Sunday, January 3, 2021

Lesson: John 2:1-11; Time of Action: 26 A.D.; Place of Action: Cana

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

I. INTRODUCTION. If you’ve ever been to a wedding or at least heard about one, you know that they never go according to plan. Someone is running late, the food is not prepared, somehow the appropriate music is forgotten, or any number of things happen. In this week’s lesson, we see that even in Jesus’ day something didn’t go as planned at a wedding in Cana—they ran out of wine. Having enough wine was a big deal and running out was similar to a wedding in our day running out of food. To us, this problem seems easily fixed. Simply go to the store and buy some more wine. But during the first century, this was not the way people lived. Getting more wine was not that simple.

II. THE LESSON BACKGROUND. This week’s lesson takes place after Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist (see Luke 3:21-22) and when He began His ministry at the age of thirty years old (see Luke 3:23). Following His baptism, Jesus
started choosing His first disciples beginning with Andrew and John, the author of this Gospel (see John 1:40), Simon Peter (see John 1:41-42), and then Philip and Nathanael (see John 1:45-46). At this point, our lesson references “the third day” seemingly to indicate that the wedding in Cana took place two days after Jesus called His first disciples. Our lesson comes from chapter 2.

III. A COMMON ACTIVITY (John 2:1-5)

A. The wedding (John 2:1-2).

1. (vs. 1). Our first verse says “And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there.” As noted in the Lesson Background, “the third day” most likely refers to two days after Jesus called His first disciples. John writes “And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee.” The region of “Galilee” was in the northern part of Palestine and was where the majority of Jesus’ early ministry took place. “Cana” was a city in “Galilee” and was also the home of Nathanael, one of Jesus’ first disciples (see John 21:2). The location of “Cana” is not known today, but it is believed to have been north of Nazareth between Nazareth and Capernaum. “Cana” is not mentioned by any of the other writers of the New Testament, but John referred to it as the location of a wedding and Mary, “the mother of Jesus was there.” Notice that the “mother of Jesus” is said to be “there,” and not “called,” or invited as Jesus and His
disciples were, which may indicate that she “was there” either as a very close friend or a relative. She may have even been a participant in planning the wedding.

2. (vs. 2). This verse says “And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.” In addition to Mary, Jesus’ mother being at “the marriage” or wedding ceremony, we are told that “both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.” This means that “Jesus” and “His disciples” were invited to the wedding. “Jesus” was not yet well known for He had not yet performed any miracles. So it was unlikely that He was invited because the people knew who He was. He was probably invited because of His relationship to Mary. At the time of the wedding, “Jesus” hadn’t called all of “His disciples” yet, so there were probably only five of them in attendance (see John 1:35-49). “Jesus” was not a private Person. He accepted invitations to social events, even though His enemies often used those situations to accuse Him (see Matthew 9:10-11; Luke 15:1-2). Our LORD took part in the normal experiences of life and sanctified them by His presence. Even today, it is a truly wise couple who invites Jesus to their wedding!

B. The wine (John 2:3). This verse says “And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.” In Jesus’ day, wedding celebrations often lasted for a week, so it took careful planning to prepare for them. Traditionally, marriages were usually celebrated with festivals (see Genesis 29:20-22; Judges 14:10), as an expression of joy, friendly respect, and the confirming of love. However, on this occasion a social disaster was about
to take place during the reception. When the guests “wanted” more “wine,” Mary said to “Jesus...they have no wine.” Running out of “wine” would not merely be embarrassing; it would also be the height of disgrace and humiliation, as well as an insult to the invited guests. In addition, the unwritten laws of hospitality would be violated and the hosts would appear unprepared and thoughtless. It was much more of a disaster than it would be in our culture. But that is exactly what happened on this occasion. They ran out of “wine” and it was Mary who came to “Jesus” and informed Him about it. She didn’t tell Him what to do; she simply told Him what the problem was. She said “They have no wine.” We may wonder if Mary was the hostess for the wedding reception. If she was, this would naturally be a great concern for her. The fact that she was mentioned as being present before “Jesus” is mentioned (see verse 1) indicates that this could have been the situation. Note: Wine was the normal drink of the people in that day, and we must not use this miracle as an argument for the use of alcoholic beverages today. When Mary brought the problem that they had run out of wine to “Jesus,” the implication is that she believes He is able to do something about it, but whether He will do something, and what He will do, her statement leaves open for Him to decide. Since the Bible gives us no reason, we can only speculate as to why Mary said to Jesus, “They have no wine.” Some scholars think that she only wanted Him to make some decent excuse to the guests to save the bridegroom’s reputation. But if we are going to speculate as to why Mary turned to “Jesus” with this problem, it is quite possible, that she
did expect some kind of miracle. Even though the Bible does not say so, it is also possible that sometimes “Jesus” had miraculously helped His mother and father in their poverty. Certainly, Mary knew who her son was, even though she didn’t share this wonderful truth with anyone (see Luke 2:19). She would have had to be very close to either the bride or the bridegroom to show such personal concern for the success of the festivities, or even to know that there was “no more wine.” Mary may have been helping with the preparation and serving of the meal.

C. The whimsical (John 2:4-5).

1. (vs. 4). This verse says “Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.” When “Jesus” replied to His mother, He called her “Woman” which seems to be a bit abrupt and even harsh, but that was not the case here. The term “Woman” was a polite and respectful way of addressing women in that culture (see John 20:13), and is the way “Jesus” normally addressed women (see John 4:21; 8:10; 19:26) so He was not being disrespectful. “Jesus” then said to His mother “what have I to do with thee?” In other words, “Why are you getting Me involved in this matter?” He was making it clear to His mother that He was no longer under her supervision, but that from that point on, He would only be doing what His Heavenly Father wanted Him to do. Some years earlier, when “Jesus” was twelve, He indicated this same thing to His parents (see Luke 2:40-49). “Jesus”’ reply “what have I to do with thee?” indicates that Mary’s special role as
“Jesus’” mother didn’t give her the authority to intervene in His messianic mission. This is a strong argument for opposing praying to Mary as some Christians do. In the last part of this verse, “Jesus” went on to say to His mother, “mine hour is not yet come.” Usually when “Jesus” spoke of “mine (His) hour” He was referring to the time of His suffering and death (see John 12:27). But here, it appears that “Jesus” is referring to His earthly ministry, asserting that He was guided by His heavenly Father and not by the agenda of any human beings, even His mother. “Jesus’” entire earthly ministry was on a heavenly timetable, which the Father laid out for Him (see John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1).

2. (vs. 5). This verse says “His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.” In the previous verse, Jesus replied to His mother’s request implying that He help the situation, by saying “mine hour is not yet come.” But like many of Jesus’ words had hidden meanings and were not understood by others, Mary didn’t understand what Jesus meant. After hearing Jesus’ puzzling statement “mine hour is not yet come,” which undoubtedly went over her head, and even sounded like “no,” and since she didn’t know what Jesus’ “hour” meant, she continued to expect Him to do something about the problem. But she does it in a way that leaves it totally up to Jesus to respond the way He wants to when she simply told “the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.” In other words, “Do whatever He tells you to do.” Even if “the servants” thought what Jesus was telling them to do was improper or senseless, they were still to do it without
disputing or asking any questions. They were “servants!” They were to “just do it!” That should be every believer’s response to whatever God’s Word tells us to do. We too, are His “servants” and should also “just do it.”

IV. AN UNCOMMON EVENT (John 2:6-10)

A. Putting water into pots (John 2:6-7).

1. (vs. 6). This verse says “And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.” At this point, John brings our attention to “six stone waterpots” that were nearby and were normally used “after the manner of the purifying of the Jews.” Mark 7:3-4 explains what is meant by the phrase “after the manner of the purifying of the Jews.” It says “For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.” These were various ritualistic washings that were important to the Jewish people and were ceremoniously followed in obedience to their customs. So “waterpots” were used by the Jews for legal purification of themselves from ceremonial pollutions and uncleanness as prescribed by the law of God and also by the tradition of the elders. Simply put, when Jews came into contact with anything that was
considered to be unclean according to the Law of Moses, they had to clean and purify themselves before God and men by washing (see Numbers 19:11-19). “Waterpots” were used for those purification or cleansing rituals. Water from a jar would be poured over the person’s hands in a symbolic gesture of washing away any impurities they had picked up in their daily contacts. By the time of Jesus, many oral laws had been added to the written Mosaic laws of purification, making them a burden to the people. But Jesus denounced those rituals, teaching that defilement and uncleanness came from within, or the inner motives of the mind and heart (see Mark 7:14-23). John also described these “waterpots” or jars as “containing two or three firkins apiece.” A “firkin” was equal to about 10 gallons in our measurements. So each “waterpot” contained 20 or thirty gallons. If all the water was turned into wine and not just that which was drawn out, there would be 120 to 180 gallons of new wine available for the guests.

2. (vs. 7). This verse says “Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.” After Mary instructed the servants to do whatever Jesus told them to do (see verse 5), “Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water.” The servants did what good servants do, they obeyed without questions. John wrote, “And they filled them up to the brim.” Since “the waterpots” were “filled up to the brim,” there was no way even small amounts of wine could be added to the water to take away from the miracle. At the time of this miracle, “the waterpots” contained only water.
B. Serving the master of ceremonies (John 2:8). This verse says, “And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.” After the waterpots had been filled to the brim, Jesus told the servants to “Draw out now” or take some of the water out. Jesus continued to instruct them to take the water they had drawn out “and bear unto the governor of the feast.” As they had done throughout this episode, the servants obeyed “and they bare it” meaning that they took some to “the governor of the feast” or the person who was in charge of the banquet. Today, we might call that person the master of ceremonies. We are not told the exact moment when the water became wine. What we do know is that the servants did exactly as Mary had told them and obeyed what Jesus told them to do. The “governor” or the master of ceremonies would have been the person in charge of the seating and serving; so if a shortage of wine appeared, it would have been his responsibility to inform the wedding couple, their parents, and the guests. If the servants suddenly served the master of ceremonies water in front of all the guests, he would be terribly embarrassed and the servants would been humiliated. So their action required some faith. Our text does not describe the moment of truth when the “governor of the feast” took the offered beverage and drank it. But we can imagine the surprise he experienced and the look on his face when he tasted what was now fresh wine.

C. Asking for an explanation (John 2:9-10).

1. (vs. 9). This verse says “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...” After “the governor of the feast” (see verse 8), here referred to as “the ruler of the feast,” received some of the beverage from “the servants,” there was no doubt that it was “wine.” The “governor” knew this when he drank it, but we are told that he “knew not whence it was.” In other words, he didn’t know where it came from. But we are also told that “the servants which drew the water knew” what had happened. The waterpots were undoubtedly located away from the banquet area, so when Jesus performed this miracle, only He, His disciples, Mary and “the servants” were aware of this miracle. After “the governor of the feast” tasted the new “wine,” he “called (for) the bridegroom.” Note: Many historians report that Jews often diluted their “wine” with water, usually to the proportion of three parts water to one part “wine.” While the Bible does not command abstaining completely from drinking, it certainly warns against drunkenness (see Proverbs 20:1; Romans 14:21; Ephesians 5:18; I Timothy 3:1-2, 8; Titus 1:7; 2:3; I Peter 4:3). In addition, this miracle gives us a practical lesson in service for God. Since obedience is such an integral part of any miracle, I believe that it’s safe to assume that the water turned into wine because the servants cooperated with Jesus and obeyed His commands. John records many miracles in his Gospel that involve people cooperating with and obeying God, as with the feeding of the five thousand (see John 6:1-13), the healing of the man who was born blind (see
John 9:1-7), and the raising of Lazarus from the dead (see John 11:33-44). The point is that if we are simply passing out bread, or washing away mud from our eyes, or rolling away a stone, we are assisting God in performing a miracle. It is also significant to note that “the servants” knew where this special “wine” came from, for we are told that “the servants which drew the water knew.” A similar thing happened when Jesus performed His second miracle (see John 4:54). When He healed the nobleman’s son from a distance (see John 4:46-54), “the servants” were the ones present and reported the miracle to the nobleman. As believers, we are not only Jesus’ “servants,” we are also His friends. And since we are His friends, like “the servants” in our lesson, He lets us know what He is doing (see John 15:15).

2. (vs. 10). This verse says “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.” Having drank some of the new “wine,” and called for the bridegroom (see verse 9), the governor of the feast said to 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 logic that the governor of the feast presented to the bridegroom made very good sense. As he explained, most hosts served the best “wine” at the beginning of a feast or celebration. Then, when the people have enjoyed the “good wine” and drank it all, the cheaper “wine” was served. It appears that the governor of the feast was surprised that the
groom had reversed this normal practice by serving the “good wine” last. And of course, the bridegroom must have been equally surprised since he had no idea where the last “wine” had come from. The “wine” which was miraculously provided was the best and richest kind, as the governor of the feast declared. It should not surprise any of us that the water that Jesus turned into “wine” was the best “wine” because all of His miracles were always the best ones.

V. A SPECIAL MANIFESTATION (John 2:11). Our final verse says “This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.” Here the Apostle John declares that the turning of water into wine was the “beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee.” Of course, many “miracles” had taken place concerning “Jesus” at His birth and baptism. But He Himself was the greatest of all “miracles.” However, this “miracle” performed at the wedding “in Cana of Galilee” was the first one that was performed by “Jesus.” When He turned water into wine, it was the first of several times when He would do something miraculous that proved He was more than a mere human being. For those who witnessed this first “miracle,” this was a sign. This “miracle” like many others, revealed something about “Jesus;” it “manifested forth his glory.” In other words, it was proof that He was the Son of God, and “His glory” was that of the only-begotten of the Father. The first result of this “miracle” was belief. John wrote “and his disciples believed on him.” Up to this point, those whom
“Jesus” had called (see John 1:35-51) had seen no “miracles,” but they still followed Him; and now they saw this miracle, and their faith was strengthened by it. Even true faith is weak at first. The strongest men were once babes, and so were the strongest Christians. The disciples’ belief in “Jesus” would be tested in days to come, and there would be much more spiritual growth, but at this moment they needed to understand that they were indeed following the Son of God. This first “miracle” performed by “Jesus” was one of seven that John presents in his Gospel. The second was the healing of a nobleman’s son (see John 4:46-54); the third was the healing at the pool of Bethesda (see John 5:1-15); the fourth was the feeding of the five thousand (see John 6:1-15); the fifth was “Jesus” walking on water (see John 6:16-21); the sixth was the healing of the man who was born blind (see John 9:1-41), and the seventh “miracle” of “Jesus” that John records was the raising of Lazarus from the dead (see John 11:1-44). John called the “miracles” that “Jesus” performed signs because they were proof that He was the Christ, the Son of God. John declared that besides the “miracles” or signs that he presents in this Gospel, “Jesus” had done many other signs which are not written in this book (see John 20:30). But the seven “miracles” that John did include he said “are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (see John 20:31).

VI. Conclusion. Our response in any difficult situation must
be to call on Jesus Christ and believe in Him. We are not alone in our deep and troubling situations. The LORD is always at work to help us, and we can trust Him to bring life into the impossible situations we may face. Our response simply must be to believe Him.

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