The Wedding at Cana

Bible Background • JOHN 2:1-12
Printed Text • JOHN 2:1-12 | Devotional Reading • JOHN 17:1-5

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: DISCUSS Jesus’ response to Mary; REFLECT on Jesus’ transforming power in our lives; and SHARE with others why the power of Jesus is necessary in our lives.

In Focus

Eddie’s love of the party life was getting out of hand. He reached a critical point one day when he left work for lunch and returned to the office drunk. He was fired on the spot.

When Eddie finally went home, his wife told him that their marriage was over. Walking the streets with no job, no home, and no family, Eddie knew his life had hit rock bottom. He looked up to the sky and cried out, “Dear God, please help me!”

After a while, Eddie passed a little storefront church and something inside him compelled him to go in. The pastor made his way to Eddie and sat down with him. Eddie broke down and tearfully poured out the whole sad story. The pastor told Eddie that in spite of all the mistakes he had made, God still loved him. That day Eddie accepted Christ as His Lord and Savior, and from that moment on he never took another drink. Within a month, he found a new job. A short time later, he and his wife were reunited.

*Eddie told his wife that he was sure God performed a miracle in his life. He said, “He changed my life from hopelessness to happiness and our marriage from failure to fantastic. If Jesus can change me, surely He can change anything.” This lesson is about the miracles that only God can do.*
Keep in Mind

“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him” (John 2:11).
Focal Verses

**KJV**  John 2:1  And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there:

2  And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.

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

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

5  His mother saith unto the servants, WHATSOEVER he saith unto you, do it.

6  And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.

7  Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.

8  And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.

9  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,

10  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.

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

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.

**NLT**  John 2:1  The next day Jesus’ mother was a guest at a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee.

2  Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration.
The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus’ mother spoke to him about the problem. “They have no more wine,” she told him.

“How does that concern you and me?” Jesus asked. “My time has not yet come.”

But his mother told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Six stone waterpots were standing there; they were used for Jewish ceremonial purposes and held twenty to thirty gallons each.

Jesus told the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” When the jars had been filled to the brim,

he said, “Dip some out and take it to the master of ceremonies.” So they followed his instructions.

When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over.

“Usually a host serves the best wine first,” he said. “Then, when everyone is full and doesn’t care, he brings out the less expensive wines. But you have kept the best until now!”

This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was Jesus’ first display of his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

After the wedding he went to Capernaum for a few days with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples.

**The People, Places, and Times**

**Miracle.** There are three Greek words used by the Gospel writers to describe our Lord’s miracles. *Dunamis* emphasizes God’s mighty power to perform supernatural events. *Teras* means “wonder,” and it emphasizes the extraordinary character of the Lord’s miracles. *Semeion* means “sign.” A sign points to something beyond itself. This word indicates that Jesus’ miracles are meant to teach spiritual truth.

**Background**

God has drawn a veil over most of Jesus’ life before He began His public ministry. Both Matthew and Luke record Jesus’ birth and some of the incidents surrounding His birth and early childhood (Matthew 1:18-2:23; Luke 2:1-40). The next and last glimpse we get of our Lord before His ministry is the pre-teen Jesus visiting the temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:41-52). There has been a great deal of speculation about the next 18 years of Jesus’ life, but Scripture does not reveal anything about those years.

Then suddenly around A.D. 27, John the Baptist explodes out of the Judean wilderness proclaiming the advent of the Messiah and the arrival of the kingdom of God. One day, as John
is baptizing along the Jordan River, Jesus shows up. He presents Himself to John for baptism (Matthew 3:13). John realizes who Jesus is and tries to decline the honor. Jesus convinces him that this is all part of God’s plan, and John baptizes Him. As Jesus makes His way out of the water, the heavens open and the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove. Then the voice of God calls out from heaven, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17, NIV).

Forty days later, Jesus returns full of the Holy Spirit from His wilderness encounter with Satan. He passes the area where John is baptizing, and when John sees Him, he declares, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, NIV). The next day John is talking with two of his disciples, and again he sees Jesus passing. Pointing Jesus out to the disciples, he exclaims, “Look, the Lamb of God!” (v. 36, NIV). The disciples, Andrew and Philip, leave John and immediately begin to follow Jesus. Later, Andrew brings his brother Peter to the Lord and Philip brings his brother Nathaniel (vv. 40-51).

The preparation for Jesus’ ministry is now complete. The Lord showed His submission to God at His baptism. He demonstrated His sinlessness and suitability to be our eternal sacrifice when He overcame Satan in the wilderness. Finally, He called His first disciples. The question now is where and how He will begin His ministry.

At-A-Glance

1. The Merry Occasion (John 2:1-2)

2. The Modest Obedience (vv. 3-5)

3. The Miraculous Occurrence (vv. 6-11)

4. The Move to Capernaum (v. 12)

In Depth

1. The Merry Occasion (John 2:1-2)

Cana of Galilee was located just south of Nazareth where Jesus grew up. The bridegroom may have been related to or maybe a close friend of Mary, Jesus’ mother. The language of the passage suggests that Mary had some official function at the wedding, while Jesus and His disciples were invited guests. “Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding” (from John 2:1-2, NIV).

Weddings were major events in those days. In small villages, such as Cana, where the people worked hard without much time for recreation, weddings were even more special. The entire village may have participated in the celebration of the couple’s union. The actual wedding usually took place on a Wednesday if the bride was a virgin and on Thursday if she was a widow. The phrase “the third day” in verse 1 refers to the succession of incidents recorded in John 1:29 and 1:35.
The series of events began with a celebration at the home of the bride. The bridal party escorted the maiden from her parents’ home and then to the home prepared for her by her husband. As the wedding party made its way through the streets, neighbors and townspeople saluted the bride. Many people joined the entourage until it grew into a parade. When the procession arrived at the bride’s new home, the couple exchanged vows. Then the bride and groom were crowned with garlands and the legal marriage document was signed. After the prescribed washing of hands and prayers, the marriage supper began with the cups being filled.

Marriage is the very first institution established by God (Genesis 2:24). The Old Testament repeatedly portrays the intimate relationship between God and Israel as a marriage (see Isaiah 62:5; Jeremiah 3:14; Hosea 1:2 and 3:1). In the New Testament, Christ is often referred to as the bridegroom (Matthew 9:15; John 3:29). The apostle Paul portrays the relationship between Christ and His church as that of a husband and wife (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:25-27). The gathering of Christ and His church in heaven at the end of the age is described as a “wedding supper” (Revelation 19:9, NIV). When we consider the high esteem God has for marriage, it is highly appropriate that Christ would inaugurate the messianic age with a sign at a wedding.

2. The Modest Obedience (vv. 3-5)

Jewish wedding celebrations often lasted an entire week. The bridegroom’s family had the sacred responsibility of providing food and beverages for all their guests for as long as the celebration lasted. But, in the midst of this celebration, the unthinkable happened. The wine ran out. This was a matter of grave concern. It would be considered an insult to all those present and cause the family to become socially marginalized. Mary realized the situation was desperate and immediately turned to Jesus for help. She said, “They have no more wine,” (John 2:3, NIV).

Mary’s urgent request that Jesus do something does not necessarily indicate she expected a miracle. Her husband, Joseph, who is not mentioned again after the temple incident (Luke 2:41-51), had probably been dead for a long time. Over the years, Mary had become accustomed to depending on her eldest son in emergencies, and this situation certainly qualified as an emergency. Mary’s absolute confidence in Jesus implies that He had seldom—if ever—disappointed her.

Our Lord’s response to His mother seems flippant on the face of it, but Jesus is not being callous or disrespectful. The term “woman” (John 2:4) was one of endearment. Jesus used the same word when He lovingly entrusted His mother to John’s care from the Cross: “Woman, behold thy son” (from John 19:26). It is probably better translated as “Dear woman” (from John 2:4, NIV). When the Lord inquires of His mother, “Why do you involve me?” (from John 2:4, NIV), it marks the turning point in His relationship with her and His family. From that moment on, the business of His Father would take precedence over the concerns of His mother (see Luke 2:49-51).

The phrase “my time has not yet come” (John 2:4, NIV) is an idea that will be repeated throughout John’s narrative (compare John 4:21, 23; 5:25; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23). Jesus lived His earthly life according to a heavenly clock. His time on earth was always in His Father’s hands.
The “hour” Jesus refers to (John 2:4) is the final hour of His earthly ministry when He would be manifested as the Christ and share in the glory of God (John 17:1).

Mary may or may not have understood what Jesus meant by His response, but she trusted Him to do what was right. She understood that Jesus was much more than just her Son. He was the Son of God. So the mother humbly submitted herself to the Son and instructed the servants, “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5, NIV).

3. The Miraculous Occurrence (vv. 6-11)

Outside the reception room were six large stone pots that contained water used for the ceremonial cleansing of hands. According to Jewish tradition, the primary sources of impurity were contact with dead creatures of any kind, genital flows, and certain skin diseases (Leviticus 11). Any impure object or person gave off a secondary degree of impurity to whatever or whomever it came into contact with. Since ultimately everything touches everything else, maintaining ritual purity was a continual battle.

Therefore, whenever new guests arrive at a wedding feast, water from the pots is poured over their hands in a cleansing ritual. Eating with unclean hands was also considered defilement, so water was poured over the hands of the diners before each meal.

Each of the water pots had a capacity of two or three firkins of water (John 2:6). A firkin is about 10 gallons, so each pot held about 20 to 30 gallons. Jesus commands the servants to fill all the pots with water, and they obediently fill each pot to the brim (v. 7). Filling the pots to the brim eliminates the possibility of anything else being added to the pots other than water. Next, Jesus tells the servants, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet” (v. 8, NIV). Again, the servants do as they are instructed.

John does not explain how or when the water in the pots becomes wine. He simply states the facts: “And the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine” (from v. 9, NIV). When the banquet master tasted the wine, he was shocked. He called for the bridegroom, took him aside, and said, “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now” (v. 10, NIV). Both the bridegroom and the banquet master were at a loss to explain the source of the new wine, but the servants knew. So it was that Jesus “chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things to shame the strong” (1 Corinthians 1:27, NIV).

Traditionally, the “choice” (John 2:10, NIV) or “good” (v. 10, KJV) wine was wine that had not lost its sugar content in the fermentation process. Cheaper fermented wine had to be diluted with much more water to ensure that the revelers did not violate the law against drunkenness (see Deuteronomy 21:20-21; Isaiah 28:7). In either case, Jewish law mandated mixing all wine with water. The mixture ranged from three to 10 parts water to one part wine. The ratio of water to wine depended on the amount of alcohol in the wine.

The phrase “when men have well drunk” (John 2:10) means “become drunk” or “become satisfied” (without reference to drunkenness). The phrase must be translated according to its
context. In this case, it is illogical to think that Jesus contributed gallons of wine to an already drunken party.

Our Lord is no mere magician performing magical feats to impress the crowds. He is the Son of God. He affects miracles to help His people and glorify His Father. The significance of Jesus’ first miracle lies in the result produced. He transforms what would have been a disaster for the host into a joyous and praiseful moment.

The supernatural event portrayed the opening of the new age of grace through the new wine of the Gospel and manifested Jesus’ glory as the Son of God. The miracle caused Jesus’ disciples to put their faith in Him (v. 11).

Miracles are not merely superhuman feats. They are divine acts of love and power. John refers to Jesus’ miracles as signs. These signs always point past the event to the source of the event, Jesus Christ. The signs are recorded so that we may believe in the power and person of Jesus Christ and attain eternal life by believing (1 John 5:13).

4. The Move to Capernaum (v. 12)

Jesus did not stay around to receive public acclaim for this miracle. Instead He moved on to Capernaum, which was His headquarters for most of His ministry.

Search the Scriptures

1. In what Israelite village and on what occasion did Jesus perform His first miracle (John 2:1)?

2. Who brought it to Jesus’ attention that the wedding supper had run out of wine for the guests (v. 4)?

3. Who were the four disciples who accompanied Jesus to the wedding (John 1:40-51)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Can Jesus’ miracle of turning water into wine be interpreted as approval of drinking alcoholic beverages? Why or why not?

2. What does Jesus’ miracle at the marriage say about His regard for marriage?

Lesson in Our Society

It is appropriate that Jesus chose a wedding ceremony to perform His first miracle. Marriage is the first institution established by God and signifies the beginning of a new way of life. God desires a lifelong commitment of the marriage partners.

In America, about half of all marriages end in divorce. Many people forego the act of marriage altogether and just “shack up.” Those who live together without marriage simply walk away
from each other when times get hard. The law now grants the same status to “common-law” unions as it does to marriages while making it much easier to get divorced.

Is it possible that our lack of true commitment to our most intimate partners contributes to the breakdown we are experiencing in our society? Should couples be required to undergo counseling before marriage and before being granted a divorce?

**Make It Happen**

The Gospel of Christ changes people from the inside out. Can you think of any ways God has changed you? This week, make a list of sinful ways or imperfections that God has changed in you. Then make a second list of sinful ways or imperfections you want God to change in you. Be prepared to share your first list with the class next week. Make your second list a matter of prayer and determine to use God’s power in you to bring about change.

**Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

**Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned:

**More Light on the Text**

**John 2:1-12**

1 And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: 2 And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.

“The third day” is not the third day of the week. The phrase continues a three-day sequence of time beginning at 1:35 (“Again the next day”), picked up at 1:43 (“The day following”), and ending here.

The “marriage” (Gk. gamos, GAM-os) or marriage festival included a series of entertainments and usually was spoken of in the plural. The marriage feast was a very important part of the marriage ceremony. Although Scripture does not provide much information about the actual ceremony, historical findings point to a very public event. The Gospels record only this instance of Jesus participating in a marriage feast, but He referred to various aspects of weddings in His teachings ([Matthew 22:1-10; 25:1-13; Mark 2:19-20; Luke 14:8](https://bible.com/bible/110/mat.22.1-10)).

The marriage took place in a village called Cana of Galilee, so named to distinguish it from another village in Syria with the same name. The exact location of Cana (“place of reeds”) is unknown, but many authorities place it near Capernaum about 12 miles north of Nazareth where Jesus was raised. The village is quite significant in Jesus’ ministry. Not only did He perform the
opening miracle of His ministry here, but later He healed a nobleman’s son (John 4:46-54). The village was also the hometown of Nathaniel, one of Jesus’ first apostles.

Marriage feasts in ancient Israel generally lasted for a whole week. The guests sat around a great bowl or bowls on the floor. The marriage meal usually consisted of stewed lamb with rice or barley. The servants poured water over the hands of the guests before the meal began. This procedure was repeated at the end of the meal. The guests used pieces of bread as table napkins to wipe their fingers. After the guests dried their hands, the bread was thrown on the ground to be eaten by pet dogs or tossed outside to be picked up by stray dogs (Matthew 15:27; Mark 7:28).

After the meal, guests retired to pillows situated around the walls, where they sat cross-legged and exchanged gossip, listened to entertainment, or engaged in riddles and jokes. Light was supplied by a small lamp or two, or if the night was chilly, by a smoldering fire of weeds kindled in the middle of the room. Sometimes there was a brazier for the fire, but the fire was often kindled in a hole in the floor.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is known as the “Virgin Mary,” although the Gospel writers never refer to her by that term. The Gospel accounts provide only a small amount of information regarding Mary’s personal history, but Luke gives her genealogy. She was of the tribe of Judah and the lineage of David (Psalm 132:11; Luke 1:32). She was related by marriage to Elisabeth, the mother of John the Baptist (Luke 1:36).

Because the wedding feast at Cana takes place shortly after Jesus’ return from His 40-day wilderness encounter, Jesus would have only four disciples at this time (Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel).

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

Here the verb “wanted” (Gk. hustereo, hoos-ter-EH-o) means “fell short, suffered need, gave out or failed.” Thus, a better translation is “when the wine was gone” (NIV). Marriage festivals generally lasted for at least a week. For some reason, perhaps because a larger number of guests than expected showed up, the celebration ran out of wine. This was a potentially embarrassing situation for the hosts of the wedding feast.

Mary, whom John never mentions by name in his narrative, takes the problem to Jesus. Her request is further evidence of her official capacity at the wedding. Mary’s request could not be based on any supposition that Jesus would perform a miracle because there is no evidence of Him ever acting miraculously before this time. So why the appeal to Jesus? Partly because during the years since Joseph’s death, Mary had probably grown accustomed to depending on her eldest son for help and hoped He would somehow meet the difficulty. Her request was both a testimony of her personal confidence in Him and a realization of the gravity of the situation that threatened the newlyweds.

4 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.
These words in our language seem harsh and rude, but the term rendered “woman” was a respectful term of endearment (see John 19:26) and is probably better understood as “dear woman.” The language Jesus used was a mild rebuke. Jesus’ gentle rebuke, literally, “What is this to Me?” rejects Mary’s interference. He intended to meet the need in His own way.

In every case, the phrase “mine hour” (John 2:4) refers to a time of personal crisis for the Lord, generally His Passion. Here He speaks of His messianic manifestation as shown in verse 11 but not fully realized until His suffering on Calvary.

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

Mary evidently understood from Jesus’ demeanor, if not His words, that He intended to help in this situation. The family was probably too poor to have actual “servants,” so the word here (Gk. diakonos, dee-AK-on-os) apparently refers to hired attendants for the wedding.

6 And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. 7 Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.

In Jewish thought, purity was obtained by cleansings and purifications that worshipers were commanded to perform as part of their religious duties. Most of the ceremonial purifications had both ethical and practical applications. The six stone waterpots were used to supply water for the ceremonial cleansing at Jewish feasts (see Mark 7:3–4). Jews were ceremonially unclean if they did not wash both before and after meals. The family probably borrowed some of the pots from neighbors and friends to accommodate all the guests. Each water pot held “two or three firkins” (John 2:6). This translates into about 20 to 30 gallons of water. The water was stored in pots to protect it from contamination, and then it was poured over the hands of the guests.

Following Jesus’ instructions, the servants filled each pot to the brim, which eliminated any possibility of anything other than pure water being added. The combined capacity of the water pots was, on average, about 150 gallons. Thus, if each serving cup held a half pint of wine, there would be enough for 2,400 servings—more than enough to meet the need.

8 And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. 9 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, 10 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 “governor” (Gk. architrikinos, ar-khee- TREE-klee-nos) of the marriage banquet was the “superintendent” whose duty it was to arrange the tables and food. He functioned in the capacity of a headwaiter. The text does not say how or when the water became wine. The servants drew the liquid from the pots and gave it to the governor of the feast. When the governor of the feast tasted the water, it had become wine!
It is probably best at this point to stop and explore the controversy of the wine. The question is whether the wine Jesus supplied for the marriage feast was fermented or unfermented. In Greek, the word for “wine,” oinos (ΟΥ-νος), is a generic term that can be used for wine or unfermented juice. The context of a given passage determines which meaning the author intends. Many believe that the wine that was served earlier and the wine Jesus provided were both fermented.

The governor of the feast described the wine provided by Jesus as “good.” It is significant that John uses the Greek word kalos (καλ-ΟΣ) instead of agathos (αγ-αθ-ΟΣ). The latter is a qualitative term that refers to the taste of the wine. The former is a more moralistic term and refers to both the quality and character of a person or object. The phrase “when men have well drunk” does seem to imply that the celebrants were drunk. The Greek word methusko (μεθ-ΟΟΣ-κο) means “to make or become drunk.” The proponents of the “intoxicating drinks” view say this is proof positive that oinos cannot be taken as referring to juice.

In either case, Jewish religious law insisted that all wine be mixed with at least three parts water or it would not be blessed and would defile the drinker. It is also vital to recognize that supplying wine at the wedding is not an endorsement of drunkenness but a miraculous sign that resolved a major crisis at a wedding feast with many guests.

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

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.

The primary purpose of the miracle was to reveal Christ’s glory in such a way as to cause people to believe in Christ as God’s Holy and righteous Son. In verse 11, the primary meaning of “glory” (Gk. doxa, DOX-α) is “favorable thought or opinion,” and thus in a secondary sense refers to reputation, praise, honor, and splendor. However, because these qualities are dependent on human opinion, this is not the glory we render to God or Christ. God’s glory embraces all that is excellent within the divine nature and finds its perfect revelation in and through Jesus Christ (John 1:14; Hebrews 1:3).

The belief prompted by the sign was not the complete faith Jesus desired, but it was a step above the disciples’ initial belief, which was only conjectural. The disciples had seen the miracle with their own eyes and were able to draw their own conclusions that a superior being was in their midst. Jesus proved all His claims through His acts of mercy and power.

Sources: