

Session Three: Sign Number One: The Wedding at Cana

Opening Prayer

Re-cap:

- John sees the public ministry of Jesus, the signs, as an extended Pentecost or 3rd day event, culminating in his hour.
- Each sign is a mini pointer to the hour and participation in it.
- In this session, we will walk our way through the details of the wedding at Cana
- Next session, we will unpack some of the lessons from this great story

The Wedding at Cana: see John 2:1-11

Context:

- As mentioned, this is on “the Third day.” This is simply John’s way of saying: “and now the curtain will rise”
- Jesus has now called his first disciples, he opens his ministry here at Cana.
- After this story we will find him in Jerusalem for the cleansing of the Temple.

Cana then and now:

- Cana is located in Galilee which is “up north” in the Holy Land. A territory in the orbit of the Temple but also a place of some independent thinking and a mixing of Jewish and Gentile customs.
- It is only a couple of towns up from Nazareth where Jesus grew up. Would have been very familiar to him.
- The next hilltop over from Cana is the Roman city of Sepphoris where Mary’s parents were from, which was being built up and expanded as Jesus was in his teens and twenties, where most likely he and Joseph would have done their construction work.
- Today one can stop to pray at the Church of the Wedding, built over the traditional place of this first sign of John’s Gospel. Around the corner one can purchase gallons and gallons of Cana wine.

The story:

- Jesus, his mother, the disciples are invited to a wedding.
- Weddings in his day were multi-day, extended celebrations, so highly did the Jews celebrate and value marriage.
- During the celebrations in this Gospel story, the embarrassing situation develops wherein the wine starts to run short. This is a humiliating situation for a new couple and their families.
- The Mother of Jesus brings this fact to the attention of Jesus. Perhaps she notices because in those days the women would have worked together in the serving areas of the party, and his Mother would have seen this coming first.
- Perhaps it is because his Mother is remarkably attentive to the needs of the human condition
- Perhaps it is because his Mother is aware that Jesus has the ability to intervene.
- She will appear again most prominently at the foot of the cross: during the hour.
- John sees her as a pivotal figure in God’s saving plan.

The Hour:

- The Lord appears to rebuff his Mother by explaining that his hour is not yet here. In other words, the time has not yet arrived for the dramatic acts of the dying and the rising of the Son of Man.

- He acts anyway in order to begin to show his glory, to offer the first glimpse of “the hour.”
- He begins to show just who he is.

So who is he and how does he show it?

He is the fulfillment of the existing Mosaic rituals and customs.

- He chooses to use a bunch of jars used for Jewish ritual purity as a means to do his sign.
- He is now the new guarantee of purity before the Father to the extent that one is a friend of him, and that one believes in him.
- There are only 6 jars, one short of the perfect number of seven. The existing Jewish customs are incomplete on their own.

He is the one who re-creates the fallen world.

- Water, the most basic of elements, is now elevated to wine, an element of human labor and creativity, an element of celebration, an element of glory and festivity.
- This is what he wants to do to the fallen, basic human condition- to elevate it in joy.
- Water and blood will flow from his side on the cross... something of a fulfillment of this story.

He is the bringer of abundance:

- The prophets spoke of the banquet of the end times, of a generous God, a lavish God, a God who ushers in the fullness of life.
- Jesus transforms 180 gallons of water into 180 gallons of wine.
- Not only that, but it is shown to be the BEST wine, and it comes LAST, as in: in the fullness of time. The final age.
- We are all now living in the final age, the age of grace, the age of perfection of grace in Christ.

He is the bridegroom:

- He does all of this in the context of a wedding celebration, showing himself to be what the prophets long spoke of and John the Baptist also will explain: the divine spouse of the chosen people.
- He seeks to enter into a marriage partnership with humanity in a new way.

His word is to be perfectly obeyed for salvation to happen

- His mother: do whatever he tells you. Perhaps a reference to the Exodus story once the law was given, and the people of Israel say to Moses: we will do whatever God tells us to do.
- The servants: they follow his instructions to the letter.
- The servants are the heroes of the story who follow the Word precisely to bring about the gift of grace.

He is faithful to the plan of salvation by beginning with the people of Israel

- We know this because the 2nd sign of John’s Gospel is going to occur in the exact same place, Cana, a couple chapters later, and it will be done for a non-Jew.
- This sign and the second sign are to be understood as an intentional pair that shows the progression of salvation. First to Israel, and then to the nations.
- After the first Cana sign, Jesus encounters the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem (the Temple), Nicodemus a leading Jew, and a Samaritan woman at the well... he has made the encounter with his own people, including the Samaritans who would be on the margins. The result? A lack of true belief in all those cases.
- Next attempts for him: the Gentiles at the 2nd Cana miracle.

- Jesus continues to search for a faithful response to who he is.

How does it end?

- Verse 11: Jesus did this to reveal his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.
- This is the point of the sign. To show who he is, and to generate the needed response of understanding who he is.

What does it mean for us to know him and believe him based on this story? Pick up there next session.

End of Session Three