

# JESUS AND THE WEDDING AT CANA

*Joy - Lost and Found...*  
SCRIPTURE TEXT: JOHN 2:1-11 (ESV)



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October 23, 2005

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## *Joy - Lost and Found:*

This message comes on the eve of Reformation Sunday—which remembers how the church was rescued from destructive heresies. And we observe the Reformation not just as an historical exercise of remembering what transpired, but also as a means of warning our own hearts against the abuse of the Word of God and misuse of the Cross of Christ we are just as prone to apply for ourselves as the church did then. After all, the heart of what the Reformation reacted against was the idea that we must, somehow, earn God's favor through our actions—that man is saved

by grace **PLUS** works—not grace **ALONE** through faith in Christ which Scripture teaches. We remain prone to this error.

Next week we are going to look at the life of one of the key figures of the Reformation, Martin Luther. But I wanted to devote this week to the study of a passage of Scripture which, I believe, helps us see the tragedy of what is lost when we trust in anything other than Christ for our salvation—and the **JOY** of what is found when our hope is in Him! It is the story of the first “sign” Jesus performed during His earthly ministry. He had only just begun calling disciples—and at the time of this text, He has gathered five—Andrew, John, Peter, Philip and Nathanael. Together they went to a wedding. What follows foreshadows the unspeakable joy of any who would be found in Him.

## *John 2:1-11*

<sup>1</sup>On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. <sup>2</sup>Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. <sup>3</sup>When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” <sup>4</sup>And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” <sup>5</sup>His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

<sup>6</sup>Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup>Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup>And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. <sup>9</sup>When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom <sup>10</sup>and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” <sup>11</sup>This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

## *A Ladder, a Ledge and a Window:*

If you ever have the opportunity to visit Jerusalem, and you find yourself at the church of the Holy Sepulcher—one of the possible sites for Jesus’ tomb—and if you look up and to your right before entering, you’ll see an old wooden ladder on a ledge resting against a window. (See picture on left.) Its story requires that you must know something about the church itself.

For centuries six Christian groups have each claimed ownership of the church. This dispute led the Ottoman Sultan, in 1757, to issue an edict known as the “*Status Quo*,” which defined which parts of the church belonged to which group. So, for example, one group had possession of the floors while another had possession of the domed roof (which led the Israeli government to put up trusses when the integrity of the domed roof began to fail because the owners of the floor would not permit the owners of the roof to use their floor to erect scaffolding to repair the roof.)

The ladder set the precedent for this. In the early 1800’s, Armenian monks, who held the rights to the outer windows, set out to repair them. But this caused a problem one historian described this way: “At some point the Armenians put out the ladder for the purpose of doing work on the windows, [and] the Greeks protested that the ladder was resting on their portion. The Armenians refused to remove the ladder - hence the frozen reality.”

Over the years, the heated dispute has cooled, but the ladder remains in place—visible in photos dating back as far as 1857! The ladder stands as a testimony to the “*Status Quo*”—no one dares remove it. (Monks make replacements when the existing ones rot.) It’s ironic, considering what that church memorializes. We can go so far from the hope of Jesus as our Immanuel—“*God with us*”—when our practice goes from heartfelt faith and joy in the risen Christ to keeping the *Status Quo*. Monks struggle to cling to where He once was, quibbling over a ladder, yet we seem to lose the glorious message of where He now is because the tomb is empty—in the hearts of His people!

We do some strange things in the name of religion. We all have ladders—practices we impose on ourselves or that have been imposed on us. (We don’t just throw away, but burn our “secular” music. In hard times, we search for the sin God is disciplining us for until we name a dozen. With disappointment, we analyze all the reasons we didn’t deserve God’s blessing—we used a credit card last month... we skipped our quite times... we forgot to send a relative a birthday gift, and then got angry because they seem to expect one.)

Somewhere between the emptying of Jesus’ tomb and the filling of modern churches we have propped a lot of ladders against a lot of windows—ladders which have stood for generations. But over time, as many of us can verify, we forget why they’re there, even though we labor to maintain them. And our “religion” becomes devoid of any true joy in Christ, and instead becomes the means by which we keep an “angry God” at bay and other Christians from suspecting we need a Savior. It is an age-old problem—forgetting what Jesus had come to do and why He had come to do it. The good news in our text is that Jesus did not forget. Jesus knew what He had come to do. He knew why He had come to do it. And He knew how we would be inclined to receive it. So He gave us this reminder, this sign.

## The First of Jesus' Signs:

John says this miracle was the first of Jesus' "signs"—and that it manifested His glory. John uses the word "sign" to describe an action which points to a greater truth. You will search in vain in the Gospel for a "random" miracle from Jesus. What needs to resonate in our hearts is that Jesus' miracles testified that He had a divine appointment to come in the flesh so that He could offer up that flesh as the sacrifice for our sins. He wasted no miracles on anything that did not bear witness to His mission. What are the details of this sign, and what do they proclaim?

### First: the Occasion — A Wedding

The happy couple must have been family friends of Jesus, since Mary seems to have authority to instruct the servants. Weddings then lasted several days, and like today they were occasions for gladness because they celebrated the forming of a covenantal bond. And wine was essential because it represented (*and no doubt facilitated*) gladness for the party. Wine was as essential for weddings then as, say, the wedding cake is today. What were they glad about? The hope of the lasting and joyful union between the groom and his beloved.

Centuries before this wedding, on a beautiful starlit night, such a union was conceived as Abraham and his family journeyed toward the Promised Land. God told Abraham to look up into that glorious sky, saying, "Count the stars, so shall your offspring be. I will be your God and you will be my people forever." I wonder what kind of gladness Abraham felt that night, but whatever joy overtook him, over time, was lost on His descendants, based on the intense legalism we see in the New Testament. Still, God's purpose was not to drive us from Him, but to bind us to Him!

Does the thought of being wedded to God bring joy to your heart? We are so easily drawn away from delighting in the Gospel to instead laboring under the burden of trying to get life right that we all but lose the joy of being accepted by God and begin to regard Him as the "old ball and chain." We begin to wonder if being in the hands of God is actually a good thing, considering what He might do to us if we step out of line.

A friend of mine who is facing a significant struggle expressed this to me saying that, at times, it can be more frightening to believe God is in complete control than to doubt it, because if God is not in control, anything could happen. But if He is, exactly what He decrees *WILL* happen—to the letter, and there's not a thing we can do about it—and that can be the hardest thing to accept. How do we respond to that? We toe the line. We make lists of rules and strive to keep them. There is no gladness in this. Jesus had come to bring unspeakable gladness to His church—to be a bridegroom to an unfaithful people. So He performs His first sign at a wedding.

### Second: the Container — Cleansing Jars

My brother was an altar boy when we were kids. And one of his jobs was to hold a gold plated disc attached to a wooden handle under people's chins as the priest placed the communion wafer on their tongues. The eight inch disc served to catch the wafer if it fell. He was told that during communion the wafer would be consecrated as the actual body of Christ, and that he must not allow it to be disgraced by falling to the ground.

As the younger brother, I would occasionally go with Ryan to the room where he changed into his vestments, and I would see that golden disc and fear would come over me. What if my brother let Jesus fall to the ground? What would happen to him? That little accoutrement that was used during the part of the service which assured us that we had a Savior left me with the haunting fear that we had better not disgrace the Savior.

Early Jews had many religious customs which led them to fear what God might do if they weren't careful. Along with dietary laws and clothing ordinances, they also practiced ceremonial purification rites. In our text, Jesus takes six 30 gallon jars which held water for ceremonial cleansing, and uses them to hold the wine. These jars held a solemn purpose, and I have to imagine, brought little joy to the people. My guess is that they reminded people that, before a Holy God, they were blemished.

Beloved, what we need to know is that those ceremonial jars had a rightful place among God's people. It is true that every man has the stain of sin and must be washed—indeed purified—to enter the counsel of a Holy God! Those who tried to cleanse themselves through law-keeping never knew purity. They were never done washing. They were always unclean.

But what is the promise for those whose faith is in Christ? It is that we're His Bride—His Radiant Bride: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her... so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." (Eph 5:25-27) Jesus' cleansing work on our behalf renders jars for ceremonial cleansing obsolete. But rather than destroy them, He gives those jars a new purpose—to hold the sweet wine of gladness that belongs at the wedding between the Bride—the Church—and the Bridegroom—Jesus! By putting the wine in those jars, Jesus gave us a rich sign of what He had come to do and by it He promised gladness—joy.

### Third: the Quantity — Abundance

If you are a numbers person, perhaps you have done the math on just how much wine Jesus made. Six jars holding between 20 to 30 gallons each filled, to the rim! Jesus made between 120 and 180 gallons of wine, or if you prefer at 5 bottles per, around 800 bottles! I have never been to a wedding that went through 800 bottles of wine. Jesus did not just make wine—He made an abundance of wine—and good wine at that! What is the greater truth this sign points to? It isn't just that He is going to offer up His life for sinners, but that in so doing, He is going to bring abundant joy to His people—Joy that comes from being joined to Him as His beloved— perfectly and eternally.

I have to imagine that there were times in the history of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher when the focus of the discussions centered on that ladder. Monks arguing their points... forgetting that the more important issue was why, if the tomb was empty, could they not be united in their joy? Inside the church is a monument to the empty tomb—the promise that the church has been washed whiter than snow. Outside the church is a monument to our unwillingness to delight in that—to the joy that has been lost. Beloved, today our Lord gives us a sign. Our union with Him is not as a slave to a master, but as a bride to a groom. When we have been washed by the Blood of Christ, we find that the rites of purification we were slaves to have been replaced with the sweet, abundant wine of gladness. May the joy of the empty tomb intoxicate you as the fear of failing God falls away. May you find joy in your salvation!