

7. The Miracle at the Wedding in Cana

Today we will examine an episode in the life of Jesus that took place at the beginning of his ministry, after his baptism and temptation in the wilderness. This passage in the Bible is certainly important. But, at the same time, it is often misunderstood, because there is a tendency to see in the text what is not there. We may go well beyond what is written, and this is always dangerous. It is the story of a miracle that Jesus did at a wedding in Cana of Galilee which is preserved for us in the gospel of John 2:1-11. Listen to the word of God:

“On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, ‘They have no wine.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Whatever He says to you, do it.’ Now there were set there six water pots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, ‘Fill the water pots with water.’ And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, ‘Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.’ And they took it. When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, ‘Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!’ This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.”

THE LESSONS WE CAN TAKE FROM THIS EVENT:

Many lessons can be taken from this story. For example, the fact that Jesus accepted an invitation to a marriage feast suggests that the Lord approved of marriage. He saw nothing to condemn in getting married. Remaining single is not necessarily more holy than being married.

In this story, we also see the compassion of Jesus. The couple who were married surely counted on the success of the feast. It was the kind of celebration

one has once in a lifetime. Running out of provisions before the event ended would have caused the couple great embarrassment in front of their friends. Their joy would have been changed to desolation. Jesus felt sorry for their situation. By supplying the wine, he saved them from the contempt of the people of the village and its surroundings.

We can also point out that when Jesus did this, he did it very well. The wine that was made miraculously was the best wine they had drunk. As the crowd witnessed at another miracle, in Mark 10:37: “He has done all things well.”

TWO LESSONS WE CANNOT DRAW FROM THIS EVENT:

A conclusion we cannot draw from this story is that Jesus approved of drinking alcohol. The story does not teach that.

1. When we use the word “wine” today, we think of a drink that contains alcohol. But in our New Testament, which was written in Greek, the word “wine” is used to translate a Greek word (*oinos*) which has a broader meaning. It indicates the juice of the grape, regardless of its form. That is the word used to speak of juice when it is still in the fruit, when it has just been pressed, when it is fermented, or when it is boiled so it doesn’t ferment.

2. We often think that in ancient times, they didn’t have the same technical ability to conserve the juice without allowing it to ferment. Thus they would have no way to drink non-fermented grape juice except at the time of harvest. In reality, the literature from the time of Jesus shows clearly that they did have the methods to save grape juice without fermentation, a very sweet drink. This was true for the Jews and the non-Jews. To speak of sweet drinks, one used the same word, *oinos*, or wine.

3. These unfermented non-alcoholic wines were well-liked in those days. It was thought that their flavor and quality exceeded those of fermented wines.

4. The rabbi S. M. Isaacs, of New York, said this:

“The Jews do not, in their feasts for sacred purposes, including the marriage feast, ever use any kind of fermented drinks. In their oblations and libations, both private and public, they

employ the fruit of the vine—that is, fresh grapes—unfermented grape-juice, and raisins, as the symbol of benediction.”

So I ask you to let go of this false idea that by this miracle, Jesus gave his approval to drinking alcohol. The Bible does not say that Jesus made alcohol. The men of that time knew about non-alcoholic wine. They respected it, and it is probably what would have been used on the occasion of a marriage—the unfermented juice of the grape.

Another lesson that we must not take from this story is that men can come to Mary to obtain favors from Jesus. Some point out that, in this story, the couple being married had a problem and that it was Mary who took that problem to her son, who could not refuse her what she asked. They think that, even today, Mary will serve as a mediator. If we tell Mary what we need, she will tell it to her son, Jesus. Because she is his mother, he is sure to grant her the favor.

But before deciding what this passage teaches, we need to study it. One of the first things that strike us in this text is the manner in which Jesus addresses Mary. Instead of calling her “my mother,” he says, “Woman, what does your concern have to do with me?” (John 2:4). In English it would probably seem disrespectful, especially in speaking to one’s own mother. The expression in Greek was not impolite, and the Greek literature apart from the Bible contains several examples where it was used by people to address women whom they liked. Nevertheless, it was still not a term usually used in addressing one’s mother.

Jesus used it generally when he spoke to other women, too. In Matthew 15:28, he spoke to a Canaanite woman who asked for healing for her daughter. “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.” In John 8:10-11, we see him speaking with a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. “He said to her, ‘Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.’”

In addressing his own mother in this way, Jesus may be indicating that he wants to eliminate the mother-son aspect of their relationship in respect to his public ministry. In calling his own mother “woman,” Jesus did not treat her contemptuously,

but he did not grant more honor to her than to other women. We have the clear impression that, instead of emphasizing the mother-son relationship, Jesus minimized it.

The same remark can be made about two other passages. In Mark 3:31-35, we read:

“Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, ‘Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You.’ But He answered them, saying, ‘Who is My mother, or My brothers?’ And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.’”

The relationship that every believer can have with Jesus by virtue of his or her obedience to the Word of God is more important than the relationship that the mother and biological brothers of Jesus could claim by virtue of their blood connection to him. They did not have any particular privileges. They were not the priority when it came to Jesus’ attention.

The only passage in the Bible where we see Mary exalted in this manner is found in Luke 11:27,28. Notice Jesus’ reaction:

“And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!’ But He said, ‘More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!’”

Now let’s return to the story of the miracle in Cana of Galilee where Jesus changed the water to wine. In this passage, we are also struck by the phrase that Jesus addresses to Mary: “Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.” In fact, the sentence “what does your concern have to do with me” generally served to repel an unwanted intervention. We see in the rest of the story that Mary did not interpret this as a categorical refusal to help in this situation, but we can consider that Jesus is telling Mary that she is not to dictate to him when or how he will exercise his ministry or use his miraculous power.

Far from justifying the belief that some have that by speaking to Mary, they can obtain what they want from Jesus, we see that Jesus put a certain distance between himself and the one who brought him into the world physically. Jesus intervened to solve the problem as Mary had apparently hoped he would, but it seems she also understood the gentle reproach Jesus had given her. We have no indication that she tried again to guide Jesus or to suggest what works he should carry out during his time on earth. Other women would be with him and would use their possessions to help him (Luke 8:2,3), but we do not see any more of Mary except at the foot of the cross.

Having said that the hour had not come to show his identity, Jesus performed this miracle in a way that only his disciples and the servants knew about it.

Let's remember other people who also obtained miracles by their prayers. Don't forget, for example, the request of the pagan woman, Syrophenician by birth, who received the miraculous healing of her little girl, even though Jesus had told her that he was sent only to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24).

Nevertheless, these people did not become mediators of grace for us. What they obtained one time cannot constitute a rule for everyone throughout time. What they did personally while they were alive is not a proof of what they could do after their deaths. On the contrary, the Bible shows us clearly that God does not want people to speak to those who are already dead. "And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people" (Leviticus 20:6). "And when they say to you, 'Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,' should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:19,20).

Nowhere in the Bible are we taught that Christians can (or need to) go to Mary to obtain favors from Jesus. He himself is ready to assist us. The Bible says:

"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we

do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Jesus is very compassionate and always ready to help his followers. Instead of fixing our attention on Mary, we would do better to follow what Mary said about Jesus to the servants that day in Cana: "Whatever He says to you, do it" (John 2:5).