The Greatest Life Ever Lived

A Study in the Incarnate Life of Jesus Christ and An Exposition of the Four Gospels Lesson XXIII : The Wedding Feast at Cana (a week in the beginning, part 2)

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	related passages
			2:1-11	

Lesson Overview

 \circ This is a continuation of a week given in detail early in the public ministry of Christ. As noticed in the last lesson, John gives four successive days (1:19, 29, 35, 43) with the third day following (2:1).

 \circ Jesus had been baptized almost two months earlier, driven into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, and declared to be the Lamb of God by John the Baptist upon His return. Some of the Baptist's disciples leave John for Jesus (properly so) and it is this small group of men which find themselves at the wedding in Cana at a time of need.

Jesus and His disciples attend a wedding feast

2:1 And the third day : taken by some to refer to the third day of the wedding feast. The most natural connection however is to take this in relation to the "days" mentioned in the previous lesson when Jesus gathered His first disciples. We may assume the preceding day or day and a half the Lord and His six new disciples (Andrew, John, Peter, James, Philip, and Nathanael) have been traveling to Cana. "The 'third day' was therefore what we would call 'the day after tomorrow'." [Dods, *Gk NT*]

there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; : it is highly possible that Cana was near Nazareth since Mary was present. It may possibly be the same as the modern village of Kefr Kenna, five miles north-east of Nazareth on the road to the sea of Galilee. "Present day commentators and geographers favor a spot situated about 8 or 9 miles north of Nazareth. Now if we are right in locating 'Bethany beyond Jordan' about twenty miles south-east of Nazareth, then two days (or slightly more than two days) of travel were, indeed, required." [Hendriksen, *John*] Josephus mentions a village named Cana in Judea, and therefore this village is said to be 'Cana of Galilee' to make a distinction.

Wuest translates this *and on the third day a marriage festival took place.* "It must be borne in mind, that marriage conveyed to the Jews much higher thoughts than merely those of festivity and merriment. The pious fasted before it, confessing their sins. It was regarded almost as a Sacrament.... Every man who met it, was bound to rise and join the marriage procession,... Everything, even a funeral, had to give way to a marriage procession." [Edersheim, *Life of Messiah*]

"The day of the wedding was a Wednesday if the bride was a virgin [note that those entering matrimony were pre-supposed to be pure; sexual conduct prior to marriage was not tolerated in the Jewish culture] and a Thursday if she was a widow. The wedding was often held in the evening, because there were processions and these were more spectacular if they were held by torchlight. First the bridegroom and his friends went in procession to the home of the bride. The bridegroom and a few of those close to him went into the bride's home, while the others waited outside (like the ten young ladies in Matt 25:1-13). The actual ceremony, whatever its form, took place inside the bride's home. Then there was another procession, this time with all those interested going to the home of the bridegroom. Here the wedding feast was held. This was a very important part of the proceedings. It was often a lengthy affair and might go on for a week. It was important that everything be done properly. One thing that seems strange to us is that there was a strong element of reciprocity. If one gave a feast of such and such a quality (and quantity!) when his son was married, he was entitled to an equivalent when his neighbor's son was married. If the neighbor did not provide it, he could be taken to court and sued; a wedding feast was not simply a social occasion, but involved a legal obligation. This is important for our present study. It is quite possible that the bridegroom of John 2 and his family were financially unable to provide all that was necessary for the wedding feast. It is often said that it is unlikely that Jesus would have performed a miracle like this simply to rescue the people from a minor social embarrassment. Quite so. But it may well have been much more than that. It may be that Jesus rescued a young couple from a financial liability that would have cripple them economically for years." [Morris, *John*]

and the mother of Jesus was there: : the apostle John is consistent with not naming himself nor his close relatives in his gospel. Mary was possibly his aunt, the sister of his mother Salome. If not, Mary had been at least taken care of by the apostle since the time of the crucifixion. Mary was probably a widow at the time and possibly one of the general assistants of the wedding. This would explain her knowledge of the wine running out and her giving of orders to the servants.

"Some of the ancients have thought that this was the marriage of John the evangelist, who is supposed to have been a near relative of our Lord." [Clarke, *Commentary*] The fact that Mary is present may account for the invitation of Jesus.

2:2 And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. : how? possibly that Jesus on His way to Cana stopped in Nazareth and received the invitation, along with His disciples. Perhaps Nathanael who was from Cana was authorized to extend invitations, perhaps he was even a relative of the bridegroom but this is unknown. Some say they were a surprise and not invited until arrival. Dods [*Gk NT*], while holding that this was the case, says the verbiage can be taken either way [that they were

previously invited or invited because they showed up] and provides no proof.

"Note Jesus (1) is not an ascetic but came eating and drinking (Mt 11:19), (2) that He does not do away with social occasions but rather blesses them. "It is significant that Jesus accepted the invitation. He did not come in order to rob men of their joy and gladness." [Hendriksen, John] "Christ does not take away human society, but sanctifies it." [Wesley, *Commentary*]

2:3 And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. : we don't know why this happened but the Jewish weddings were often a week-long feast (Gen 29:27; Judg 14:15) with new guests continually arriving. Perhaps the host was short-sighted as to the extent of the festivities.

Some take this to have been caused by the appearance of Jesus with His disciples: e.g. Dods [*Gk NT*] says the wine failed due to their appearance, and some take this to be a request for Him to leave. "His mother saith to him, They have no wine : Either she might mean, supply them by miracle; or, Go away, that others may go also, before the want appears. [John Wesley, *Commentary*] I find this improbable however because even if Jesus made an abrupt appearance with unexpected disciples and was "invited" on the spot, what host would have just enough food supplies for exactly enough people? If a large party is thrown into disaster by the appearance of a half dozen more guests, the host would have ran out of food anyway.

"She did not ask explicitly for a miracle, but her words seem to look for nothing less. At the least she knew Jesus to be resourceful, and she put the problem before him. But we should perhaps see more than that in her words. Mary knew the circumstances of the birth of Jesus, and she had had visits from the shepherds and the wise men. Whatever the case with other people, she knew Jesus to be God's Messiah. It may be that we should see here some natural motherly pride and perhaps a small trace of exasperation. From Luke's Gospel we know that Jesus was about thirty years old when He started on His public ministry (Luke 3:23). Mary may well have been asking herself, 'When will He begin His work as Messiah?' Surely it was time. Moreover, there was the excitement arising from the events described in John 1. Disciples were gathering round Jesus. He was being hailed as the Messiah. Why then does He not do something? Mary, proud of her son, gives a gentle push. Here is a fine opportunity for Him to make a beginning." [Morris, *John*] "But the fundamental mistake in what she attempted is just this, that she spake as His Mother, and placed that maternal relationship in connection with His work. And therefore it was that as, on the first misunderstanding in the Temple, He had said: 'wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' so now: 'woman, what have I to do with thee?' ... As in His first manifestation in the Temple, so in this the first manifestation of His glory, the finger that pointed to 'His hour' was not, and could not be, that of an earthly parent, but of His Father in Heaven." [Edersheim, *Life of Messiah*]

2:4 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, : "Gunai [woman] is a term of respect, not equivalent to our 'woman'. See chap 19:26, 20:13, Lk 13:12. In the Greek tragedians it is constantly used in addressing queens and persons of distinction. Augustus addresses Cleopatra as gunai.... But while there is neither harshness nor disrespect, there is distance in the expression." [Dods, *Gk NT*] It was a term of respectful address and could be translated "lady" but that term has fallen into disrepute, giving it a connotation of a streetwalker. "When the Lord said, 'Woman,' He did not indulge in rudeness. On the contrary, it was very kind of Him to emphasize, by the use of this word, that Mary must no longer think of Him as being merely her Son; for, the more she conceives of Him as her Son, the more also will she suffer when He suffers. Mary must begin to look upon Jesus as her Lord." [Hendriksen, *John*]

"Our Lord's answer to his mother, if properly translated, is far from being disrespectful. He addresses the virgin as he did the Syrophoenician woman, Matthew 15:28; as he did the Samaritan woman, John 4:21, as he addressed his disconsolate mother when he hung upon the cross, John 19:26; as he did his most affectionate friend Mary Magdalene, John 20:15, and as the angels had addressed her before, John 20:13; and as St. Paul does the believing Christian woman, 1 Corinthians 7:16; in all which places the same term, gunai which occurs in this verse, is used; and where certainly no kind of disrespect is intended, but, on the contrary, complaisance, affability, tenderness, and concern and in this sense it is used in the best Greek writers." [Clarke, *Commentary*]

"Yet we should bear in mind that it was a very unusual form of address for a son to use in speaking to his mother. Apart from the examples in this Gospel, no one seems to have noticed any. Neither among the Jews nor among the Greeks is this form of address attested. We should probably infer that Jesus, though speaking politely, is putting a distance between them. As long as He lived in the home at Nazareth He was subject to His parents as a dutiful son. But when He began His public ministry He was God's Messiah." [Morris, *John*]

what have I to do with thee?: literally, "what to me and to thee"; Wuest: *and Jesus says to her, What is that to me and to you, woman?* Adam Clarke translates it, *O, woman, what is this to thee and me?* "Its meaning depends not a little on the context in which it is found. In the Old Testament if often means 'Don't bother me. Leave me alone'. On the lips of the demoniacs in Mk 1:24 it implies 'What have we in common with you?'. Here... the probable meaning is, 'Your concern and mine are not the same.' "[Tasker, *John*] Ryrie says it means "that concerns you, leave Me alone" (Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*). Dods [*Gk NT*] says its an equivalent of the Heb in Judges 11:12 and has the sense " 'Let me alone; what is there common to thee and me; we stand in this matter on altogether different grounds'. Or, as Holtzmann gives it, Our point of view and interests are wholly diverse; why do you mingle them'? "

mine hour is not yet come.: "This must surely mean, 'It is not yet time for me to act.' We would leave it at that, were it not that this is the first of a series of references to Jesus' 'time' or His 'hour'. His time has not yet come in John 7:6,8,30; and 8:20. But when the cross is in immediate prospect Jesus says, 'The hour has come that the Son of man should be glorified' (John 12:23; there are similar statements in 12:27; 13:1; 16:32; 17:1)." [Morris, *John*]

Dods [*Gk NT*] says it could be used of any critical time. "Mine hour is not yet come. Compare 8:20; 12:23; 13:1. In every case the coming of the hour indicates some crisis in the personal life of the Lord, more commonly His passion. Here the hour of His Messianic manifestation (ver. 11)." [Vincent, *Word Studies*] The "hour" for manifesting Himself as Messiah had not come, see 8:20. Jesus even this early in His ministry realized the fact of the task entrusted to Him by His Father, of which every detail had been providentially worked out. For each act there was a time. "When Jesus knew that this moment had arrived, He would act, not before." [Hendriksen, *John*]

"May we not learn hence, if his mother was rebuked for attempting to direct him in the days of his flesh, how absurd it is to address her as if she had a right to command him, on the throne of his glory? Likewise how indecent it is for us to direct his supreme wisdom, as to the time or manner in which he shall appear for us in any of the exigencies of life! [Wesley, *Commentary*]

2:5 *His mother saith unto the servants, :* the word for *servants* is diakonois (v5), diakonoi (v9) and is the same word for *deacon* (*deacon* is a transliteration, *servant* is a translation).

Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. : Mary sensed He would act when the time came, so in submission and confident expectation she spoke to the servants. Mary perceived that Jesus' answer, while containing a mild rebuke, contained a promise. She spoke to them for two reasons: (1) it may seem strange a guest would order the waiters; (2) what Jesus would tell the attendants may see foolish so she prepared them to do whatever He told them to do.

2:6 And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, : somewhere in the vicinity of the room where they were stood six water jars, used for the Jewish ritual of purification (Mk 7:3) in which the guests washed their hands both prior and after the meal, as well as being used for the dishes. Vincent comments that they were of stone because they were less liable to impurity, and therefore prescribed by the Jewish authorities for washing before and after meals. [Vincent, *Word Studies*] Wuest: there were standing there stone water jars used for the ritualistic ablutions of the Jews. "After the manner of the purifying of the Jews: Or, for the purpose of the purifying of the Jews. The preposition kata ... often denotes in the best Greek writers the final cause of a thing. See several examples produced by Raphelius, from Arrian and Herodotus. These six vessels were set in a convenient place, for the purpose of the Jews washing their hands before they sat down to meat, and probably for other purposes of purification. See this custom referred to in Matthew 15:2. As to the number six, we need seek for no mystery in it; the number of pots was proportioned to the number of the guests." [Adam Clarke, Commentary]

"It was this water of Jewish purification that Jesus changed into wine. John surely means us to see that the water of Jewish ceremonial observance, water used in accordance with Jewish concentration on the law as the way of salvation, is changed by Christ into the wine of the gospel. Jesus had not come to tidy up an old system. He came to change people, to change them radically, to put a new power in them." [Morris, *John*]

containing two or three firkins apiece. : Edersheim says its impossible to determine how large they were: there were three different kinds of that kind of measurement used in the ancient Palestine: the common Palestinian or 'wilderness' (holding from 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ - 15 3/4 gallons each), the Jerusalem, and that of Sepphoris (holding 17 - 25 $\frac{1}{2}$ gallons). From what I have read, the quantity could have been anywhere from about 100 - 180 gallons. Vincent states that the word is used only here in the New Testament. From a root word meaning to measure; and therefore, properly, a measurer. A liquid measure containing nearly nine gallons. [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

2:7 Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. : why is how much wine made stated, and the jars were filled to the brim? - to emphasize the greatness and immensity of Christ's miracle. One significance of the pots being filled to the brim is that there was no room for Jesus to add anything; the servants thus became instrumental in the working and the proof of the miracle.

2:8 And he saith unto them, Draw out now, : draw out now = dip out the wine. If the end of verse 9 is taken most literally, what the waiters drew off was water and it changed to wine as they drew it off. "Some have thought that his meaning is that the whole 120 gallons became wine, others that only what was brought to the guests was so changed. If the former was the case, the change probably took place before the waiters started bringing it in; if the latter, then the transformation would have been at the time of bringing the beverage to the guests.... We have already seen that wine was heavily diluted on such occasions, and if we are to think of the entire amount as being changed (which I would think we should), the point is that it was more than was needed for the wedding. The young couple would be able to sell the excess and start their married life with an asset instead of facing a crippling liability.... One point of the miracle is that Christ makes abundant provision. There was an immediate need at the wedding, but when he supplied that need he did more: he helped the young couple get of to a good start in their married life." [Morris, John]

As for one who believed the water turned to wine as it was being drawn off: "Apparently what these men dipped out was water (see verse 9), but it changed into wine immediately. However, the author does not intend to convey the idea that only a small portion of the water was actually dipped out and changed into wine. On the contrary, the sense seems to be: keep on carrying wine. They dip out again and again." [Hendriksen, John] "From [a word that referred to] the hold of a ship where the bilge-water settles, and hence, the bilge-water itself. The verb, therefore, originally, means to bale out bilge-water; thence, generally, to draw, as from a well (4:15). Canon Westcott thinks that the water which was changed into wine was not taken from the vessels of purification, but that the servants were bidden, after they had filled the vessels with water, to continue drawing from the well or spring." [Vincent, *Word Studies*] I tend to think the whole six jars were turned into wine else why were they mentioned?

and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. : governor of the feast: (Gk arxhitriklino, from archō = ruler +

triklinos = three couches) literally, to the superintendent of the room with three couches, usually found on three sides of a low table. He was the "butler" or head waiter whose duty it was to arrange the table and taste the food and wine. In general he regulated the course of the feast and the conduct of the guests. Usually chosen from the guests, sometimes by lot. "The original word, arcitriklinov, signifies one who is chief or head over three couches, or tables. In the Asiatic countries, they take their meals sitting, or rather reclining, on small low couches. And when many people are present, so that they cannot all eat together, three of these low tables or couches are put together in form of a crescent, and some one of the guests is appointed to take charge of the persons who sit at these tables. Hence the appellation of architriclinus, the chief over three couches or tables, which in process of time became applied to the governor or steward of a feast, let the guests be many or few; and such person, having conducted the business well, had a festive crown put on his head by the guests, at the conclusion of the feast.... This person is seldom the master of the house." [Clarke, *Commentary*]

2:9, 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.: "What Christ introduces into the world will stand comparison with what is already in it." — what was made was excellent wine. Apparently the master of the feast was not present when the wine ran out or Jesus made the water into wine; he was surprised at how good the wine was, not that they now had wine. This also was not a rebuke but rather an expression of surprise or even a compliment on the quality of the wine.

The sense here is dependent upon the meaning of the word "wine"; if the wine was alcoholic as we think of it in today's culture, the sense is "the good wine is brought out at first, then when men are drunk (in the alcoholic sense of the word) and can no longer tell or no longer care if the wine is good or bad, then the inferior wine is brought out." If the wine is not as we think today (see below), the word "drunk" has the meaning "when men have drunk freely". Wuest: *and whenever they become satiated* [to supply with anything to excess]. ASV: *and when men have drunk freely*. Young's Literal *NT: and when they may have drunk freely*. It could very easily just have the sense of the good wine being served first and later (either when men's senses are dulled just from having drank and eaten already, or even used just as an indication of time) when that's gone, what is left is served. "When they have well drunk : does not mean any more than toward the close of the entertainment." [Wesley, *Commentary*]

If the wine is alcoholic as in our culture, a problem is present. Even those who accept "social drinking" believes the Bible condemns drunkenness and intemperance. What is being said here however is that Jesus waited until everyone was "three sheets in the wind" then "brought out some really good stuff that put them all under the table!" The wine served that Jesus made was declared to be *very* good, even better than what was served in the beginning. In the alcoholic sense? Those that believe this is alcoholic wine gets around this problem by commenting that the governor of the feast was merely stating a common occurrence in their day and that it did not necessarily reflect on the festival they were at. " When people get drunk' which is a comment not on the state of the guests at this particular feast but on what happens at feasts in general." [Morris, *John*] Possibly, but I think they are trying too hard to prove something unnecessary.

2:11 This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; : "No natural explanation will suffice. The notion that these same jars had previously been filled with wine and that this wine-sediment explains what happened, deserves no answer at all.... There simply is no explanation for what happened here. It is a miracle which one either accepts or denies. There is no third way out of the difficulty." [Hendriksen, John]

The miracle was called a sign (sāmeion) by John in order to emphasize the significance of the miracles rather than the miracles themselves. "They revealed various aspects of the Person or work of Christ (here His glory), and their purpose was to encourage faith in His followers." [*Ryrie Study Bible*] "The term is used more often by John than by the other Gospel-writers. It indicates a miracle viewed as *a proof of divine authority and majesty*. Hence, it leads the attention of the spectator away from the deed itself to the divine Doer.... This truth receives a particularly striking illustration in the present account. Note that *everything* else remains in the background. Who was the bridegroom? We do not know. Who was the bride? We are not told. In exactly what relation did Mary stand to the wedded pair: was she, perhaps, the aunt of bride or groom? Silence again. Did Nathaniel serve as 'best man' (friend of the bridegroom)? Also on this score our curiosity receives no satisfaction whatever. *In the full light of day stands the Christ. All the rest is shadow.*" [Hendriksen, *John*]

"This beginning of miracles: It was probably the first he ever wrought:-at any rate, it was the first he wrought after his baptism, and the first he wrought publicly." [Adam Clarke, *Commentary*]

"We are prompted to ask what particular aspect of His glory was manifested here. What was there in it to elicit the faith and reverence of the disciples? (1) He appears as King in physical nature. He can use it for the furtherance of His purposes and man's good. He is, as declared in the Prologue, that One in whom is life. (2) A hint is given of the ends for which this creative power is to be used. It is, that human joy may be full. These disciples of the Baptist perceive a new kind of power in their new Master, whose goodness irradiates the natural joys and domestic incidents of human life. (3) When John recorded this miracle he saw how fitly it stood as the first rehearsing as it did the entire work of Christ, who came that human happiness might not untimely close in shame. Wine had become the symbol of that blood which brought reconcilement and renewal." [Dods, *Gk NT*]

and his disciples believed on him. : "Were more abundantly confirmed in their faith, that he was either the promised Messiah, or a most extraordinary prophet, in the fullest intercourse with the ever blessed God." "Testimony (1:36) directs those who were ready to welcome Christ to Him. Personal intercourse converts followers into disciples (2:2). A manifestation of power, as a sign

of divine grace, converts discipleship into personal faith.... It conveys the idea of 'the absolute transference of trust from one's self to another.'" [Wescott, John]

Christ is pictured here:

• the One who honors marriage. Not surprisingly does He later picture Himself as the Bridegroom with His people being His bride.

• the One who bestows gifts lavishly without stint. "Surely One who supplies so abundantly in the physical realm will not be less generous in the spiritual.

• the One whose infinite love is made effective by His infinite power

• the One who, as the Son of God, is full of grace and glory (Jn 1:14) "He stands here revealed as being infinite not only in His love but also in His power; hence, as being, indeed, the Son of God. His disciples began to realize this, and believed in Him." [Hendriksen, *John*]

Wine

A pastor I greatly respected once told me it is impossible to prove beyond any doubt the meaning of the word "wine" or its use in Biblical times. Even with what is being presented below, I cannot help but wonder how much of my own belief is influenced by the American "Total Abstinence" culture. Without over-simplifying, there are three main beliefs concerning the biblical usage of wine:

• biblical wines are alcoholic as in our culture. The advocates of this point to non-American cultures as examples, such as the use of alcohol in Europe.

• biblical wines are non-alcoholic, equivalent to our grape juice. Prevalent belief among many Baptists and those that teach total abstinence.

• biblical wines are alcoholic but diluted to present no physical effects upon the drinker. "There is a Rabbinic saying, 'without wine there is no joy.' We should not misinterpret this as evidence that the rabbis were given to much drinking. They were not. They were highly critical of drunkenness, and they required that when wine was drunk it should be diluted with water in the proportion of three parts of water to one of wine. The saying reflects the fact that in the first century there was not much choice of beverages. Quite unreasonably we tend to read back our rich variety; we think that if they did not have our tea, coffee, Coca-Cola, and the like, they had their equivalent. But in the first century one drank water or one drank wine. For ordinary people there was nothing else." [Morris, *John*]

"The ratio of water to wine varied. Homer mentions a ratio of 20 to 1, twenty parts water to one part wine. Pline mentions a ratio of eight parts water to one part wine.... A quotation from a play by Aristophanes ... [says] 'the ratio of water to wine is 3 to 1.' .. Sometimes the ratio goes down to 1 to 1 (and even lower), but it should be noted that such a mixture is referred to as 'strong wine.' Drinking wine unmixed, on the other hand, was looked upon as a 'Scythian' or Barbarian custom.... The ratio of water might vary, but only barbarians drank it unmixed, and a mixture of wine and water of equal parts was seen as 'strong drink' and frowned upon. The term 'wine' or *oinos* in the ancient world, then, did not mean wine as we understand it today but wine mixed with water....The 1901 *Jewish Encyclopedia* (Vol 12, p 533) states that in the rabbinic period at least "yayin [or wine] is to be distinguished from shekar [or strong drink]: the former is diluted with water; the latter is undiluted." In the Talmud, which contains the oral traditions of Judaism from about 200 BC to AD 200, there are several tractates in which the mixture of water and wine is discussed. One tractate (Shabbath 77a) states that wine that does not carry three parts of water well is not wine.... In ancient times there were not many beverages that were safe to drink. The danger of drinking water alone raises another point. There were several ways in which the ancients could make water safe to drink. One method was boiling, but this was tedious and costly. Different methods of filtration were tried. The safest and easiest method of making the water safe to drink, however, was to mix it with wine. The drinking of wine (i.e. a mixture of water and wine) served therefore as a safety measure, since often the water available was not safe." [Stein, *Wine-Drinking in NT Times;* quoted by Pentecost, *Words and Works*]