor of its authenticity:

It is located on the main road between two important cities in the region (Sepphoris and Tiberias) and is not far from Nazareth.

The ruins on the site indicate the presence of a town in the time of Jesus (they span the Persian to Byzantine periods).

The site has no running spring water, so in ancient times water would have had to be brought from cisterns or from the valley below, and stored in stone jars such as those mentioned in the miracle story.

Christian pilgrims have revered this site as the place of Jesus' first miracle from an early date. Ancient graffiti can be seen on one of the grottoes.

Recent excavations on a hill just north of Nazareth have uncovered ruins of a Jewish village from the 1st century AD. The excavators think the biblical Cana could be there instead of at this site 1 km to the east. For more information you can visit:

<http://www.sacred-destinations.com/israel/cana>

John 2:1-12

To begin with, I would encourage you to read this story in a Bible that you enjoy reading with a translation that speaks best to your mind and heart. We are privileged today to have so many versions. While some are more technically accurate than others, they all share stories well because stories simply share a life event. One of the definitions of a story in the dictionary is, "a message that tells the particulars of an act or occurrence or course of events". The author of John's Gospel begins with this story to tell us something of importance about Jesus by way of introduction. In verse 11 he tells us his reason, "*Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.*"

A wedding is a grand and joyous celebration of two people who are beginning a new life together in the presence of their relatives and friends. Because Jesus is noted as beginning his ministry to announce and establish the Kingdom or Realm of God it appears to be an appropriate setting for such a revelation. Jesus will be demonstrating, by his words and actions, how the Spirit of God will enable us to live together in a relationship of loving interdependence. What were the signs or marks of Jesus among us and what made him glorious and loved by so many people? Jesus was generous and caring, especially to those who were in need. He shared his message about the Realm of God in plain language by telling stories and giving illustrations in parables. His glory was his brilliant and radiant beauty of God's loving care for all people. He demonstrated this by his whole life among us in word and deed. So, at a feast in the joyous setting of a marriage, John introduces us to a Jesus who would help keep this spirit continuing even when the wine failed.

What were weddings like in Jesus' day?

Since the author of this Gospel does not fully answer this question and since the readers of his day would fully have such knowledge, I received some interesting information from a Rabbi friend, Gordon Gladstone. Here are some things that he shared.

- At that time, Jewish marriage was purely an act of kinyan / acquisition; the man, essentially, purchased a wife from the man who controlled her, be that a father, a brother, or whatever male relative. A marriage was arranged by shtar, kesef, or beeah (document, silver, or intercourse).
 - if shtar, the "groom's" agent delivers a document stating terms to the controlling male.
 - If kesef, an agreed amount of silver was delivered to the controlling male. [This morphed into a wedding ring in later centuries.]
 - If beeah, the man would fall upon the woman, penetrating her, whilst howling, "H'ray aht m'kudeshet li." (Behold thou art consecrated unto me)
- The "wedding ceremony" did not require clergy; only 2 adult male witnesses. The "liturgy" was the man saying, "H'ray aht m'kudeshet li."

When I asked him about the length of time for the duration of a marriage or festival celebrations, he shared this:

Any happy occasion was a time for celebration, but we can only infer things such as duration, unless specifically mentioned in Scripture. For example, look at the first chapter of the OT book of Esther.

1 Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus--this is Ahasuerus who reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over a hundred and seven and twenty provinces-- 2 that in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the castle, 3 in the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the army of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him; 4 when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty, many days, even a hundred and fourscore days. 5 And when these days were fulfilled, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the castle, both great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace; 6 there were hangings of white, fine cotton, and blue, bordered with cords of fine linen and purple, upon silver rods and pillars of marble; the couches were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of green, and white, and shell, and onyx marble. 7 And they gave them drink in vessels of gold--the vessels being diverse one from another--and royal wine in abundance, according to the bounty of the king. 8 And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel; for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure.

From this we gather that a mishteh, a banquet of wine, could go on for a long time in the time of the Persian Empire that followed the Babylonian era.

What about the term miracle? As we noted above, the closing verse (vs. 11) of this story says it marks "the beginning of his signs...and his disciples believed in him". We are not told that the crowd nor the headwaiter noted a miracle. In his massive commentary of the Gospel of John, Father Raymond E. Brown, a noted Catholic scholar, when commenting on the words, "*Jesus' mother told him 'They have no wine'*", he offers this commentary:

Why is Mary especially concerned and why does she turn to Jesus? Many have thought that she was asking for a miracle. However, there is no evidence of any previous miracles performed by Jesus, and there is nothing in the OT picture of the Messiah which would have led the Jews to expect him to work miracles on behalf of individuals (yet see 7:31). An expectation of miracles is more understandable if Jesus is thought of as the Prophet-like-Moses or as Elijah come back to life, for the OT attributed miracles to both Moses and Elijah. Most commentators, including Catholics like Gaechter, Braun, Van den Bussche, Boismard, Charlier, see no evidence in Mary's request of the expectation of a miracle. Van den Bussche, 1. pp. 38-39 (also Zahn, Boismard), does not think that Mary is even asking Jesus to do anything but is simply reporting the desperate situation. Jesus' answer, however, wherein he refuses to become involved, does seem to indicate that something was being asked of him."

Before we go further, it might be good to point out a couple of things that Father Brown shares with us about this story in his commentary. The use of the term "The mother of Jesus" is interesting because in the Gospel of John the author never refers to her as "Mary". He also points out that the term "his disciples" is always used. *In consistently referring to these men during the ministry as "disciples," and in avoiding the title of "apostle," John shows a historical sense, for "apostle" is a term that belongs to the post-resurrectional period.* There are many ways in which the Gospel of John is unique and very different from the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In the opening introduction to this Gospel, "Good News Bible - The Bible in Today's English Version" we are told, *A striking feature of John is the symbolic use of common things from everyday life to point to spiritual realities, such as water, bread, light, the shepherd and his sheep, and the grapevine and its fruit.* This is why we want to capture the spiritual sense of this particular "sign" about a marriage that ran out of wine.

So why does the author of John's Gospel start with this sign? What do a marriage and wine tell us about Jesus?

I believe they tell us a lot more than most people realize in these "signs" of Jesus' character and the demeanor of his whole purpose and life's work in both word and deed. The person of Jesus, in every aspect of who he really is, sets forth the picture of God the Creator and the demeanor of the Source of all that is. Jesus is the "word" and the "verb" of the beginning of all things in time and space. Before this story, John's Gospel begins the first chapter with "In the beginning was the word". This is the translation with which most are familiar. In the Spanish translation of the Latin Vulgate edition of this Gospel we are told, "In the beginning was the verb". Today, we understand more than ever, how important a variety of translations can be in furthering our understanding of Scripture. Words and actions are both "signs" that convey meaning to our understanding and assist us in both speaking and listening. We have often seen Jesus as the word, the expression, of the Source of what we now see as "The Big Bang". In stories and portraits of Jesus we are also aware of the "verb" since, through his actions, he was proclaiming the Realm of God as to how we might all come to love and act toward one another as we are loved.

Perhaps this story was chosen by John in order to share with us the essence of the true personhood of Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. What was it about him that would enable him to carry out his mission to announce the Realm of God and show us this caring peace of God that goes beyond human understanding? What is unique about this story that will bring the core values and full extent of this care and grace? Why is Jesus at a wedding in Cana of Galilee where they are running out of wine and how does this share John's vision of Jesus with us?

Let us begin with the wedding and a few words that I have chosen that may develop my vision of this story in which John introduces us to Jesus.

Responsive - [readily reacting or replying to people or events or stimuli] Jesus was a person who showed a response and reaction to all of life, especially to the people whom he encountered. In word and action (noun and verb) he was fully involved. He expressed a godly interest in his surroundings and with the people he met and engaged.

Reliable - [conforming to fact and therefore worthy of belief] Jesus was authentic and honest to a fault. Whether he was alone with one person or in the presence of a crowd there was never a pretense. Jesus announced the reality and purpose of God's Kingdom on earth and how we were to interact with one another to fulfill and establish this Realm.

Secure - [free from fear or doubt] Perhaps one of my acronyms will embellish my use of this word: SECURE - (Staying Extremely Comfortable Under Reoccurring Experiences). Jesus, in this story, and in most of the descriptions of him in scripture share the details that depict his comfort in new and reoccurring situations. Jesus knew who he was and was fearlessly true to his mission.

Productive - [producing or capable of producing (especially abundantly)] Jesus always knew the probabilities of creation and energized the possibilities of his anointing to demonstrate the abundant life in God's Realm.

How does the wine part of the story give us further details about the person of Jesus?

Remember, the crowd of people were probably not aware of what Jesus was doing or that he was responsible for the new wine but the disciples were well aware. Even the person in charge, the headwaiter, was not fully aware of what happened except that he tasted the replenishment of wine that he claimed was more excellent than the first. Perhaps even the mother of Jesus was pleasantly pleased in that Jesus seemed to honor her request? Jesus always showed humility as he went about doing for others and did not aspire to become famous. He was clear about what he needed to say and did his work with grace and dignity as one sent from God.

Here are a few more words that I hope will amplify what his disciples may have observed about Jesus and why his disciples began to believe in him:

- ALIVE - Always Learning Inspired Vital Engaged
- CARE - Constantly Appreciate and Respect Everyone
- HOLY - Habitually Open to Learning and Yearning

- HOPE - Habitually Open to Productive Exploration
- LOVE - Limitless Offerings Veraciously Expended
- MOVE - Making Opportunity Verifying Experience
- SHARE - Simply Having And Readily Expending

All of us learn a lot from stories or signs. It is important to let the story speak to us through the whole presentation without concentrating on the individual parts as if they were fact. Too often people get lost in individual details by "amplification" (turning up the volume on the details) instead of discovering the main point of why the story may have been told. This story has two main themes around which the few details we have revolve - Jesus attended a marriage feast and there was not enough wine to last before the feast was to end. The main point of this story at the beginning of the Gospel of John was to introduce us to Jesus as he begins his mission and ministry. We were not meant to completely understand everything about Jesus here or the rest of the Gospel would be superfluous.

There are two words and ideas that I believe are clearly inherent in this short story to introduce us to Jesus - hospitality and leadership. The theme of hospitality begins with knowing that Jesus was invited to be a guest and that he responded favorably. When a problem arose without enough wine Jesus demonstrated leadership that was necessary to remedy this situation. I believe that these words were central themes that claimed the allegiance of his disciples to become followers. Let us take a look at these two words and see how they may actually encompass what John may have wanted us to know about Jesus as he began his ministry.

Hospitality - [kindness in welcoming guests or strangers] In this definition there are two other significant words, kindness - [the quality of being warmhearted and considerate and humane and sympathetic] and welcome - a greeting or reception]. These words, without a doubt, clearly describe the attitude and function of Jesus whenever he encountered and interacted with people. Surely, at a marriage and wedding reception, one would hope that this would be the atmosphere overall and among the guests as they interacted in company with each other. This story then becomes an excellent scene for demonstrating these qualities in the person of Jesus.

Unfortunately there are many people who believe they are being hospitable but it may not always be so. Many of our churches today use the term "all are welcome" and truly intend to be kind and hospitable to everyone who comes but too often this is not the case. A brief statement on hospitality by The Rev. Canon Timothy Boggs at the Washington National Cathedral makes it poignantly clear, "*Hospitality is not merely making space for somebody else, it's about letting people into your hearts and letting them change you*". Jesus, in this story, had a change of heart that allowed him to go beyond the normal and provide for the needs of all who were gathered. This, my friends, is a wonderful and inclusive example of what hospitality really means. It clarifies what we need to do if we wish to imitate the hospitality of Jesus. Unlike a hospital that is not comprehensive enough to care for all who come to it for its services or our American leaders who call themselves "constitutionalists" but forget the operative words in the Constitution, "one nation, with liberty and justice for all", Jesus was the consummate example of God's love and care, by word and example, as his ministry developed to include all people everywhere in every time and all places where he traveled.

Leadership - [the activity of leading leadership, the status of a leader] This is the word that I think is the key that caused his disciples to believe in him and become followers. They evidently witnessed the lack of wine, the mother of Jesus pointing this out to him, and the whole process of how Jesus responded to provide a solution that renewed the joy of the festivities. To them the results were utterly amazing and it was Jesus' leadership that solved this dilemma. This vision of hospitality and leadership as they saw how Jesus mingled with the people and what control he had over a very tense situation provided the impetus to become disciples of Jesus and respond positively to his invitation.

I believe that most every person is gifted with leadership ability but, like all talents and gifts, they need to be recognized, developed, and practiced. This was also true of Jesus when we consider what we learn about him in the Gospels. We are told about his birth, his parents, his interest in learning as a child from leaders in the

Temple, the son of a Carpenter, his Baptism by John the Baptist, his time of temptation in the desert, along with other subtle things that hint of his preparation for being who he was called to be. Details of a similar nature are true in all of our lives wherein we grow to be and become all that we can be. While expressions of leadership may differ from one person to another, leadership training would be basically similar in content, structure, and goals. Here is a model of what I have learned that I have expressed in an acronym to consolidate the content to be easily remembered:

LEADERSHIP:

- Learning Enthusiastically
- Appreciating Diversity
- Energizing Relationships
- Sharing Hospitality
- Inspiring People

One's attitude in life is vital in everything we think, say, or do! The dictionary defines attitude as - [a complex mental state involving beliefs and feelings and values and dispositions to act in certain ways]. Zig Ziglar, a famous motivational speaker, said: *"Your attitude, not your aptitude, will determine your altitude"* and George Sheehan, an American physician, said, *"Success means having the courage, the determination, and the will to become the person you believe you were meant to be"*. There are many writers and speakers who have simply said, *"Attitude is everything"*! One of my life mentors, John C. Maxwell, wrote a book called "The Difference Maker - Making Your Attitude Your Greatest Asset" in which he spells out very clearly why your attitude is the difference maker - a book well worth reading. The greatest part of Jesus' leadership ability was his attitude. He was humble but also well aware of his calling and mission to announce and demonstrate the Kingdom of God on earth.

As you read the Synoptic Gospels and especially the Gospel of John you realize how much time and effort Jesus spent in preparing himself for his ministry and mission. This attitude of prayer and meditation was a part of his daily life experience as well. Even the apostle Paul, who never met Jesus in the flesh personally, knew and adapted this stance in Phillipians 4:8, *"Finally, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."*

In closing this portion of John's introduction of Jesus, I would invite you to consider visiting our website - <http://www.JandDHealth.com> - which is dedicated to help us focus on these essentials for a healthy life in Mind, Soul, and Body. Especially the opening section on "Mindful Soul Food" - - "Learning to Live Well".

<http://janddhealth.com/LWellPage.html>

May the caring peace of God that goes beyond human comprehension, declare God's love for you in your heart and mind as we see it in Jesus Christ; and may the blessing of God, loving Creator, gracious Liberator, and life giving Spirit keep you steadfast now and always. Amen.