

“The Meaning of Jesus’ First Miracle” (Series #5)

By Pastor Rand Lankheet, for New Horizon URC, March 19, 2017, first service

Text: John 2:1-11

Introduction and point **1**. Jesus in **ON A HUMAN LEVEL**.

Illus: Maybe you are starting to get invitations to attend weddings this summer. Or to save the date. In our modern, western, tradition, weddings usually have two parts: there’s the ceremony (仪式), often in a church building; then there is a wedding reception. The reception includes a lot of good food and drink. Lots of fun and laughter.

In the East, in Bible times, the traditions were a bit different. Some of those traditions are explained in parables (比喻) Jesus told. For example, in those days the groom (新郎) would come walking in the darkness of night. He would be accompanied by his close, male friends. They would walk together to the home of the bride to be—she with her friends.

Then, together, as one large group they would walk back to the house of the groom.

At his home, there was evidently a short ceremony. And that was followed by a much longer celebration. The wedding celebration, the wedding feast, would go on, in some cases, for several days. Even as long as a week.

In chapter 2, John tells us that Jesus was personally invited to a local wedding.

[Read vs. 1-2. It’s in the nearby town of Cana, near to Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth.

Some scholars think that perhaps Jesus’ mother, Mary, was a relative, or a close friend of the married couple. She seems to have some role in the celebration.

So Jesus is an invited guest to this festive celebration. Think of it: Jesus himself is invited and he attends, this wedding celebration! This wonderful time of feasting, of eating and drinking. We sometimes wrongly think of Jesus as being very serious, all the time. That he was mostly engaged in (专注于) deep, spiritual teachings. But here He is, at this wedding celebration, in his hometown of Nazareth. In his earlier years, no doubt Jesus often attended such celebrations: of his siblings (兄弟姐妹), and cousins, and neighbours in Nazareth. No doubt, Jesus enjoyed the laughter, and the music, and the celebrating.

Remember how the Pharisees (法利赛人) later accused him: Jesus, they said, is a drunkard (酒鬼), and he

feasts with sinners.” That, of course, was partly untrue. Jesus was no drunkard.

But he did enjoy feasting and celebrating. He’s often in people’s homes, eating and drinking with them. It gave him special opportunity to get to know people, and for them to know him.

We’re looking at Jesus viewed from that ordinary, human level, Dr. James Montgomery Boice writes this: “...Jesus was always welcome among those who were having a good time. Have you ever thought how wonderful it is that Jesus was at home in such company?

Some Christians go around with grim (严肃的) looks and long faces. If they ever find themselves in the company of someone else who is having a good time, they immediately suspect that the cause of the fun is either illegal, immoral (不道德的), or fattening (使人发胖的). Jesus was not like that. He did not condemn (定罪于) those who were enjoying themselves...As a result, He was welcome at their gatherings, and those who had invited Him listened to His teachings.”

Likewise, Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse writes this: “...our Lord must ... have been a popular dinner guest, who loved to mingle with people and enjoy their fellowship. That he was so often invited into homes, that young children seemed to love to be near Him, indicates His pleasant personality.”

And, let us be clear: Jewish wedding celebrations always included the drinking of good wine.

In fact, in Jewish culture, for thousands of years, wine was considered essential (重要的) to life, and regarded as a wonderful gift of God. For example....

-Isaac, the father of Jacob and Esau, speaks of the LORD's great blessing on his son in this way (quote): "May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness—*an abundance of grain and NEW WINE*" (Gen 27:28). The richness of the earth is displayed in God's gift of abundant grain *and* abundant wine.

-Psalm 104:15 speaks of wine as a key gift of God to mankind, (quote) "wine that gladdens (使愉悦) the heart of man, (and) olive oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart." Bread—and olive oil—*and wine*. -Yes, drunkenness (醉酒) was, and still is, a sin.

But according to the Bible, wine truly is a gift from God's hand. //

However, at that wedding celebration in the town of Cana, the wine had run out. In that day, to run out of wine would be far worse than, say, poor planning. As we might regard it today. Merely poor planning. In that ancient, Jewish culture, to run out of wine would be a scandal (丑闻). It would be something people would talk about for years: "Oh, that wedding? I remember! That was the wedding where they ran out of wine!!" The story would be told for generations.

In fact, to run out of wine put the whole celebration at risk. And it would reflect terribly upon the families of the bride and the groom and on their families. Their reputation (名声) ...

We must view Jesus' first miracle (神迹), first, **on this human level**. You see, in turning the water into

wine, Jesus is preserving the integrity (正直) of the groom and the bride, and their parents. And Jesus ensures that the celebration will continue. And not just to barely get by...with only a little extra wine. But these were large water jars. Each the jars held 20-30 gallons. That's 120-180 gallons of wine. [500-700 liters!] What a huge amount of wine! And, the best wine!

You see how Jesus brings renewed joy to the celebration!

And he upholds the reputation of those families! By this mighty miracle.

Appl: Brothers and sisters, may all our celebrations, be filled with this joyful spirit of Jesus.

That when we gather in social settings with family and friends, that we truly enjoy ourselves. Now, for some of us, this comes more naturally than for others.

But if we lack this joy, we should work on it. In our sanctification (成圣).

Remember the fruit of the Spirit is not sourness (酸), or dourness (阴沉). Rather, it is joy (喜乐). Joy that is reflected on our faces. Joy that is shown in our conversations and our celebrations.

That's one thing, for us to learn. Then, along with it, let us learn from the ministry of Jesus.

We sometimes overly (过分地) spiritualize (使属灵化) Jesus' ministry. To think that his work was mostly, or even exclusively (特定地, 专门地), about "spiritual" things...such as the forgiveness of sins. Yes, Jesus came for the forgiveness of our sins. But, Jesus ministered in all ways, even in more ordinary ways.

At weddings and funerals; in times of eating and drinking. Among family and friends.

It's another way to be witness for Jesus in our world today, among unbelievers.

Let us join in whenever and wherever we can. Let us preserve and enhance the festive atmosphere. It's part of our being the salt of the earth, serving and helping, even as Jesus did. // -Well, this is on the human level, as John records this miracle.

2. But now, let us view this miracle from God's viewpoint. As part of His plan of

redemption (救赎).

For this we go to the very last verse in this section. [Read vs. 11. “Sign.” (记号) The Greek word is not

the normal word used in the other gospels, for “miracle.” Rather, it is simply the word, “sign.” John writes in vs. 11: “This, the first sign, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee.” The first “sign.”

-We Reformed Christians use this same word about the sacraments (圣礼) of baptism (洗礼) and the Lord’s Supper (圣餐). We say the sacraments are “signs and seals.” (记号和印记) A sign points away from itself.

A sign is not used for itself, to call attention to itself. No. It is like a traffic sign. A sign indicates something, explains something--informing people about something important.

This is John’s special word for miracle.

So, what is the water-turned-to-wine teaching us? What did it teach the people of that day?

Now, the people at the wedding didn’t know what had happened. Everything is yet hidden from their sight. The meaning is hidden.

The most anyone thinks, is that something is a bit strange.

That the best wine was brought out last, instead of being brought out first.

But John tells us clearly: this sign is especially for Jesus’ disciples. For those 5 or 6 men who were the first to follow Jesus. Andrew and John, Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel. Remember how Jesus had told them: “Come and you **will see**. Follow me and **watch, and learn.**”

What are the disciples learning? [Read vs. 11. The disciples are now learning something about Jesus “glory.” (荣耀) There’s a whole sermon just in the word “glory.” Perhaps the most helpful place is in Exodus chapter 40. When the Israelites constructed that tent-tabernacle (会幕), as God instructed them. As that tent was completed, we read, then, (quote) “The glory of the LORD *filled* that tabernacle.”

Instead of being distant from the people, up in heaven, the LORD became present among his people. Instead of being far away, the LORD came close to them. He was, in a real sense, living among his people.

This fits perfectly with what John is trying to show in his gospel account. [Look at chapter 1, verse 14. Read. Jesus, the Word, “became flesh and lived for a while among us.”

John then says: “We have seen **his glory**, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father.” Jesus “lived for a while among us.” The word in the original is literally, Jesus “tabernacle” (立会幕) among us. Jesus “pitched his tabernacle tent” in the midst of his people.

Jesus is showing how the Lord, has now fully come to live in the midst of His people. In his own being, Jesus, the very image and likeness of God. Not merely, as in old days, with a bright cloud entering and covering a tent. Jesus is revealing Himself as the true and complete Tabernacle Himself! Jesus shows us the full “glory” of God. /

John says Jesus’ miracle of changing water into wine, is the “first” sign.

It’s the first public indicator (标志), that the God Himself is now fully among His people. // And what is the character of this God? Look at Jesus! Watch him. “Come and see” him.

Yes, there will be times, later in John’s account, when Jesus becomes angry. And He will condemn certain people. The next story in chapter 2 shows us that aspect of Jesus.

But this miracle the **first sign**. Jesus is providing good wine at a joyful wedding celebration. Jesus is not revealing Himself to His people as an angry God. Not as a God who wants to stop the fun and the festivities. Not a God who works hard to make people feel guilty and sad. But this is a God of Joy! This is part of God’s Glory!

God among His people--eating and drinking with them, in loving, joyful relationship!
-See Jesus, from heaven, fulfilling God's eternal plan. Listen to God's promise to Israel, recorded in the OT book of Amos chapter 9. (Quote): "New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills. I will bring back my exiled people Israel...They will plant vineyards and *drink their wine*; they will make gardens and eat their fruit" (Amos 9:13-14).

You see this miracle is much more than a story about a wedding celebration. This miracle of Jesus is a powerful sign that the new age (新时代) has come. The new age for Israel, has begun, with Jesus. / And we are in that new age of redemption today. Until, someday, we will celebrate, with all God's people. The book of Revelation refers to that as the wedding banquet!

The wedding of the Lamb (Jesus) and His glorified Church.

In Cana of Galilee, the people are given a foretaste of that eternal banquet.//

-Now, most of the Jews of that day thought God's kingdom would come in a different way.

They thought God's kingdom would come as they worshipped in the Temple building.

Doing their best to obey the laws of Moses.

Trying to become morally better, under the strict rules of the Pharisees.

But John is correcting that idea. Look back to [John chapter 1, vs. 17. Read.

"The law" here carries that negative sense. The law with all its rules and regulations.

The law in all its condemnation (定罪). That law of Moses was a dead end.

In contrast to that law of Moses, says John, "*grace and truth*" came through Jesus.

God's grace, His mercy, and his gospel truth, is being shown by Jesus.

Jesus, who comes not with more condemning laws.

But Jesus comes with grace, mercy, compassion for sinners.

Brothers and sisters that is our Jesus. Jesus for us.

Jesus who has taken our sin on Himself. He has taken our punishment.

And the Jesus who has perfectly obeyed God's laws for us. The only truly righteous man.

And that righteousness of Jesus, is then credited to us, who trust in Him.

That righteousness of Jesus is give to us as freely as that new wine.

The wine given freely to the invited guests at that wedding celebration.

Oh, taste and see how good God is to us, in Jesus. **LET US PRAY.**

James Montgomery Boice, The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary, Five Volumes in One (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), p. 143.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, John: The Love Life: A Bible Commentary for Laymen, (Glendale, Calif: Regal Books Division, 1973, third printing 1979), p. 21.