

Intro - Luke 2 25v35

Water into Wine – John 2v1-12

OT possibilities:-

Isaiah 51v3 – I will show compassion to Jerusalem to all who live in her ruins. Though her land is a desert, I will make it a garden like the garden I planted in Eden.

Find OT which predicts a time of plenty when there would be food for everyone and an end to illness and impurity. The rule of Satan will be replaced by the rule of God.

Intro

(Choosing a first impression) If you were going to choose a miracle to kick off your signs & wonders tour with. What would you do? Heal a blind person perhaps, help some-one in a wheelchair get up and walk. What did Jesus do? He turned a load of washing up water into the finest wine, which probably had the effect of making some tipsy wedding guests very drunk. That was the probable outcome of the first recorded public miracle.

(A bad sign?) Why do that?. We know from our study of miracles that the actual miracle itself and the legacy of what was done, was usually important than what it was telling people. John's gospel refers to the miracles as signs, if you like pointers to a deeper truth. But doesn't this miracle send the wrong message. Like most Christians I like a drink now and again, particularly a nice glass of Rioja, but I also understand the widespread problems caused by people of all ages and both sexes drinking too much. I have seen first hand how pleasant lads can turn very aggressive and break the law once they have had a few drinks. There are a lot of Christians who would much sooner that this story wasn't in the Bible. But if we take a much closer look at it, we'll see it does not have anything to do with whether or not we should drink alcohol in today's culture, and not a huge amount to do with weddings either, despite it being a very popular reading at weddings.

Context

Jesus is about 30 (Luke 3v23). This was the age when Levites began their temple service. The exact order of events is difficult, but my interpretation is that Jesus has been baptised and tempted for 40 days in the desert and travelled back to the Galilee district. Picked up some disciples and after the wedding he spends a short time in Capernaum then goes back to the Jordan Valley to rejoin John the Baptist and his disciples (John baptised at the South end of the Valley near Bethany which was just outside Jerusalem). Probably 3-4 days of walking to get there (130km?). It seems to me that Jesus had unfinished business in the Jordan Valley but came back for a specific reason to the area, probably the wedding itself. Why walk for 3 days, stay somewhere for a few days only then walk back again? Cana is so close to Nazareth, it could well have been a close relative getting married, perhaps one of his sisters was marrying a farmer in Cana. With their father dead, perhaps he felt as oldest brother a duty to be there.. Perhaps for this reason, there was some obligation on him to do something when the wind ran out. Speculation, but possible.

Cana – 4 miles NE of Nazareth, across hills that sheltered the new town of Sephoris where a Roman garrison was based, and where no doubt Jesus had picked up work as a journeyman carpenter.

V1-2 The impact of having them all at the wedding

See description of wedding in appendix.

V3-5 Jesus' altercation with his Mother

The wine gave out and Jesus' mother said to him 'They have no wine left'

'Jesus is quite abrupt, seemingly rude with Mary. 'Woman' is not particularly rude for then, but the next phrase 'What is this to do with you', was rude.

Mary knew from prophecies, words of the Wise Men & Simeon something of Jesus' mission. She pondered these things in her heart. But this was all filtered through her worldview. And her love as a Mother for Jesus. Part of her thinks she knows what's best for Jesus/ But Jesus is taking his lead direct from his Father not from his Mother. He cannot be distracted by sentiment for him, or others moulding him into something which is not what God his Father is intended. He is vulnerable to this, perhaps tempted at times for a safer option. A good example is Peter telling Jesus he won't let him die, and Jesus responding 'Get behind me Satan'. He did not want to be dictated to, but perhaps he reconsidered because Jesus could see this would be a way to start teaching his early followers about his mission. Mary seemed to still know enough about Jesus' nature to know that he would do something to help, she took the reproof without complaint or come-back and then instructed the servants to do whatever Jesus told them.

V6-8 The numbers involved and what they meant

The water in the stone jars is stated to be for the Jewish rites of purification (representing the old ways).

6 stone water jars containing over 120 gallons of wine. If you drank a bottle of red wine every two days., then this cellar load would last you over 4 years. [Approx, 750 bottles]

6 in Rabbinic numerology is one short of 7 or perfection, so 6 in Rabbinic numerology depicts 'deficiency'. i.e. the old ways are now deficient.

But the issue is not to do with the the exact measure of new wine, but the fact that is Jesus had made it super-abundant. There was far more than needed at the wedding feast. If there were 100 guests at the wedding then there would have been an extra 7 or more bottles of wine each over what you had already drunk. You can't drink that much in one night

He is not just catering for 200 wedding guests, but has to meet the needs of a lost world, current population greater than xxx billion. Jesus is not the owner of a tiny winecellar but the steward of a huge storeroom with no sides.

V9-10 Water into wine

(a trick ?) Some consider it more of a party trick. But magic tricks are all about the big build up. Magicians revel in the bafflement of their audience. How did he do that? Jesus does not even announce to the party-goers what's going on.

Jesus makes no noise but just wills the water into wine. He has it taken to the Governor of the feast. This man is in charge of the feast to make sure that no-one has too little or too much, and that there is no disorder. He does not know where the wine has come from, but declares it the best of wines, and is bemused why the host did not use the best wine first.

V11-12 Impact on disciples and family – First jigsaw piece

Like many miracles this was done primarily as a sign for his disciples. He is putting together a picture of the New Kingdom, the New Covenant or Agreement. Jesus is starting out on his ministry, with new disciples and is laying down the first piece of the jigsaw in his coaching and mentoring of those closest to him. The first of a sequence of signs that shaped Jesus' sense of who he was and what he was doing. The first sign of the new Kingdom, the new covenant. Radical new teaching in the face of the yoke that the tidal wave of Jewish laws burdens the normal folk. Bit by bit, he is teaching them, until after 3 years they finally get it. A bit like A Rolf Harris painting. "Do you know what it is yet?". Bit by bit, piece by piece – like a jigsaw, and here we see him laying down perhaps the first piece of the jigsaw for them. He is going to tell them this in different ways right up to the night before he dies at the Last Supper

The New Covenant

OT – CF: Moses turned water into blood . Blood and sacrifice looms large in the Old Covenant.

But blood is replaced by wine in the new Covenant. Weddings are regularly depicted as symbolic of Gods new kingdom. There are 5 parables which mention weddings. Christ is often depicted as the Groom, with the bride as his Church.

The miracle is about the new covenant of God/Christ with his people, replacing the old with the new; a new pouring out of Gods spirit. In the Gospel tradition 'new wine' stands for 'new life of Gods Kingdom'. The New teaching could not be contained in the old ways of the Pharisees.

Jesus said he came to fulfil Gods Law not to replace it, but he had come to replace what the Jews had done to it. The written laws, oral laws, Rabbinic codes. Not just 10 commandments, but 248 positive commandments (ones you must do) & 365 -ve ones (you must not do) i.e. wear linen & wool garments together!).

The Old Covenant is a lists of rule and measures which you try and comply with. Do all this and you will be alright with God, but because you will still sin then you have to sacrifice something at the temple to atone for this. Its like having work targets. Which you must meet or you will be sacked/demoted. You do what you have to do, but its not much fun and you are not going to put in any discretionary effort. The New Covenant encourages you to do even more for God, but its your choice, and he will rejoice is what you do. Its like having a good boss who gives you good feedback, and helps you develop in a way you enjoy more, but you want to go that extra mile for him, to please him, and to get the most from the job yourself. This is like the new wine, the new covenant. Then if you get it wrong, you sit down for a simple meal of bread and wine and ask for forgiveness. In the old the yoke (or the burden) is heavy, in the new, the burden is light.

For Jesus a key element of the Kingdom is in these new fellowship meals in which Gods presence comes. This is the new order. Whilst Jesus retains his love for the temple, and insists he has come to fulfil the law he strikes at the belief system that says you can only be in Gods presence in the temple, and through animal sacrifices. Jesus develops his 'New Covenant' theme of God being present in fellowship meals, and in the act of communion where we remember that he has become the sacrifice, no more need for animals, the bread & the wine has taken on new significance.

[Also expound Mark 2 v19-22]

What it means to us.

The wine did not just appear out of nothing. Jesus took normal water and turned it into wine.

Jesus did not come as a new super being, but came as an ordinary looking man, with a normal character and nature, which he made divine.

Our lives/purposes may seem ordinary/normal but it is through our ordinary lives that his divine purposes are fulfilled.

In one sense, the main business of the Christian is to go through the world turning water into wine (being the salt and the light).

But as Christians we do that under the new covenant, this arrangement and relationship we have with Jesus, which places us not just under his favour but under his superabundance. A super-abundance of love, grace, patience and forgiveness, so we can step out and make mistakes but never find ourselves separated from Him. We also had his Holy Spirit with us, making all things possible, not guaranteed (as that's up to God's will) but possible. In our way we have the power to turn transform the ordinary in this life (the water) into the extra-ordinary (the best wine) that which reflects God's Kingdom and Glory,.

So this parable is not about how good it is to get married, and it's not a justification for us to drink significant quantities of alcoholic beverages. It is about having Jesus' Holy Spirit to make a difference in and through our lives, and the super-abundance of blessings that are available to us through this new agreement, this new covenant.

Seek his presence, and ask for his blessings, take from this super-abundance that is available for you. Start turning to the ordinary things of this world, into the extra-ordinary things through his Spirit.

Amen