

A Closer Look

Wayne Waibel – 01/19/2025

By today's standards, the act of turning water into wine seems less miraculous and more magical in nature, making it difficult for us in this age, to appreciate the significance of the act in the time of Jesus.

The trouble we have stems from our unbelief. Most folks want a reasonable explanation or at least understanding for unexplained phenomena. It's like a requirement for living in the Post-modern era. Since we reserve our freedom to believe, we very truly are not of this world.

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There are a number of disorienting aspects to today's passage from John. Perhaps the most glaring would be Christ's attitude towards His mother. "Woman, what does your concern have to do with me?" is inconsistent with a Son honoring His mother. It's actually a little rude.

But we need to parse this out in the context of the time in which we're dealing. What at first blush may appear as a harshness of a son toward his mother is really just John's way of separating the relationship - from the situation.

Jesus is acutely mindful of His mission and His ministry, so He needs to be guided by His inner voice, and that voice is telling Him that the hour has not yet come.

His mother on the other hand is driven by her inner voice as well, and in keeping with her wonderful tendency of prodding divine generosity, she instructs the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them to do.

Another sticking point is encountered when you consider the abundance of wine. Twenty to thirty gallons in each of six water pots filled to the brim with water – then turned to fine wine? Really? That’s a hundred and eighty gallons of wine!

But held in another light, it can amply demonstrate the generosity of God and His recurring theme of abundance - His desire for His people to live a joyous life abundantly. Weddings are universally celebrated to the fullest extent. Why would this particular wedding be any different?

The mother of Jesus (John never actually refers to her by name) notices they have no more wine before Jesus does and mentions it expecting her Son to do something about it. Jesus responds by reminding His mother of His divine purpose. She supersedes that purpose, choosing instead to acknowledge the immediate need of the bridegroom who will be humiliated for having run out of wine, to say nothing of the guests who are in the midst of a great celebration. Jesus relents - and begins His ministry.

We have problems with the Cana wedding story as a rule on multiple levels because we can't get away from the appearance of overindulgence involved in the story. This is precisely why you have to take a closer look at things.

Weddings are pretty much accidents waiting to happen. Ceremonies are sort of rehearsed and even if they don't always proceed according to the script – they are enlightening and memorable anyway. But the receptions always offer plenty of fodder for lighthearted banter in years to come.

As the bass player in a wedding band for twelve years, I am able to speak with authority on the matter and can support the statement without hesitation that weddings are indeed accidents waiting to happen.

So why would John choose a wedding in Cana - mentioned only in this gospel, by the way – to be the backdrop for the first sign of Christ's divinity and power and launch His ministry?

Because it serves to magnify the glory of God. It presents in an atmosphere of people celebrating, and that above all is what God wants for His people. An abundance of joy and celebration. Also – the disciples are with Jesus on this trip, and they witness the whole thing. All doubt was removed for them.

The sign at Cana tells us that Jesus served a God who puts joy into life, who thinks it is worth a miracle to keep the party going as we celebrate people. God does not want our religion to be too holy to be happy in.

The typical wedding in biblical times lasted seven days. Day number three was where the celebration began, and vows were exchanged. The bride and the groom did not go on a honeymoon. They spent time together with their family and friends for a weeklong party.

And it was into this scene that Jesus reluctantly began His public life. His mother knew precisely what she was doing when she prodded Him into performing His first miracle.

Why not during the most celebrated time in the life of a community? Why not when spirits are high, and worries are put on hold? Why not help people to celebrate people?

The good news is that God leaves room for a change of heart, a flexible timetable. Maybe everything will transpire in the fullness of time, but that fullness is not necessarily carved in stone.

The wedding guests were unaware they were about to run out of wine, which may have been catastrophic. But the servants knew what happened, and who was responsible for the disaster being averted. And the disciples from that moment on – believed in Him. All things considered – not a bad day for Jesus – who by the way – maintained that the hour had not yet come until the night of His betrayal.

Sometimes the things we do that fall outside our predicted or planned behaviors have a way of accomplishing far greater results than our efforts would otherwise produce. This holds true even for Jesus.

He took the old ways and energized them into a new covenant that included all people, not just Jews. And it served notice to the masses that their God – our God – is divinely interested in helping His people celebrate with boundless joy and merriment. Happy occasions are God-centered. All it takes – is a closer look. Amen.