

JOHN 2.1-11: THE WEDDING AT CANA

[Chelmsford Baptismal Service: 6 February 2011]

Weddings are expensive. The cost of the average UK wedding is now over £20,000.

- The most expensive item is the wedding reception – averages £7,724
- The honeymoon costs £3,220
- The engagement ring costs £1,400 – while the two wedding rings cost a further £900
- The wedding dress + shoes comes to £1,927
- The bride's honeymoon wardrobe costs another £352
- By contrast the groom's wedding suit averages £165
- Photos & video come to £1,239
- Wedding flowers £381
- Cars £308
- Wedding stationary £138

No wonder one in five single women start saving for their dream wedding day before they have even met their dream husband.

Incidentally, all this information is courtesy of Sky TV – and is actually over two years out of date. Goodness knows how much a wedding costs in 2011!

Still, things could be worse.

Just imagine if we were living *in 1st century Palestine*.

There *a wedding reception* didn't just last an afternoon and an evening. It *went on all week*. In fact, the reception took the place of the honeymoon.

I'm told that the bride wore her wedding dress the whole week long - I suppose that's what's called getting value for money!

As for the guest list, not only were all the relatives invited – but all the friends and acquaintances. Almost every Tom, Dick and Harry. Our guest lists with a cut-off point of 60, 80 or even 120 people would look down-right mean by comparison.

For those of you with daughters, the one consolation is that in those days it wasn't the father of the bride who paid for the reception - it was the father of the groom.

Hard luck if you had sons!

This morning we are gathered not for a wedding, but for a baptism

Nonetheless I want to focus on what happened when Jesus was present at a wedding.

That may seem strange, but as we look at the story of that wedding at Cana, I believe that we shall find some principles which are relevant to Hannah's baptism.

Scripture: John 2.1-11

1. JESUS MADE A DIFFERENCE AT CANA

What a story: the party was in full swing, when suddenly they discovered ***they had run out of wine!***

If ever there was an embarrassing situation, that was it. Just imagine running out of champagne before the toast! This was indeed ***a crisis situation.***

Fortunately Jesus was there to solve it.

Why did they run out of wine?

Was it due to bad planning on the part of the bride's parents? Had they failed to work out that you can't get more than six glasses to a bottle? I don't know.

One thing for certain: disaster was about to happen.

Just imagine the situation. Imagine if at your daughter's wedding the caterers had forgotten to provide the champagne for the toasts - wouldn't you feel embarrassed?

Such a situation would have been even more embarrassing in the East

For there hospitality was regarded as a sacred duty.

If supplies were ever to run out in the East, it would be no laughing matter - the family would never live down the shame. Indeed, the family could even be sued in the courts by the aggrieved relatives of the bride!

Fortunately the crisis was not allowed to develop into a disaster.

Mary, Jesus' mother, was there.

How she got to know of the crisis, we are not told. However, one of the Coptic apocryphal gospels says that Mary was ***the sister of the bride:*** i.e. she was one of the insiders. Whatever the truth of that suggestion, Mary heard of the impending disaster and went to Jesus, and said: "**They have no wine left**" (v3)

What did Jesus do? He told the servants to fill up **6 stone jars** with water (v7).

These stone jars were used not for holding drinking water, but for water for washing – the Jews were into washing their hands big-time, not because they knew it was good for hygiene, but because washing their hands was a purification ritual – not only before the meal, but between each course the hands had to be washed in a certain way. These jars were enormous things: ***each held 20-30 gallons.***

- Now do your maths. How many pints are in a gallon? 8! Now if each jar averaged 25 galls, then there would have been how many pints of water in each jar? 200 pints. Multiply that by 6 and add a miracle and you have 1,200 pints of wine!
- Or expressed metrically, each stone jar contained some 100 litres - 600 litres in total, which if it had all been bottled in a modern 75 cc wine bottle would have come to 800 bottles. Just think of finding space for all the bottles

But to go back to the story.

Jesus ordered the servants to pour out some of the water out from these jars and take it to **the man in charge of the feast** (v8), i.e. to the equivalent of the red-coated toast-master.

The toast-master smacked his lips & said: "**Everyone else serves the best wine first, & after the guests have had plenty to drink [literally, after they have become drunk], he serves the ordinary wine - the cheap stuff** (Message). **But you have kept the best wine until now!**" (v10).

Jesus turned water into wine - gallons of it.

How did he do it?

- One person suggested that the water was poured into jars already containing dregs of wine & the resulting mixture tasted wonderful!
- Yet another suggestion was that Jesus' presence so graced & entertained the guests that they later concluded, '*It was almost as if we had been drinking fine wine*'.

Frankly, I find it easier to believe in a miracle than in some of these dubious rationalisations.

The same was true of CS Lewis, the Oxbridge English don, who wrote the Narnia stories. He attributed this miracle not to somebody's imagination, but rather to God. He wrote: "*Every year as part of the natural order, God makes wine. He does so by creating a vegetable organism that can turn water, soil & sunlight into a juice which will, under proper conditions, make wine. Thus in a certain sense, he constantly turns water into wine, for wine, like all drinks, is but water modified. Once, & in one year only, God now incarnate short-circuits the process: makes wine in a moment: uses earthenware jars instead of vegetable fibres to hold the water. But uses them to do what he is always doing. The miracle consists in the short cut!*"

One way or another, Jesus turned water into wine.

In so doing, Jesus saved the day. Jesus made the difference - ***he made that vital difference between disaster & happiness.***

2. JESUS CONTINUES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Yes, it **was** quite a feat. I'm somewhat surprised that Norris McWhirter didn't enter it into the ***Guinness Book of Records***.

As it is the ***Guinness Book of Records*** prefers to give other details about marriage and divorce: e.g.

- The greatest number of marriages accumulated in the monogamous world is 19 by the American Glynn de Moss Wolfe who "*has additionally suffered 16 mothers-in-law*"
- Another record in the monogamous world was set by Mrs Beverly Nina Avery, a barmaid from Los Angeles, who in October 1957 obtained her 16th divorce from her 14th husband. She alleged outside the court that 5 of the 14 had broken her nose!

But there is one important respect where the miracle of Jesus turning the wine into water & the Guinness Book of Records differs.

For ***when Jesus turned the water into wine, it was more than a one-off feat - it's typical of something which is happening all the time!***

Let me explain. John in his Gospel describes the miracles of Jesus as '**signs**' – at the end of his account of Jesus' turning water into wine, John writes: "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory" (v11) - for John each miracle is a 'sign' or pointer to what Jesus typically does in people's lives..

- Take the ***Feeding of the 5000***. John includes this miracle not simply to record

that at a certain place & at a certain time Jesus miraculously fed 5000 people; for him it was also a sign that **Jesus is the Bread of Life**, who continues to satisfy the longings of the human heart.

- Similarly John records the story of **the Man Born Blind** to demonstrate the fact that **Jesus is the Light of the World**, who continues to open the eyes of blind men & women to the truth and to God.
- Likewise the story of **Lazarus** is more than the story of the bringing back to life of a man who was dead - it is a story which tells that Jesus is constantly bringing victory over death to men and women. He is **the Resurrection & the Life**.

As for this miracle of Jesus turning water into wine, it likewise is about what Jesus can do now. **Jesus can still turn water into wine** - not, of course, in the literal sense, but in the metaphorical sense - in the sense that **Jesus can turn the dull water of mere existence into the sparkling wine of real life**.

Jesus can make the difference - the difference between happiness & disaster.

This is why we come together this Sunday - and every Sunday.

We come to seek the help of Jesus in our lives today.

Our church is not a society for those interested in learning more about ancient history, it is for those who are interested in learning how to cope with the pressures of life today.

John records in his Gospel how Jesus rescued what appeared to be a hopeless situation centuries ago. The Good News is that Jesus can still change situations - however hopeless & depressing they may seem to be.

Some time ago I read the story of a man who went to his doctor because he felt tired of life. He said to his doctor: "*Doctor, I've tried everything, but I've ended up with nothing. I have a nice house. I have a swimming pool. I have two cars - two Jaguars. I've done everything I ever wanted to do. I have everything a person could wish for except the ability to wish for anything. Doctor, I've come to the point where I just don't give a damn anymore*".

I wonder if anybody here relates to such a man? OK, you may not literally have two Jags in the garage and a swimming pool in the garden, but in a sense you do have everything - and yet you feel you have nothing.

Our testimony as a church is that Jesus does make a difference.

Jesus gives purpose & meaning. Jesus gives life. Indeed, Jesus himself once said: "**I have come in order that you might have life - life in all its fulness**" (Jn 10.10).

And the life of which Jesus spoke is not just life beyond the grave, but life in the here and now.

All too often people outside the church have perceived Christians to be kill-joys.

Sadly, there have been some misguided Christians who have been kill-joys. Indeed, there is a very small and exceedingly strange group of Baptists living in Norfolk who believe it is wrong to smile – instead they think it is far more holy to scowl.

But they are so wrong – I am sure that Jesus had a massive smile on his face when he tasted the water turned into wine.

Jesus can make life really worth living.

3. JESUS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO YOUR LIFE TOO

This leads me to my third point: Jesus can make a difference to your life too.

But for Jesus to make a difference, then three things have to happen

1) We need to invite Jesus into our lives as our Saviour.

Jesus made a difference to that wedding at Cana, because he was there.

Had he not been invited to attend, then the crisis would have turned into a disaster.

Similarly, if Jesus is to make a difference to our lives, then he must be there in our lives. We must invite him to come into our lives.

In the first place, we need to invite him to come into our lives to be our Saviour - we need to invite him to deal with our sin which spoils our relationship with God, as also our relationships with others too.

"Listen!" says Jesus, "**I standing at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice & opens the door, I will come in...**" (Rev 3.20). Amazingly Jesus wants to come into our hearts and lives & make the difference. But in his love he refuses to force himself upon us - he leaves it to us to make the next move

2) We need to invite Jesus into our lives as our Friend.

Christian conversion is not a one-off experience, when we acknowledge our need of forgiveness & a new beginning with Jesus; it is an ongoing experience in which we ***invite Jesus into the everyday ordinariness of our lives.***

Jesus is of no use to anybody if we restrict him to Sundays & to the religious bits of our lives. We need to open up the rest of our week to him too.

We need to share with him the ordinary every-day problems of life we face.

To go back to the story, had Mary not shared with Jesus the dilemma which the family faced, it is unlikely that Jesus have turned the water into wine.

Jesus can only change our lives for the better when we share our concerns with him. He wants to be our Friend - but again, he refuses to force his friendship upon us.

3) We need to invite Jesus into our lives as our Lord.

By this I mean that if Jesus is to be of any help to us, then in the words of Mary we must "**do whatever he tells**" (v5) us.

What would have happened if Jesus' instructions to the servants had not been carried out? There would have been no wine - instead there would have been disaster.

The fact is that we can't experience life on our own terms. We must go his way, and not our way. To know true joy, Jesus must come first.

In a few moments ***Hannah*** will be giving a brief testimony to the difference which Jesus has made to her life.

After her testimony, she will be baptised - in being baptised she will be identifying herself with Jesus who died for her, and who rose for her - and in so doing she will be declaring that she wants Jesus to be her Saviour, Friend and Lord. Or as she will say in her testimony, which I have already seen: "Here I am willing to give my life to God, follow him with all of my heart, and learn more about Him day by day".

Let me encourage you to do the same and discover the difference that Jesus can make to your life too.

As I now go and get changed to the baptism listen carefully to the words of the next song to be sung by Sarah Wilson – it's a great testimony song

Running out of wine, the party's over.
Guests are at the door.
Jars of clay are only filled with water
And there's nothing left in store

Take my life and turn it into wine.
Help me know Your presence all the time.
Let me see You can work in me
And I'll do, Lord help me to do,
Whatever you tell me to.

You can take my life in all its weakness.
Only You know how.
Make it into something good and lovely.
You have saved the best 'til now.

Change my heart, I'm reaching out to You.
Make me pure and holy through and through.
Let me see You can work in me
And I'll do, Lord help me to do,
Whatever you tell me to.

Hearts are filled with things that never mattered.
Don't know why or how.
Though the years have passed and time's been wasted,
You have saved the best 'til now.

Make my life the very best of wine.
Give to me this miracle divine.
Let me see You can work in me
And I'll do, Lord help me to do,
Whatever you tell me to.