

4 *New Wine*

John 2:1–11



Getting started:

Did anything strange happen at your wedding or a wedding that you attended?

What is the funniest thing you've witnessed at a wedding?

After I had given a presentation on the claims of Christ, a skeptical student asked: “What proof do you have that Jesus really was who he claimed to be?” People have been asking that question for two thousand years! For John the convincing proof of Jesus' deity was found in his words and deeds. No one but God could say the things Jesus said, and no one but God could do the things Jesus did. (see *A Word About Miracles* at the end of this study)

In chapter two, John recounts the first of Jesus' miracles which displayed his power and authority over nature and demonstrated that he was the Son of God.

1. What initially convinced you that Jesus was more than a man?

2. Read John 2:1–11. When the groom's parents ran out of wine for their guests, Jesus' mother asked him to help (v. 3). What do you think Mary expected Jesus to do? (Remember, according to verse 11 Jesus had not yet performed any miracles.)

Question 2. In Jesus' day the wedding feast for the family and friends of the bride and groom lasted between two and seven days. The groom's parents were responsible for feeding and caring for all the guests the entire time. If they ran out of food or wine during the feast, it was considered a very serious insult to the guests.

The Gospels never refer to Joseph as alive during Jesus' adult years. Probably Joseph died during Jesus' young adulthood. As the oldest son, Jesus had the responsibility of caring for Mary and helping her. It was natural, then, in this time of need for Mary to come to Jesus for help.

3. What did Jesus mean by his reply to Mary in verse 4?

The term Jesus uses to address Mary, ("woman") is not disrespectful, as we would interpret it if someone said it today. It is the same word that Jesus uses when addressing his mother from the cross (John 19:26) and was a normal, polite way of addressing women (Matt. 15:28; Lk 13:12; John 4:21, 8:10, 19:26, 20:21).

The word "hour" occurs in John 2:4, 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28, 29; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:25; and 17:1. It usually refers to a special period in Jesus' life when he is to leave this world and return to the Father (13:1); the hour when the Son of Man is glorified (17:1). This will be accomplished through his suffering, death, and resurrection (7:30; 8:20; 12:23). In this passage, Jesus' remark to his mother indicates that the time for his self-manifestation has not yet arrived. His identity as Messiah is not yet to be publicly revealed.

4. In your opinion, why did Jesus command that the servants fill the pots with water (v. 7)? (Obviously, Jesus could have simply created wine in the empty pots.)

Question 4. Large water pots holding twenty to thirty gallons each were available at the feast for washing the feet of the guests as they arrived and for the subsequent ceremonial washing of hands required by Jewish tradition.

5. Can you think of a time when you knew God was telling you to do something, even when it didn't seem to make sense at the time?

What did you do?

6. If you had been a wedding guest, what do you imagine your reaction would have been to this miracle?

How did Jesus' disciples respond (v. 11)?

7. According to verse 11, the purpose of Jesus' miracle was not to save the groom from embarrassment but to display Christ's glory. What aspects of Christ's glory does this miracle reveal to you?

8. This miracle also showed that God was replacing that which was old and ineffective with the new. He is able to do that in our lives today as well. In the Bible, wine is sometimes a symbol of joy. Are you feeling low on joy in your life? Only Jesus can fill up your life with joy. What area of your life do you need to entrust to God today? In what area do you need to begin to obey Him?

A Word about Miracles

There are many who argue that miracles could not have happened because they are not explainable by the laws of nature. However, while science can determine with some certainty what happens most of the time, it cannot exhaustively verify that an outcome happens the same way all the time.

What Constitutes A Miracle?

"A popular but wrong, definition is to say that a miracle is a point in time in which God intervenes in the world.... That definition fails for one good reason: It gives the false impression that God only occasionally intervenes in the world. ... A miracle happens when God, who is continuously active in the world, breaks His usual pattern and does something extraordinary."¹

C. S. Lewis points out that Laws of nature are a description of what happens, not a handbook of rules to tell us what cannot happen. Science can only prove things that are verifiable through repeatable observation and experimentation. Science cannot prove anything that happened in history. Bible miracles are a matter of history, not of science. This means that the authenticity of a miraculous event requires historical investigation, not scientific.² "In choosing his laws of nature, therefore, the scientist should first consult history, and after deciding by historical evidence what has happened, should then choose his laws within the limits of historical actuality. The non-Christian thinker, intent on repudiating miracles, proceeds by a reverse method. He chooses his law without regard to historical limits, and then tries to rewrite history to fit his law. But surely this method is not only the reverse of Christian method, it is clearly the reverse of rational procedure as well."³

On the other hand, God had to create an orderly universe, or we would not recognize when He intervened miraculously in human history. Says Lewis: "Nothing can seem extraordinary until you have discovered what is ordinary. Belief in miracles, far from depending on an ignorance of the laws of nature, is only possible in so far as those laws are known. We have already seen that if you begin by ruling out the supernatural you will perceive no miracles. We must now add that you will equally perceive no miracles until you believe that nature works according to regular laws. If you have not yet noticed that the sun always rises in the East you will see nothing miraculous about its rising one morning in the West."⁴

For an in-depth look at the issue of miracles, see *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*. ed by Douglas Geivett & Gary Habermas (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

¹Erwin W. Lutzer. *Seven Convincing Miracles*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999) 16-17.

²Dan Story, *Defending Your Faith* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997), 160.

³E. J. Carnell, *Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 258.

⁴C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (NY: Macmillan, 1947), 46.

A Word about Wine

Some have looked to this passage as a justification for drinking alcohol. Others, in reaction to this have argued that Jesus must have made grape juice here. However, both of these views are taking things a little bit too far. There is no indication that Jesus made grape juice here. John writes that the host was amazed at the quality of the wine. If it were grape juice, they would have noticed right away. In addition, the Greek word used in John 2:1-11 for "wine" and in Paul's command to Timothy to drink wine (1 Tim. 5:23) is the term *oinos*. This same word appears in Eph. 5:18 ("be not drunk with wine") and Luke 10:34 ("and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine"). Obviously you cannot get drunk on grape juice, nor would you pour grape juice on a wound.

Without refrigeration, it did not take long for their juice to ferment, producing some alcoholic content. However, without distillation, the alcoholic content was much less than today. In fact, ancient sources tell us that they typically added 2-3 parts water to their wine to reduce the alcoholic content. Wine which was not diluted was considered "strong drink" and was only drunk to intoxication, which was frowned upon.

While the Bible does not command complete abstinence from alcohol per se, it clearly condemns intoxication (Prov. 20:1; 23:29-32; Eph 5:18; Rom 13:13; 1 Cor. 5:11; 1 Pet 4:3-4). Intoxication reduces our inhibitions and causes us to not think clearly. In addition, alcohol can be addictive and cause us to be its servant. Those with a family history of alcoholism must be particularly careful in drinking alcohol even in small amounts, since they have an increased risk of becoming addicted to it.

Often the Bible talks in terms of wise decisions and foolish ones. While drinking alcohol in moderation is not condemned in Scripture, one must also prayerfully consider whether it is always the wise choice, given the potential risks.

Finally, one must also consider one's testimony towards outsiders when choosing to drink.

As in all things regarding Christian liberty, we must also be on guard against having a critical or judgmental spirit towards those who exercise or restrict their liberties differently than we do.
