

The Wedding Party

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We're in the 4th week of our Sermon Series, "Encounters with Jesus." We've been following Tim Keller's Book, Encounters with Jesus. If you haven't picked up a copy, I highly recommend it.

In this chapter we come to the story of Jesus, his mother, Mary, and some of his disciples in Cana, in Galilee. Galilee is found between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. This is the area where Jesus' ministry really takes off. Just before this text, in chapter 1, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. If you're new to the Gospel of John, this is NOT the John that is referred to as, John, the beloved disciple, or the John for whom the book is named. He comes later. After being baptized, some of John's disciples become Jesus' disciples. One of them is Andrew, who brings Jesus to his brother, Peter. On their way to Galilee they "pick up" Philip and Nathanael.

So here they are in Cana at a wedding that they've been invited to. Who's wedding it is? How did they get invited? Who knows. All we know is Jesus is there with his mother, and some of his disciples.

Now, would you agree with me, when I say that in our society, weddings are a pretty big deal? Now that I think about it, I probably should have asked Matt and Tracy to come and give today's message, and just have them talk about planning their wedding.

According to Parade Magazine, the average total cost per wedding in the US (excluding the honeymoon) is: \$29,858. In the Greater Bay Area, bump that up to \$33,836 and in New York, the average wedding runs American families a whopping: \$86,916.

If we just focus on this area, the Greater Bay Area, once again:

Average total wedding cost: \$33,836
Average amount brides spent on their dresses: \$1,355
Average number of wedding guests: 120

Kacey and I were talking with some new friends years ago about our weddings. We had a pretty small wedding, so they were telling us all about the huge extravagant wedding they had. He summarized the experience as spending a

small fortune so your friends could have an excuse to have the party of a life time. Obviously he said this to me when his wife wasn't in earshot.

But using the averages we just talked about, we spend \$33,836 and invite 120 people: that's \$281.96 per "friend." I'm using my air quotes here when I say "friend." If you've had to plan a wedding, you know why I say, "friend."

"You're inviting HIM? You haven't seen him since you were 6."

"Yeah, but he's my 2nd cousin's neighbor, and he'd be offended if we didn't invite him."

But clearly this is just one man's perspective on the event. **[PAUSE]**

Oh, sorry, I was waiting for that lone "amen" to come from the back row. Anyway, this is just one man's perspective on a wedding. If you were to ask the lovely bride, she'd say you can't put a price tag on the biggest day of her life. Right?

But that's just it; a wedding in our culture is a HUGE deal. It takes months or sometimes years to plan. And all that planning for one of the biggest DAYS in a couple's lives. Yes, day...one day.

Now let's get back to the text... Jesus was at a wedding celebration. In the 1st century in a community like Cana, communities built their pride and well being on the stability of their families. More families meant more commerce, more prosperity and even more military type protection.

A wedding was a huge deal. A wedding meant a new family was forming. A wedding meant growth and prosperity. A wedding would not simply be a bride and groom's "Big Day." Wedding celebrations at that time would last up to a week. And the family was responsible for the feast to continue throughout the week.

Also, in the 1st century, society was built on honor and shame. Honor was more important than riches. Status in the community was built more on a person's reputation than their portfolio.

In that culture, a lot was riding on a wedding. The entire community would be there...for a week. If you were to embarrass your friends and family, they'd remember it...forever.

All this to say, Kacey and I would not have started out so well in 1st century Cana.

We were married on July 16, 2005 in Brentwood, CA. (I had to look at my notes to make sure I got the date right.)

We planned our wedding ourselves, having really never been to a wedding. We planned it in a matter of a few days, or weeks, but it wasn't long. We were broke, and didn't want all the pomp and circumstance, so we to do something small, with just our closest friends and family. Kacey's mom wanted us to get married in their church and invite everyone they knew. I still insisted on something small, so naturally, we had the church wedding.

Since we were still broke, we wanted to keep it as small as possible, so we had an afternoon wedding so we'd only have to serve hors d'oeuvres. The problem is, it was an afternoon wedding in Brentwood, in July. It had to be 110 degrees that day.

(To be honest, every time I tell this story it get's hotter and hotter. I think the first time I told it, it was 105).

But seriously, it was well over 100. No problem in the small church with the AC cranked. But as we got to the reception at the Brentwood Vet's Hall Building, Kacey in her grandmother's thick silk wedding dress, handmade in 1942, we were told the AC wasn't working that day.

I don't remember much from that day. But I remember being really hot. I remember rushing through all of the necessary events like 1st dance, toast, cake, etc, so everyone didn't feel obligated to stay much longer and could go home and cool off.

I do remember thinking that one of Kacey's uncles must really like cake, because he was standing next to our beautiful 3 tier cake the whole time, and he kept asking if it was time to cut the cake yet.

I found out later, it was because the cake had melted, and he was propping it up so it wouldn't fall over.

But of all the things that went wrong at our wedding, and no matter how hot it was...we did NOT run out of wine. And this was coming from a couple that didn't drink. For our toast, I had Martinelli's cider, and Kacey had water. But we made sure we had enough wine...and special punch.

But in our society, all this just makes for a good story. At least for Kacey and I.

There are things we'd love to do over, but ultimately what came out of that sweltering day has been almost 9 years of marriage that gets better each day, and one heck of a story that we love laugh about.

That would not have been the case for this poor couple John chapter 2. Everyone was expecting a week long party, and they've run out of wine. It's not like they would have had many other beverage choices either. In that day, people would have had 2 choices: water, or wine. And without all the filtration and water treatments we have today, wine was a much "safer" choice.

Years after that wedding, people would still refer to them as "the couple that ran out of wine at their wedding."

This alerted Jesus' mother, and she went to her son. "They have no more wine."

Jesus responds in verse 4 with, "Woman, why do you involve me?" "My hour has not yet come."

A couple of things here. The translation can seem a little harsh here. "woman." The older version of the NIV translates the Greek with, "Dear woman." To give

it that endearing feel in English. Most translations don't include the "dear woman" and they just say, "woman."

The understanding of how Jesus is addressing his mother is right in between these two. He is not being quite so soft and endearing as, "Dear woman." But it was not as cold as it sounds in English. The Greek word used here for woman is the same as in John chapter 4 when Jesus is speaking to the Samaritan woman, and in chapter 19 when he speaks to Mary from the cross. It was a common, and polite way to address someone in that day, however, Jesus is distancing himself from his mom. He doesn't say, "Mom..." He says "woman" the same way he would address a stranger. Polite, but distant. I picture this being similar to how we might use ma'am.

We know what happens next: Jesus turns water into wine and saves the party. But let's look even closer. Verse 6 and 7 gives a real look into the sign itself.

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

It was the custom at the time, to ceremonially wash your hands before a meal. And just as it says in this text, there would have been huge jars nearby for this to happen. 6 huge jars, holding 20-30 gallons each, filled to the brim.

I did a little math and using the lower estimate of 20 gallons per jar, this would have been at least 120 gallons of wine. This would have filled over 600 modern day wine bottles, and would be over 3000 servings.

Jesus knows how to save a party! The host of the party even says so: verse 10:

“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.”

Jesus not only turned water to wine... he made choice wine, the best wine, and at least 3000 servings of it at that.

I know we've heard this story a thousand times. But now I have to be totally honest. I have some problems with this passage. Not the text itself. This passage is Holy, and just as the God the creator intended it. But I have a problem with how this passage is often used. I have a pet-peeve when it comes to interpreting and quoting scripture, especially the miracles of Jesus.

In verse 11, John says this was,

“the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”

In John, all of Jesus' miracles are referred to as signs. Because that's what the miracles of Jesus are. They are signs of Jesus' glory. They are signs that Jesus is not just another prophet. He is the true Son of God!

I'll use this miracle as an example of my problem with the miss-interpretation of miracles. We've heard this story a thousand times, but when have you heard it most? I'm just being totally honest here... I think I've heard this passage most when I've been in a situation with a fellow Christian brother or sister, and usually they've had a few too many adult beverages, and they say something along the lines of, "hey, it's okay because it's in the Bible...Jesus turned water into wine, right?"

I'm not here today to talk about what the Bible says about drinking alcohol. But what I am telling you, is that if you read this passage, and all you get out of it is, Jesus says it's okay to drink alcohol we're missing the point.

Let's look at this first miracle, this "sign" of Jesus even closer.

Before we look at how he turns the water to wine, he says something to Mary that we just can't gloss over...

After he says,

"Woman, why do you involve me?"

He says:

“My hour has not yet come.”

On the surface, this seems like a simple answer to Mary’s request. Help them, they’re out of wine...I’m not ready to be awesome yet. But what is this “hour” Jesus is speaking of? John mentions it several times in his gospel:

In John 7:30

³⁰ At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because **his hour** had not yet come.

John 8:20

²⁰ He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, **because his hour** had not yet come.

Then in John 12:23, as Jesus predicts his death:

²³ Jesus replied, “**The hour has come** for the Son of Man to be glorified.

John 13:1

Jesus Washes His Disciples’ Feet

13 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that **the hour had come** for him to leave this world and go to the Father.

John 17:1 Before he is arrested

Jesus Prays to Be Glorified

17 After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:

“Father, **the hour has come**. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.

You see, Jesus knew full well what he had come to do. John's gospel spells it out.

And here in this little story in the beginning of Jesus' ministry, he is already alluding to "His hour." Jesus came to save us. Jesus came to redeem us.

Jesus came cleans us of our sins.

So let's go back to his first sign one more time. Jesus turned water into wine, but he started by telling the servants to fill the 6 stone jars to the brim. What were those stone jars used for? Ceremonial washing.

Keller nails it when he says, "You know that Old Testament Judaism contained a great number of rites and regulations, which required many and various courses of physical cleansing and purification, all in order to point to our spiritual need. These vividly got across the idea that God is holy and perfect and we are flawed and that to connect with him at all, there needs to be atonement, cleansing, and pardon. We cannot just walk right into his presence."

The Jews of that day would use these cleansing rituals to make themselves Holy, and pleasing to God. It would give them the ability to approach Him. They didn't know it yet, but by creating new wine in the ceremonial washing jars, Jesus is showing them, showing us that he IS the ceremonial washing. He takes the place of ceremonial washing.

Near the end of his life, Jesus takes the symbol of wine one step further. .. beyond the feast, beyond the party.

Matthew 26: 27-28

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

At the beginning of his ministry, he creates new wine in an old tradition, and at the end, he shows us what it means.

We don't sing: "What can wash away my sins, only the ceremonial washing from the stone jars."

What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the...

What can make me whole again? Nothing but the...

Jesus knew as his hour drew near, just what he had to do. He washed the feet of his disciples. He prayed for them, he prayed for us. Then he took centuries of rituals, centuries of ceremonially washing. Centuries of blood sacrifices, and made 1 final sacrifice. One final perfect sacrifice that covered all of our sins. He took our burdens to the cross, and he died... for us. And after 3 days, he rose again.

Friends, Jesus is alive today, because we have a God that longs to be in relationship us. We have a God that seeks us out, and give us the gift we don't deserve...

everlasting life in His presence. Jesus turned water into wine, not so we have an excuse to party, but to show us he is the way to the Father.