

**International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
January 24, 2016**

**Lesson Text: John 2:1-12
Lesson Title: A Wedding in Cana**

Introduction

According to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, a wedding is the ceremony in which two people are united in marriage or a similar institution. Wedding traditions and customs vary greatly between cultures, ethnic groups, religions, countries, and social classes. Most wedding ceremonies involve an exchange of wedding vows by the couple, presentation of a gift (offering, ring(s), symbolic item, flowers, money), and a public proclamation of marriage by an authority figure or leader. Special wedding garments are often worn, and the ceremony is sometimes followed by a wedding reception. Music, poetry, prayers or readings from religious texts or literature are also commonly incorporated into the ceremony.

The Bible is loaded with wedding language, some is positive and some is negative (Genesis 29:22-28; Psalm 19:5; Matthew 22:2-14; Luke 12:36; Revelation 19:9) but has little to say about the wedding ceremony and the fanfare that goes along with it. The Bible is clear concerning marriage as ordained of God and is between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:24; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Matthew 19:5; Romans 1:26-28; 1 Corinthians 7:2; Hebrew 13:4; 1 Peter 3:7). It is also clear from our text today that Jesus Christ placed His approval on weddings as evidenced by His attending the wedding at Cana. He miraculously changed what had the potential of becoming a disaster into a glorious occasion proving He cared about practical people with practical problems.

The Location of the Wedding at Cana (John 2:1a)

Verse 1a

“And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee...”

As John relates the story of the “marriage in Cana of Galilee,” he begins by carefully noting it occurred on “the third day.” The “third day” is referring to three days after Jesus had called Nathanael (John 1:45-51). “Since that was the fourth day of the week recorded in John (John 1:19, 29, 35, 43), the wedding took place on the seventh day of the week. John might be saying, “On this seventh day, Jesus performs a work of new creation!”

“Cana of Galilee” was a tiny remote village some 22 miles from the Jordan River, the hometown of Nathanael. “Cana” was also about 8 miles north of Nazareth, the hometown of Jesus. This was the area in which Jesus grew up, His hometown (John 1:45-46; 18:5-7; 19:19). “Why Cana?” “Cana” is only mentioned four times in the Bible (John 2:1, 11, 4:46; 21:2) and is always qualified by “of Galilee.” Evidently it was not a well-known place in Jesus’ day. The reason “Cana of Galilee” is known today is because of Jesus.

There is no mention in this wedding story of the bride, groom, attendants or anything else that is usually recorded about a wedding. John wants us to remember “Cana of Galilee” because of Jesus.

The Invitation to Mary, Jesus, and his Disciples (John 2:1b-2)

Verse 1b-2

“...And the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.”

It is possible there were strong family ties between Nazareth and Cana which would explain the presence of “the mother of Jesus.” Furthermore, Mary’s (Jesus never made use of her name here or elsewhere) involvement and freedom to make decisions during this marriage indicates she was well known, respected, and among friends. Strangers are usually not involved in the decision making at weddings as Mary was at this wedding. Mary’s invitation led to “Jesus” and “his disciples” being invited to the marriage. It seems everyone is comfortable and at home at this marriage.

“Jesus was called” reminds us that people should desire the presence of Jesus at weddings and every occasion of life. Christ still goes where He is invited. Sinners can and should invite Jesus into their hearts for salvation. People should invite Jesus into life’s daily experiences. It is important to remember Jesus can only be a part of your everyday life when He is your Lord and Savior. Wise are those who invite Him to every part of life, especially the wedding!

The Situation during the Wedding (John 2:3-5)

Verse 3

“And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.”

Some suggest the presence of Jesus and His disciples created the shortage of wine. Any speculation about why the wine ran out is just speculation. “Wine” is the Greek word *oinos*, the only word for wine in the New Testament. This particular word “wine” may or may not mean intoxicating depending upon the

context. At the wedding of Cana, “wine,” not grape juice was being served. This “wine” was fermented.

Note: Some Christians are troubled over the presence of wine, an alcoholic beverage, at this wedding. We must understand two things in this regard. First, the contention that this was some type of unfermented grape juice with zero alcohol content cannot be supported by what we know of the ancient world. Wine was a common beverage for the people of that day. Good wine (meaning non-vinegary) would have been the normal, expected beverage to be served at a wedding celebration. But, second, we must understand that the people of Jesus’ day normally drank wine diluted with water. This was both an economy measure (to stretch the supply) and a health measure (to provide a moderate antiseptic for the water supply). Undiluted wine may have had an alcohol content of 10 or 11 percent. The diluted wine of Jesus’ day would have had an alcohol content of 2 or 3 percent. While it was possible for heavy consumers to become intoxicated, the wedding guests who had two cups of wine per hour would have felt little effect from the alcohol” (Standard Lesson Commentary 2011-2012).

In his comments concerning the “wine,” Doctor J. Vernon McGee writes, “The question comes up about the wine. I read recently of a liberal who called Jesus a bootlegger. Such sacrilege! In that day, wine was a staple article of diet. However, drunkenness was absolutely condemned. There was no thought of drunkenness connected with this. A wedding was a religious occasion, by the way, and these were folk who believed the Old Testament. You can put it down that there was no intoxication at this wedding” (*Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*). Further proof that the ‘wine’ at the wedding was not intoxicating is seen in the fact that the guest had consumed all of it and could still tell the difference between the first wine and that which Jesus created. If you are looking for justification to drink alcoholic beverages, John 2:1-12 is not the passage you should use. In fact, there are no passages in Scripture to justify the consumption of alcoholic beverages. However, there are plenty that warn against it (Proverbs 23:19, 29; Isaiah 5:21-22; 28:1-4; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:18).”

“...The mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.” Running out of wine at a wedding in Jesus’ day was a social disaster. Some historians say that legal action could be taken against the wedding host if they ran out of food or wine. Whether that is true or not, would cost the host family socially if the wine ran out. The real question here is why did Jesus’ mother come to Jesus with the problem? Those who believe Jesus performed child miracles say Mary had seen him work miracles before and wanted him to do something about this situation. That could not be the case because this is Jesus’ first miracle (John 2:11). However, Mary was aware of the miraculous power of God she witnessed firsthand in Christ’s incarnation. There is no doubt Mary believed Jesus was God. Perhaps Mary was assisting with the hosting and just wanted Jesus to do what he could as her son to help. There was obviously no other means of

obtaining wine at this point from any other source. Mary believed Jesus could do something about the situation

Verse 4

“Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.”

It seems Jesus’ response indicates Mary wanted Jesus to do something to bail her out of this most embarrassing situation, in other words, to clear her name. Mary did not want to be remembered as one of the hostesses who allowed the wine to run out. Jesus will bail her out, but not at Cana and not at this hour.

What is about to happen here is a miracle of the Savior meeting a simple need at the simplest level of life. Does that tell you anything about Christ? There is nothing sarcastic or disrespectful in Christ’s words to Mary. He is simply saying, “What is this wine shortage to me and you.” There is more going on here than a wedding ceremony running out of wine. Jesus is calling his mother’s attention and our attention to the fact that he has a plan and a purpose for being at Cana of Galilee. As great and glorious as God’s plan of salvation is, Christ still cares about practical people with practical problems.

By calling Mary, “Woman,” Christ was saying anything he would and could do would be based on a *sinner-Savior* relationship not a *mother-son* relationship. Mary may have been asking for her son’s help but this miracle reveals she needed a Savior. Mary, was a sinner and needed a Savior. How do we know this is the basis of Christ’s response? He spoke about “mine hour” which is a repetitive theme in John’s Gospel (John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1) and refers to his sacrifice and death at Calvary. Everything Christ did while he was on earth and everything he does now is vitally connected to that “hour.”

Jesus’ words, “not yet come” imply that the time is coming when he will suffer and die on the cross for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2). Although that event is nearly three years away from the time of Jesus’ first miracle, what he is about to do is just a sample of the power that will make that “hour” victorious.

Verse 5

“His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.”

When Mary told the servants to do whatever Jesus said, she realized he could and would do something and whatever he did would be right. Verse 4 might have sounded like Jesus said “no” to her, but Mary takes the “no” and sees a “yes.” No, he will not do a miracle because his mother asked him to. Yes, he will do something great and miraculous to serve a greater cause and result in greater glory. Sometimes Christ’s “no’s” are actually “yes.” The Lord said “no”

to David when he wanted to build a temple for the Lord but gave David an everlasting kingdom much bigger than a temple (2 Chronicles 6:9).

Mary does not seem to be worried or anxious in this situation. In fact, as you read the story you get a sense of faith and trust. She does not know *what* Jesus will do or *how* he will do it. She just knows he will “do it.” The wedding at Cana calls us back to simple faith and trust in Jesus Christ. The faith and trust we exercise is based on the truth that we are *sinners* and he is our *Savior!*

The Directions from the Savior (John 2:6-8)

Verse 6-8

“And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.”

The “waterpots of stone” were likely vessels designed for washing and purity. Jews were very particular about cleansing themselves and the utensils they used in meal preparation and serving. These “waterpots” became the containers for this miracle. “Six” is the number of man and represents humanity. A “firkin” is a measurement of about 9 to 10 gallons. Multiply “two or three firkins” by “six waterpots” and you have the potential for a 20 to 30-gallon capacity per container. If each container held 20 gallons and you multiply those 20-gallons times “six” containers, you have over 100 gallons. No one knows for sure the exact amount and the precise standard of measurement. What we do know is these “waterpots” were “filled to the brim” with “water.” Not “wine,” but “water.”

At this point in the wedding story there is nothing miraculous. Servants are doing what servants do. The best the servants could do was “fill them to the brim.” The miracle is in Jesus, not man.

“Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.” The action of the servants is not insignificant. It may have taken an hour or more for the servants to get the water, carry it back and present it to the governor. All of this may have seemed ridiculous to the servants but remember, they had been asked to just “do it.” Whatever Jesus says, “do it.” Christ’s work in our life is not always about understanding. It is about obedience. The obedience of the servants was a part of our Lord’s first miracle.

The Declaration from the Ruler of the Feast (John 2:9-10)

Verse 9-10

“When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.”

The “ruler of the feast” or the master of ceremonies, “tasted the water that was made wine.” When was the “water...made wine?” Somewhere between the filling of the pots and the dipper going from the pot to the mouth of the ruler, a miracle took place. Christ changed “water” into “wine.” He used no grapes, sunshine, harvest of grapes, or process. The result was “wine.” Christ’s first miracle was a creative miracle. He has power over time!

The statement “(but the servants which drew the water knew)” is a fascinating statement. Just what did they know? Did they see the change? Could they smell the change as they carried the water or at the point they drew out the water? There is no actual statement about what they knew. But they “knew.” John does not tell us they believed on Jesus, but only they “knew.” If you know who Jesus is today and what he can do, why not believe (Romans 10:9-10)?

The ruler’s words “Thou hast kept the good wine until now” is a testimony that Jesus alone gives a quality of taste to life that no one else can. Jesus not only has power to *provide*, he also has power to *improve*. Many people are living on the taste of this world. The “good wine” must come from the power of Jesus Christ. “Good wine” is available to those today who will trust Christ for salvation. The Psalmist said, “*O taste and see that the LORD is good...*” (Psalm 34:8). Life with Jesus Christ is not bland, tasteless and dull. It is fresh and the greatest quality of life there is (John 10:10).

In *quality* the “good wine” was harmless. In *quantity* it was sufficient.

The Manifestation of Christ’s Glory (John 2:11)

Verse 11

“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.”

This was the first miracle by Jesus Christ. He would do many more miracles throughout his earthly ministry. There are at least 35 separate miracles done by Christ recorded in the Gospels. What is a miracle? There are many definitions given, but one of the clearest is offered by C.S. Lewis. “A miracle is more than something unusual. A true miracle is something beyond man’s intellectual or scientific ability to accomplish. It is not natural, even though it

may be unusual; a miracle is a supernatural act of God.” (*Miracles* (London: The Centenary Press, 1947, p.15).

Christ “manifested his glory” through his first miracle at Cana of Galilee. What he did in creating wine from water was more than just helping his mother and a few distraught friends. His purpose was to “manifest his glory.” He revealed His deity and His power, not for the multitudes to see, but in the presence of only a few. What did it accomplish? John says, “...and his disciples believed on him.”

Every miracle has results. Jesus’ disciples planted their spiritual roots at Cana of Galilee. Some of his followers were saved that day. Others who were already saved became strengthened in their new faith. Though miracles alone are not sufficient evidence for declaring Jesus to be the Son of God, the effect of seeing miracle after miracle from Christ should certainly convince his disciples of His deity. The disciples had to begin somewhere, and over the months, their faith deepened as they learned more and more about Jesus.

The Continuation of Jesus’ Ministry (John 2:12)

Verse 12

“After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days.”

After the wedding at Cana and creating wine from water, Jesus, along with “his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples” traveled to “Capernaum.” The “brethren” mentioned here are possibly some of Jesus’ family members or close relatives. The verse seems to indicate the possibility of Joseph (Jesus’ earthly, not biological father) was dead and Jesus, his mother, and his family all moved together to live in Capernaum. Capernaum would become Jesus’ headquarters for ministry. On this occasion however, Jesus and his family “continued there not many days.” Jerusalem and the Passover was calling Jesus away (John 2:13).

Conclusion

So many wonderful lessons can be learned from the wedding at Cana. First, Jesus comes where he is invited. If you are lost today, invite Christ into your heart. Second, Jesus cares about people and their problems no matter how large or small. Running out of wine may not be a big deal to us in today’s culture, but in Jesus’ day it was huge. Whatever you are facing may look small in the eyes of others. Rest assured Jesus knows and Jesus cares. Third, anything Jesus does for you today is based on the sinner-Savior relationship. Christ came for sinners and what he does for us is because we need a Savior. Fourth, our lives are like those empty waterpots, available and potentially

useful when applied to the Savior's directions. Fifth, Jesus does give real taste to life. The quality of what he provides far surpasses that of the world. Sixth, when Jesus works, sinners and saints recognize the difference. Just as the servants knew along with the ruler of feast, people today know when Jesus has worked. Finally, the miracle at Cana of Galilee was only the "beginning" (John 2:11). He moved on to "Capernaum" (John 2:12) to continue His ministry and He still works miracles today.

Whatever you need today, Jesus Christ can and will provide!

Amen.