The Wedding at Cana

Bible Stories Anthology — John 2:1-12

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> **Romans 15:4** *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

Why These Stories Were Written — Romans 15:4

Paul had just quoted a thousand-year-old psalm and applied it to Christ (Romans 15:3, quoting Psalm 69:9), and then he explained why he could: *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*. **Written aforetime** — the scriptures that already stood before this present age of grace opened at Pentecost: the record God gave through Moses, the prophets and the writings, along with the Gospel accounts of Christ's earthly ministry, which belong to that same time before Pentecost. (When Paul wrote these words, the scriptures he had in hand were the Hebrew scriptures; the Gospels had not yet been written down.) **Written for our learning** — "learning" is the Greek word for *teaching*, the very word rendered "doctrine" in 2 Timothy 3:16. These are not quaint tales; they are doctrine in narrative form. Adam, Ruth and David never knew us, but God did, and He had their lives recorded with us in mind — written *for* us, though not all of it written *to* us, which is why we read Israel's history as our instruction and not as our marching orders. **Through patience and comfort of the scriptures** — "patience" is literally *remaining under*, the staying power we gain from watching men and women stay under a load; "comfort" is a *calling alongside*, the strength God brings when He meets them there, which is why Paul calls Him "the God of patience and consolation" in the very next verse. **That we might have hope** — not a wish, but confident expectation: the return of Jesus Christ and everlasting life with Him. That is why these accounts exist, and it is how they should be read.

The Best Wine Last

The wine was gone.

Somewhere in a small hill village of Galilee a wedding feast was in full swing. The bridegroom had brought his bride home, the guests had come from the surrounding villages, and the celebration was meant to last for days. And the wine had run out.

To us it sounds like a small thing — a party that ran short. In that world it was a public disgrace. A wedding feast was a family's honour on display before the whole community, and the shame of running dry would follow the young couple for years.

Among the guests was a carpenter from Nazareth, newly come back from the Jordan with a handful of followers. His mother came to him with four words: *They have no wine.*

What happened next was the first sign Jesus ever did. No one was sick. No one was dying. No demon was cast out. He simply turned about a hundred and fifty gallons of water into the best wine anyone at that feast had ever tasted — and almost no one there knew it had happened.

This is the story of the wedding at Cana — the first of the signs John recorded so that we **"might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."**

The Setting

When. A few days after the events at the Jordan in John 1. After his forty days in the wilderness (story 40), Jesus came back to the place where John was baptizing. John pointed him out — **"Behold the Lamb of God"** (John 1:29, 36) — and the first disciples began to follow him: Andrew, an unnamed disciple

(very likely John himself, who wrote the account), Simon Peter, Philip and Nathanael (John 1:35-51). Then Jesus went north into Galilee. This was about A.D. 28 by the reckoning this series uses, early in his ministry, before his first Passover in Jerusalem (John 2:13).

Where. "Cana of Galilee" — so called to set it apart from another Cana. It was the home town of Nathanael (John 21:2), who had just become a disciple. Two places are suggested today. The traditional site is **Kafr Kanna**, about four miles north-east of Nazareth, where churches now commemorate the miracle. Many archaeologists prefer **Khirbet Qana**, a ruined hilltop village about nine miles north of Nazareth, overlooking the Beit Netofa valley; excavations there have found a Jewish village of Jesus' time, and a cave complex that early Christian pilgrims visited and venerated. Scripture names the town but not its location, and either site fits.

Who.

- **Jesus**, about thirty years old, newly anointed at the Jordan.
- **The mother of Jesus** — Mary. John never uses her name.
- **His disciples** — the five or six who had just begun to follow him.
- **The bridegroom** and, unseen, the bride.
- **The servants** who waited at the feast.
- **The governor of the feast**, who was in charge of the tables.

The administration. The **Christ administration**, which opened at Jesus' baptism. Israel was still under the Law of Moses, which is why there were waterpots of stone standing ready **"after the manner of the purifying of the Jews."**

The Story, Told Faithfully

The Third Day

> **John 2:1** *And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there:*
> **John 2:2** *And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.*

"The third day." John has been counting days. **"The next day"** (1:29), **"the next day"** (1:35), **"the day following"** (1:43), and now **"the third day."** The plainest reading is the third day after Jesus set out for Galilee with Philip and Nathanael (1:43) — about the time it would take to walk from the Jordan valley up into the hills of Galilee. Some readers, adding up all John's days from 1:19, find a week of seven days in these opening chapters, ending with the first sign, as Genesis opens with the seven days of creation. John's Gospel begins with the words of Genesis — **"In the beginning"** (John 1:1) — so the observation is attractive. But John does not say it, and this series gives it only as something readers have noticed.

"There was a marriage." A Jewish marriage came in two stages. First came the **betrothal**, a binding agreement before witnesses, after which the couple were legally husband and wife though they did not yet live together (as Mary and Joseph were in Matthew 1:18-19). Then, often a year later, came the **wedding** itself: the bridegroom and his friends went in procession, usually at night with lamps and torches, to bring the bride from her father's house to his own (compare the parable of the ten virgins, Matthew 25:1-10). Then came the **feast.** It could last a full week. When Laban gave Leah to Jacob, he said, **"Fulfil her week"** (Genesis 29:27), and Samson's wedding feast ran **"seven days"** (Judges 14:12, 17).

“And the mother of Jesus was there.” In John’s Gospel Mary is always **“the mother of Jesus”** or **“his mother,”** never named. She appears only twice: here, at the beginning of her son’s ministry, and at the cross, at its end (John 19:25-27). Joseph is not mentioned, here or anywhere in Jesus’ adult ministry. Most readers take it that Joseph had died by this time; the Gospels do not say so, but they never mention him alive again after Jesus was twelve (Luke 2:41-51; story 39).

Mary was there before Jesus and his disciples arrived, and she knew when the wine ran out. She may have been helping with the feast, as a relative or close friend of the family would. Cana was only a few miles from Nazareth. Some have supposed the bridegroom was a relative; the text does not say.

“And both Jesus was called, and his disciples.” “Called” means *invited*. Jesus came as an invited guest, and his new disciples came with him. Five or six extra guests arriving at a village wedding may well have added to the strain on the wine. The one who would later be called **“a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners”** (Matthew 11:19) by his critics did not hold himself apart from the ordinary joys of ordinary people. He went to a wedding.

“They Have No Wine”

> **John 2:3** *And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.*

“When they wanted wine.” “Wanted” in old English means *lacked*, *ran short of*. The wine was gone, and the feast was not over.

In that culture hospitality was a sacred duty. To invite guests and then fail them was to bring shame on the bridegroom and his family before the whole village. Weddings were also times of exchange between families — guests brought gifts, and the hosts were expected to provide generously in return. Running out of wine was not a minor slip; it was a humiliation that people would remember.

“They have no wine.” Mary did not tell Jesus what to do. She simply told him the need. It is the same kind of request Martha and Mary later sent when Lazarus was sick: **“Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick”** (John 11:3). They stated the need and left the answer with him.

Why did she come to him? Jesus had not yet done a single miracle (John 2:11 says this was the *beginning* of his signs). But Mary had kept and pondered everything that had happened since the angel came to her: **“But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart”** (Luke 2:19, 51). She knew who her son was. She had heard what the angel said: **“He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest”** (Luke 1:32). Perhaps she had heard from the disciples what John the Baptist had said of him at the Jordan. She believed he could help, even if she did not know how.

“Mine Hour Is Not Yet Come”

> **John 2:4** *Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.*

To English ears this sounds cold, even rude. It was neither.

“Woman.” The Greek *gunai* was a respectful and even tender form of address. Jesus used it of the Canaanite mother whose faith he praised — **“O woman, great is thy faith”** (Matthew 15:28) — and of Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb — **“Woman, why weepest thou?”** (John 20:15). Most telling of all, he used it to his own mother from the cross, as he gave her into John’s care: **“Woman, behold thy son!”**

(John 19:26). No one thinks he was cold to her then. Our nearest English might be “Dear lady” or “Madam.”

But it is still notable that he did not say “Mother.” From this point on, the relationship between them was changing. He was no longer only the son of the house in Nazareth. He was the anointed one about his Father’s business, as he had told her at twelve: **“wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?”** (Luke 2:49).

“What have I to do with thee?” Literally, *What to me and to thee?* It is a Hebrew way of speaking that appears again and again in the Old Testament, and its meaning depends on the tone and the situation. Jephthah said it to the king of Ammon: **“What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me?”** (Judges 11:12). David said it to his nephews when they wanted to kill Shimei: **“What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah?”** (2 Samuel 16:10). The widow of Zarephath said it to Elijah: **“What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God?”** (1 Kings 17:18). It means something like *What concern is that of ours?* or *Why are you bringing this to me?* — a gentle putting off, a reminder that the two of them did not stand in the same place in this matter. Here Jesus is telling his mother, kindly but plainly, that what he does from now on will not be decided by family or by what others ask of him, but by his Father.

He said as much later: **“The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do”** (John 5:19), and **“I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things”** (John 8:28).

“Mine hour is not yet come.” This is the first time in John’s Gospel that Jesus speaks of *his hour*. It will run through the whole book like a drumbeat:

- **“They sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come”** (John 7:30).
- **“No man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come”** (John 8:20).
- **“The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified”** (John 12:23).
- **“Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father”** (John 13:1).
- **“Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee”** (John 17:1).

His *hour* is the appointed time of his death, resurrection and return to his Father — the time when he would be **“glorified.”** At a wedding feast, at the very beginning, Jesus was already looking toward that hour. The wine at Cana was not yet the great thing he had come to do. That would come later, at the cross, the empty tomb, and the ascension.

How, then, could he say his hour had not come, and then go on to do the miracle? Because the timing of all his works was in his Father’s hands. He would not act because his mother asked, or because the situation pressed, but when and as God showed him. And God did show him — that very day. This series understands it this way: the miracle was done at God’s direction, not at Mary’s request, and so the words and the deed do not conflict.

“Whatsoever He Saith unto You, Do It”

> **John 2:5** *His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.*

Mary did not argue, and she was not offended. She turned to the servants and said, *Whatever he tells you, do it.* She left the matter entirely in his hands — and she expected him to act.

These are the last words of Mary recorded in John's Gospel. They are good last words for anyone: *Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.*

Her words echo one of the great moments of the Old Testament. When famine struck Egypt and the people cried to Pharaoh for bread, Pharaoh sent them to the man God had raised up: **"Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do"** (Genesis 41:55; story 12). Joseph, rejected by his brothers and raised to the right hand of the throne, opened the storehouses and fed the world. Mary sends the servants to her son with almost the same words. The parallel is not stated in John, but it is a picture readers have long noticed: the one rejected by his own, who would be raised to God's right hand, providing for those who come to him.

Six Waterpots of Stone

> **John 2:6** *And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.*

"Six waterpots of stone." These were large stone jars, standing ready at the house. Why stone? Because under the law, as the Jews of that day understood it, stone vessels did not become ceremonially unclean. An earthen pot that came into contact with something unclean had to be broken (Leviticus 11:33; 15:12). A stone vessel did not — so the Mishnah, the written record of the rabbis' rulings, later put it, listing stone vessels among those that do not take on uncleanness. Archaeologists have found the remains of such vessels all over Judea and Galilee from Jesus' time, and even the workshops that made them. One was excavated near the village of Reina, a few miles from Kafr Kanna, with thousands of chalkstone cores and unfinished vessels lying where the workers left them. The largest jars, carved on a lathe from a single block of soft limestone, stood waist high or more.

"After the manner of the purifying of the Jews." The water was for ceremonial washing: of hands before eating, of cups and pots and utensils. Mark explains for his non-Jewish readers: **"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"** (Mark 7:3-4). At a large feast, with many guests, a great deal of water would be used.

"Containing two or three firkins apiece." The Greek word is *metrētēs*, "a measure," a liquid measure of about nine English gallons (about 39 litres). Two or three measures is roughly twenty to twenty-seven gallons for each jar. Six jars together held somewhere between 120 and 160 gallons — about 450 to 600 litres. That would fill around 600 to 800 of our wine bottles.

"Six." John counts the jars. Six is the number of man in Scripture — man was made on the sixth day (Genesis 1:31), and six falls one short of seven, the number of what God makes complete. Some readers see in six stone jars of washing water a picture of the law's rituals: real, ordered, necessary in their time, but never able to make anyone truly clean or bring the joy God intended. John does not draw that lesson, and this series gives it as a picture, not as the meaning of the text.

"Fill the Waterpots with Water"

> **John 2:7** *Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.*
>
> **John 2:8** *And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.*

“Fill the waterpots with water.” Some of the water had probably been used already for washing. The servants would have had to go back and forth to the village well or spring with smaller jars, many trips, to fill 120 gallons or more. It was hard, heavy work, and to the servants it must have seemed pointless. The problem was wine, not water. But Mary had said, *Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.* They did.

“And they filled them up to the brim.” John adds this detail. There was no room left to add anything. Nothing went into those jars but water, and the jars were full.

“Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast.” Jesus did not touch the jars. He did not pray aloud, or wave his hands, or speak a word over the water. He told the servants to draw some out and carry it to the man in charge of the tables. The word for “draw out” (*antleō*) is the word used for drawing water from a well — the same word used of the Samaritan woman: **“There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water”** (John 4:7). Some students have suggested that the servants drew from the well, and that only what was carried to the governor became wine. Most take it that they drew from the jars. Either way, the water became wine between the drawing and the tasting.

“The governor of the feast.” Greek *architriklinos*, literally “ruler of the three couches” — at a formal meal guests reclined on couches set around three sides of the tables. He was the master of ceremonies, responsible for the order of the feast and the serving of food and wine, and he tasted the wine before it was served. He might be a head servant, or a respected guest chosen for the honour. A Jewish writing from about two centuries before Christ gives advice to such a man: **“If thou be made the master of a feast, lift not thyself up, but be among them as one of the rest; take diligent care for them”** (Ecclesiasticus 32:1).

“And they bare it.” Again the servants simply obeyed. Imagine carrying a cup of what you know to be well water to the man responsible for the wine, at a feast where the wine has run out.

“Thou Hast Kept the Good Wine Until Now”

> **John 2:9** *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,*
>
> **John 2:10** *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.*

“The water that was made wine.” John states it plainly. The water was *made* wine — real wine, not water that tasted like wine, and not wine that was added to water. John uses the same verb later when he looks back: **“So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine”** (John 4:46).

“And knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;).” John stops in the middle of the sentence to tell us who knew and who did not. The man responsible for the wine had no idea where it came from. The servants, who had done the work, knew exactly where it came from. It is one of the quiet lessons of the story: those who obeyed were the ones who saw the miracle.

“The governor of the feast called the bridegroom.” The governor assumed that the bridegroom, as host, had arranged it.

“Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine.” The governor tells the bridegroom what everyone knew: you serve the best wine first, while the guests can still tell the difference. **“When men have well drunk”** — the Greek can mean “have drunk freely” or “have become drunk” — then you bring

out the cheaper wine, because no one will notice. The governor is describing the common practice of feasts, not saying that the guests at this feast were drunk.

"But thou hast kept the good wine until now." The new wine was not merely acceptable. It was better than anything served before. The governor was surprised, and perhaps a little reproachful: *Why did you hold back the best?*

The bridegroom received the praise for something he had not done. The guests drank the wine without knowing where it came from. Only Jesus, his mother, the servants, and the disciples knew. The first sign of Jesus was almost a secret.

Was it real wine? Some have argued that what Jesus made was unfermented grape juice. The text does not allow it. The word is *oinos*, the ordinary word for wine. The governor, who knew wine, compared it with the wine served earlier and with the cheaper wine served later, and called it **"the good wine."** Scripture speaks of wine as one of God's gifts — **"wine that maketh glad the heart of man"** (Psalm 104:15) — and in the same breath it warns plainly against drunkenness: **"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise"** (Proverbs 20:1); **"be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess"** (Ephesians 5:18). Both are true. Jesus made real wine for a real wedding, in a land and a time where wine was part of every celebration, and the Bible's warning against drunkenness stands beside the miracle, not against it.

The Beginning of Signs

> **John 2:11** *This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.*

"This beginning of miracles." The Greek word translated "miracles" is *sēmeion*, *a sign*. A sign is something that points beyond itself. John's Gospel does not call Jesus' works "wonders" or "mighty works," as the other Gospels often do; it calls them *signs*, because each one points to who Jesus is. John tells us why he wrote them down:

> **John 20:30** *And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:*
>
> **John 20:31** *But these 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.*

This was the *beginning*, the first. John counts the second one himself: **"This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judaea into Galilee"** (John 4:54), when he healed a nobleman's son — also from Cana. Many students count seven signs in John before the cross: the water made wine (2:1-11), the nobleman's son (4:46-54), the lame man at Bethesda (5:1-9), the feeding of the five thousand (6:1-14), the walking on the sea (6:16-21), the man born blind (9:1-7), and the raising of Lazarus (11:1-44). John numbers only the first two, but the pattern of seven is widely noted.

It also means that all the stories of Jesus doing miracles as a boy, found in later writings such as the so-called *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, are false. John says plainly that Cana was the beginning (see story 39).

"In Cana of Galilee." Not in Jerusalem, not in the temple, not before the rulers — but at a village wedding in Galilee, a region the leaders in Jerusalem looked down on (John 7:52). Isaiah had said that a great light would shine in **"Galilee of the nations"** (Isaiah 9:1-2; Matthew 4:15-16).

"And manifested forth his glory." To *manifest* is to make visible, to show openly. What glory? John had written in his opening: **"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth"** (John 1:14). The glory Jesus showed was the glory God his Father had given him. Peter said of the miracles: **"Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you"** (Acts 2:22). Jesus himself said, **"the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works"** (John 14:10). At Lazarus' tomb he would tell Martha, **"Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?"** (John 11:40). The sign at Cana showed that God was with this man, working through him — that he was the one God had sent.

"And his disciples believed on him." They had already begun to believe (John 1:41, 45, 49). Now their faith was confirmed and deepened. Nathanael had been told, **"Thou shalt see greater things than these"** (John 1:50) — and within days, in his own home town, he did. The sign was not done mainly for the guests, most of whom never knew. It was done for those who were following him.

Down to Capernaum

> **John 2:12** *After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days.*

"He went down to Capernaum." "Down," because Capernaum lies on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, nearly 700 feet below sea level, while Cana stands in the hills. Capernaum would become Jesus' home base during his Galilean ministry — **"his own city"** (Matthew 9:1).

"And his mother, and his brethren." His brothers — named elsewhere as **"James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon,"** along with sisters (Mark 6:3). The plainest reading, followed by this series, is that they were children born to Joseph and Mary after Jesus (Matthew 1:25, **"till she had brought forth her firstborn son"**; story 38). At this time they did not yet believe in him: **"For neither did his brethren believe in him"** (John 7:5). After his resurrection they did (Acts 1:14), and James became a leader of the church in Jerusalem (Galatians 1:19).

"Not many days." A short stay. The Passover was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem (John 2:13), where he would drive the money-changers out of the temple — another step that began to set him against the rulers.

Where the Story Leads

To the Messiah

The first sign: water to wine. The first sign God did through Moses in Egypt was to turn water into **blood**: **"all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. And the fish that was in the river died"** (Exodus 7:20-21). It brought death. The first sign God did through Jesus was to turn water into **wine**, the drink of joy and celebration. John had already set the two side by side: **"For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ"** (John 1:17). This contrast is an observation many have made, not something John states, but it fits his Gospel well.

The new wine of the kingdom. The prophets spoke of the Messiah's kingdom as a time of abundant wine. **"And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined"** (Isaiah 25:6). **"The mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt"** (Amos 9:13). **"And it shall come to pass**

in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine" (Joel 3:18). Jesus' first sign, the overflowing gift of the best wine, was a small foretaste of that coming kingdom. At the last supper he would say, **"I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom"** (Matthew 26:29).

The bridegroom. Jesus later spoke of himself as the bridegroom: **"Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?"** (Mark 2:19). And John the Baptist, shortly after Cana, said, **"He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled"** (John 3:29). Israel's prophets had pictured God as the husband of His people (Isaiah 54:5; Hosea 2:19-20). At Cana the true bridegroom sat as a guest at another man's wedding, and quietly provided what the feast lacked.

New wine, new bottles. Jesus taught, **"No man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles"** (Mark 2:22). The water of purification under the law became the wine of a new day. What God was doing in Christ could not be contained in the old forms.

The best kept until last. "Thou hast kept the good wine until now." The world gives its best first and its worst last. God's way is the opposite. **"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son"** (Hebrews 1:1-2). The best was kept until last: the Son himself. This is a picture readers have drawn from the governor's words, and this series offers it as such.

His hour. At Cana Jesus said, **"Mine hour is not yet come."** Three years later he said, **"Father, the hour is come"** (John 17:1). At Cana he gave wine at a wedding; at the last supper he took the cup and said, **"This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you"** (Luke 22:20). In his hour he went to the cross, gave his life, was raised on the third day, and ascended to his Father's right hand. The joy he gave at Cana was a sign pointing to the joy his death, resurrection and ascension would win.

Who he is. The signs were written **"that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God"** (John 20:31). Not that Jesus is God, but that he is God's anointed and God's Son — the man through whom God worked, **"a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him"** (Acts 2:22).

To the Grace Administration

Bring the need to him. Mary brought the need to Jesus and left it with him. Believers today are told the same: **"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God"** (Philippians 4:6). **"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you"** (1 Peter 5:7). No need is too small to bring. The first sign was done at a wedding, for a family that had simply run out of wine.

Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. The servants did not understand the command, and it must have seemed useless. They obeyed anyway, and they were the ones who saw the miracle. **"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only"** (James 1:22). Obedience to God's Word often comes before understanding, not after.

Filled to the brim. God's provision is not stingy. The servants filled the jars to the brim, and the result was more and better wine than anyone needed. Paul writes of God **"that is able to do exceeding**

abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20), and **"my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus"** (Philippians 4:19).

Not washing, but cleansing. The stone jars stood for the outward washings of the law, which could never cleanse the heart. The writer to the Hebrews calls them **"divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation"** (Hebrews 9:10). Under grace believers are cleansed by what Christ did: **"the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin"** (1 John 1:7), **"by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost"** (Titus 3:5). The rituals of washing are **"a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ"** (Colossians 2:17).

Not drunk with wine, but filled with the spirit. Paul sets the two side by side: **"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit"** (Ephesians 5:18). On the day of Pentecost the crowds mocked the apostles, saying, **"These men are full of new wine"** (Acts 2:13; story 54). The true joy of the believer does not come from a cup, but from the gift of holy spirit God has given.

Grace upon grace. John wrote, **"And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace"** (John 1:16). At Cana the guests received an overflowing gift they had done nothing to earn, and most of them never knew where it came from. That is grace: God's favour, freely given, more than enough.

To the Topic of Joy

- **God is not against joy.** The first sign was done at a wedding feast, to keep a celebration going.
- **Jesus took part in ordinary life** — he was an invited guest at a village wedding.
- **Marriage is honoured by God.** Jesus' presence honoured it; **"Marriage is honourable in all"** (Hebrews 13:4).
- **God cares about small things** — even a family's embarrassment.
- **True joy comes from God** — not from what runs out, but from what He provides.
- **The best is yet to come** — **"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him"** (1 Corinthians 2:9).

The Main Takeaway

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and Jesus, his mother and his new disciples were there as guests; when the wine ran out, a disgrace for the bridegroom's family, Mary told Jesus, "They have no wine"; he answered her respectfully but plainly, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come" — his works would be timed by his Father, and his true hour was the hour of his death, resurrection and return to God; Mary told the servants, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it"; Jesus had them fill six stone jars, used for the Jews' ceremonial washing, to the brim with water — about 120 to 160 gallons — and then draw some out and carry it to the governor of the feast, who tasted the water that was made wine and, not knowing where it came from, told the bridegroom, "thou hast kept the good wine until now"; the servants who obeyed knew; this was the beginning of the signs Jesus did, and by it he showed the glory God had given him, and his disciples believed on him. The first sign of Moses turned water into blood; the first sign of Jesus turned water into the best wine — a foretaste of the joy of God's kingdom, done for those who would do whatever he said.

- **Bring every need to him,** even the small ones.
- **Leave the answer and the timing with God.**

- **Do whatever he says,** even before you understand.
- **Fill the jars to the brim** — give God your full obedience.
- **Expect God's provision to be abundant.**
- **God keeps the best until last.**

For Our Learning — The People

- **Jesus.** The Son of God, about thirty, newly anointed; a guest at the wedding, who did his first sign there.
- **The mother of Jesus (Mary).** Never named in John; seen here at the beginning of his ministry and at the cross at its end. Her last recorded words in John: "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."
- **His disciples.** Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathanael (who was from Cana), and very likely John himself.
- **The bridegroom.** The host, who was praised for wine he did not provide.
- **The governor of the feast.** The master of ceremonies, who tasted the wine and did not know where it came from.
- **The servants.** They filled and drew and carried — and they knew.
- **His brethren.** James, Joses, Juda and Simon, who went with him to Capernaum but did not yet believe.

For Our Learning — Customs and Orientalisms

- **Betrothal and wedding** — two stages; the bridegroom brought the bride from her father's house to his own in procession.
- **The wedding feast** — could last seven days (Genesis 29:27; Judges 14:12); hosted by the bridegroom's family.
- **Hospitality as a duty of honour** — running out of wine was a public shame.
- **Invited guests** — "called" to the marriage.
- **Stone vessels for purification** — stone did not become ceremonially unclean, as earthenware did; carved from soft limestone.
- **The purifying of the Jews** — washing hands, cups and pots before eating (Mark 7:3-4).
- **The firkin (metrētēs)** — a liquid measure of about nine gallons.
- **The governor of the feast (architriklinos)** — master of ceremonies who ordered the meal and tasted the wine.
- **Reclining at table** on couches around three sides — hence "ruler of the three couches."
- **Good wine first, poorer wine later** — the common custom at feasts.
- **Drawing water** with smaller jars from the well or spring.
- **"Going down" to Capernaum** — from the hills to the lakeshore far below sea level.

For Our Learning — Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used by God to add emphasis and feeling. These are the ones in this story:

- **Idiom** — "What have I to do with thee?" (2:4), literally "What to me and to thee?": a Hebrew way of saying *Why bring this to me?* or *This is not ours to decide.*
- **Metonymy (one name put for a related thing)** — "mine hour" (2:4), the hour put for all that would happen in it: his death, resurrection and return to his Father.
- **Periphrasis (a description used instead of a name)** — "the mother of Jesus" (2:1, 3), never "Mary," throughout John's Gospel.
- **Parenthesis (a sentence set inside another)** — "(but the servants which drew the water knew;)" (2:9), John's own aside.
- **Antithesis (setting opposites against each other)** — "at the beginning … good wine … then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now" (2:10).
- **Ellipsis (words left out)** — "They have no wine" (2:3), with the request itself left unspoken.
- **Synecdoche (a part for the whole)** — "wine" for the provision of the whole feast.

What the Bible Actually Says

- **The wedding was in Cana of Galilee,** on "the third day."
- **Mary was there, and Jesus and his disciples were invited.**
- **Mary told Jesus the need; she did not tell him what to do.**
- **Jesus called her "Woman,"** a respectful address he also used from the cross.
- **He said his hour had not yet come** — the first mention of "his hour" in John.
- **Mary told the servants to do whatever he said.**
- **There were six stone waterpots** for the Jews' purification, each holding two or three firkins.
- **The servants filled them to the brim with water.**
- **Jesus did not touch the jars or speak over the water.**
- **The water was "made wine,"** and the governor called it "the good wine."
- **The governor did not know where it came from; the servants did.**
- **This was the *beginning* of Jesus' signs** — he did no miracles before it.
- **By it he showed his glory, and his disciples believed on him.**
- **The Bible does not name the bride or the bridegroom,** or say they were relatives.
- **The Bible does not say Joseph was there,** or that he had died.

God's Will and Intent

- **God shows who His Son is** by the signs He does through him.
- **God cares about the ordinary needs and joys of His people,** even a family's embarrassment at a wedding.
- **God works in His own time,** and His Son acted only as his Father directed.

- **God blesses obedience** — those who did what Jesus said saw what God did.
- **God gives abundantly,** more and better than anyone asks.
- **God keeps the best until last:** His Son, and the joy of the kingdom to come.
- **God's purpose was the hour** — the cross, the empty tomb and the ascension — of which every sign was a pointer.