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Because Context Matters

A Crisis of Joy in Cana – Part III

Yeshua replied, “Mother, why should that concern me? – or you? My time has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Now six stone water jars were standing there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each with a capacity of twenty or thirty gallons. Yeshua told them, “Fill the jars with water,” and they filled them to the brim.

He said, “Now draw some out, and take it to the man in charge of the banquet;” and they took it. The man in charge tasted the water, it had now turned to wine! He did not know where it had come from, but the servants who had drawn the water knew. So he called the bridegroom and said to him, “Everyone else serves the good wine first and the poorer wine after people have drunk freely. But you have kept the good wine until now!” This the first of Yeshua’s miraculous signs, he did at Cana in the Galil; he manifested his glory, and his talmidim came to trust in him. John 2:3-11 Complete Jewish Bible (English Version)

Continuity In the [first installment](#) of this series, we examined the geography implications of Cana as well as the implied “timing” for Jesus’ first sign/miracle. We also developed the context for wedding feast celebrations.

Next we [explored](#) the social contract permeating wedding feasts in the Near East, the symbolism of wine and the implications of ritual purification to the Jewish mind. Particular attention was given to a fresh (non-traditional) understanding of the interplay between Jesus and His mother over what to do about the impending no-more-wine crisis. Now we examine the implications of turning the ritual purification water into wine.

Redefining Purity The water in those purification jars was meant to achieve ritual purity over and over again. Jesus converts that water into wine (symbolically His blood) to signify that the shedding of His blood will result in total and complete purity once and forever for those who “*Follow Me*.” Thus, Jesus is totally redefining purity, and by extension, righteousness. The ritual purification system and the procedural Temple sacrificial system will soon be obsolete. John’s use of the term *hour* in the reference to *my hour has not yet come* is in a technical sense to mean the period of Jesus’ passion, death, resurrection and ascension. It may suggest that while it is not yet the time for Jesus to publicly perform the shedding of His blood for the remission of sins, He is willing to privately (behind the scenes) intervene and perform a miracle that signifies what He will accomplish in Jerusalem when His hour has indeed come. That’s why this first miracle is called a *sign*. Like a highway sign, it points to something beyond itself further down the road.

Those Servants Note that the servants were obedient to Jesus' command. Some were instructed by Jesus to draw out a sampling of this new liquid and take it to the steward. Remember, at that moment those servants chosen to bring this fluid to the steward are not sure what it is. What if the steward doesn't like what they brought? How would they explain this? Only later, after the steward had pronounced this to be the *best* wine, would it have dawned on these servants that they had been "hands on" participants in a paradigm-changing miracle. When we too don't have full knowledge of the eventual outcome in God's economy of a "crisis," there is often a risk associated with following Jesus' commands. Are we willing to take that risk to participate with God in miracles?

Too Much Wine? Some commentators from the past struggled with the amount of choice wine that Jesus creates in this first recorded *sign* in John's Gospel. To them, 150 gallons (800 bottle equivalent) seems too excessive and therefore inappropriate for any such party. Thus they conclude that John must be using hyperbole to indicate the amount of fine wine Jesus created.

Let's ponder that for a moment. If the wine was to represent (in part) the weight and import of His forthcoming Calvary sacrifice, why would He or we want to try and minimize the amount of wine needed to symbolize that? Furthermore, if that fine wine also symbolizes joy, how much wine would be adequate to represent a future *joy unspeakable*? The very excessive amount of the wine created by Jesus is exactly the point that John wants to underscore! When the joy of heaven invades your soul, that joy is intended to flood it so that your cup overflows.

Revealing His Glory To further re-enforce this Calvary/joy perspective, John tells us in verse 11 that Jesus gave this first *sign through which he revealed his glory*. That is very helpful in keeping us pointed interpretively in the right direction. From the Hebrew perspective, when God reveals His glory He is accurately representing and portraying "who He is, what He cares about, and how He does things." We see this functional Hebrew understanding of glorifying God in Hebrews 1:3, where it says that Jesus *is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being*.

So when John says Jesus did this *sign* to reveal His glory, Jesus is demonstrating what is to come, and like a compass, points us in the right direction to what He has accomplished, and why. Jesus is going to efficaciously shed His blood for the remission of sins so that purity will move from a ritualistic practice to an eternal condition for His disciples that welcomes them into His Father's everlasting presence as part of a new creation. At the wedding feast in Cana, Jesus chose to reveal and portray His present and future glory with this *sign*. He launched His ministry with the "*It is finished*" end in view. In so doing, He provides us with a wonderful "completion" motif!

They Believed As a result of this experience, John tells us that these brand new, seven-day disciples *believed in Him*. The disciples' familiarity with the OT understanding that "*the joy of the final days is an abundance of wine* (Amos 9:13-14, Hosea 14:7, Jeremiah 31:12)," may have triggered their memories to see this sign as the advent of the messianic age with Jesus being the Lord's Messiah. If they recalled the restoration promised in Joel 2:24 when *the vats overflow with fresh wine*, it would have re-enforced this perspective even though **their** full realization did not come for quite some time.

A New Standard Thanks to Jesus' intervention, a new standard for marriage feast hospitality was set in Cana by this host family. The bar was now raised so high that no other family in the village would likely be able to reach it (800 bottles of fine wine saved for last). Jesus rescued this host family from the brink of a lifetime of shame and; in so doing, now placed them in a distinct position of honor for the rest of their days. No other family could ever hope to emulate such hospitality unless they too invited Jesus to their celebration. That is yet another refrain of the Gospel message – unless Jesus comes into your life, your joy will never be overflowingly complete!

Reflections

- Have you been part of any miracles lately? That may depend on how close to Jesus you have been as a servant. It's usually true; if you want to participate in miracles, stay close to Jesus with a servant's heart.

- This first miracle is rich in gospel themes. There will come a day when humanity will realize it has a crisis. That it cannot clean itself no matter how hard it tries. That no amount of good works, religious acts and ritualistic procedures can make one acceptable to a Holy God. It is only when we have been cleansed with the efficacious blood of Jesus that we become (w)holy righteous in His Father's sight.
- Do you need to recommit yourself to glorifying God to a watching world in all that you do; i.e., accurately revealing and portraying "*who God is, what He cares about, and how He does things*"? To be a disciple who always points to Him rather than to yourself, your abilities, capacities, gifts and talents? Only daily life in the Spirit will empower such a commitment.
- Jesus rescued and sustained the joy of a marriage feast that was about to turn ugly. How is your joy doing these days? Is it solely rooted in Jesus? Is it overflowing? Or might it have gone stale or even dry? If so, what might need to be done; e.g., remembered, faced, dealt with?

Shalom, Shalom

Doug for the PBT Team

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