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The Lord of Ordinary Life – John 2:1-11 – May 31, 2009

¹On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ²and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

⁴"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied, "My time has not yet come."

⁵His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

⁶Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

⁷Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

⁸Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, ⁹and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

¹¹This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

Today (and for a couple of weeks, I think) we're going to talk about miracles and miraculous power. (Planned on following up with a similar talk tonight, but something better came up – Faith's presentation). Miracles. We believe in these because we pray for them. We don't believe in them strongly enough because we don't expect them to happen.

If you ever do a study of the miracles of Jesus and you look specifically at the Gospel of John, you'll notice that John really wants you to know that there was a reason, a big, guiding purpose for each miracle Jesus did, and the reason was to demonstrate that he was in fact Lord over every area of life. Some miracles, for example show that Jesus is Lord over nature. Others show that he is Lord over the Law. Some show that he is the Lord over death itself – obviously when he raises someone from the dead. for example, or the law, or sickness, or even death itself. These were the things people feared, things they felt powerless against. "Who are we" they wondered "to stand against the weather, or the teachers of the Law, or disease or famine or death?" These things made slaves of them, but then came this Man who showed that he was the Lord over disease and the teachers of the Law and death.

And then there's this first miracle he did that showed, among other things, that Jesus was and is the Lord over ordinary life too.

John himself explains at the end of his Gospel why he put in it the things that he did:

"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples that are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name" (Jn. 20:30,31).

John also makes frequent use of the word “sign” to describe the miracles, more so than any other NT writer. John knew that Jesus wasn’t just doing miracles. He was giving signs. That means that, as important as the miracles were in and of themselves, they each pointed beyond themselves. For example, when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, you’ll agree that this was a rather important day in Lazarus’ life (not to mention his afterlife!) But as important as it was to Lazarus and his sisters, it was even more important as a sign, pointing those with eyes to see to the true identity of Jesus. When Nicodemus came to Jesus, he said: **“We know you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him” (Jn. 3:1)**. Many in the crowds who followed Jesus put their faith in him because, as they asked, **“When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?” (Jn. 7:31)**. In Peter’s famous Pentecost Sermon, he said: **“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did among you through him” (Acts 2:22)**. Signs, however, point to Jesus’ true identity, but they don’t compel belief. John says in **12:37, “Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.”** Jesus himself got frustrated at how the crowds seemed to depend on his miracles for their faith. He said: **“Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe” (Jn. 4:48)**.

So miracles didn’t always convince people, and Jesus seemed to think that people who believed ONLY because of a steady stream of miracles weren’t very solid believers – in fact, they were mercenaries, in it for the benefits. Nevertheless, his miracles WERE supposed to be signs. “These miracles are written that you may believe...” It’s my hope that as we talk about miracles, you and I both will believe more, and that our faith in him and our dedication to him will increase. In him is life. There is no other worth following with all you have.

Now let’s think about that miracle at Cana, at the wedding – turning water into wine. First thing: Sometimes when Jesus healed someone, he told them to keep it quiet, and we wonder why he was so publicity-shy. But here it’s easy to see why he didn’t advertise this miracle. Can you imagine how many parties Jesus would’ve been invited to? “Jesus, we have 50 guests here, but I only bought one bottle of wine. Any ideas?”

So why did Jesus do this miracle? What kind of a sign was it? What did it demonstrate about him and about his Lordship? How might it increase belief? And why did he do this miracle first, and kick off his ministry with something like this?

In a way, it seems like he was roped into it. He was there as a guest and his mother came and dropped a pretty big hint, “They have no more wine”. Of course that was the immediate reason, but I don’t think there were any accidents in the order of his ministry either.

Lets start with the symbolism. Despite the fact that Jesus seems reluctant to do this miracle at first (“Dear woman, why do you involve me?”), the details couldn’t have been planned any better to make this miracle into a message, and I think it’s actually one of his most symbolic miracles. First off, what kind of an event is this? A wedding. The celebration of new life together, a new family, the uniting of two people. We see some of that imagery much later from John’s pen in **Revelation 19 and 21** when the end of time and the beginning of the next age are described as the marriage supper of the Lamb, and the union of Christ and his church is called a wedding. Jesus talked about it this way too. When someone asked why his disciples didn’t fast, he said in **Luke 5:34: “Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?”** In **John 3:29, 30**, when John the Baptist was losing followers to Jesus, John’s disciples thought he should be jealous, but John said: **“The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who**

attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less." So Scripture testifies that Christ's love for us and our union with him is like a groom for his bride, so the occasion of this miracle is highly appropriate and it wouldn't have been quite the same miracle if done somewhere else.

Greater than that is the source of the water Jesus uses, the containers themselves. What are they? "Six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing." In other words, these were jars devoted to the Old Testament way of cleaning yourself up before God. To be ceremonially clean in order to enter the temple and do your religion, you first had to wash your hands with holy water from special jars like these. Well we all understand that Jesus came to fulfill and replace that old order. He became the sacrificial lamb of God whose blood cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Further, you understand that when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, he took wine and said "This is the blood of the New Covenant", and the wine stood for that cleansing blood. So, when Jesus took this holy water used for cleansing in the old way, and turned it into wine, what a powerful symbol of the new thing God was getting ready to do. So the very method in which he did the miracle was important, and it wouldn't have been the same miracle if he had taken the water in any old jar and turned it into wine.

Also, you know that Jesus referred to his Kingdom as new wine, which could not be contained by the "old wineskins" of works, traditionalism and legalism. So if we're looking for the meaning of this sign, well, what better way for the new wine of the Kingdom to be announced to the world than with the production of some good new wine?

But symbolism aside, there's another, simpler meaning here - especially when you consider that Jesus didn't go seeking to do this miracle - it came to him. And he almost seems reluctant to do it. Jesus did this miracle - and this is true of most every miracle he did - in response to a normal, everyday need that someone had. He did it because they needed wine. And he was kind, and his mother asked him, and he could provide, so he did provide. Oh, I know it seems so trivial - we'd never think of going to God today because we're running out of pizza on Wednesday night! A trivial need! But in a sense, even our deepest needs could often be called trivial from God's perspective. From eternity's viewpoint, how much difference is there between a request for release from disease and a request for release from embarrassment? He's God, and he's so much bigger than us!

And yes, it's such a temporary miracle too! Drinks for a few hours more. But that's true of all of Jesus' miracles save one - the resurrection. The 5,000 were fed lunch and had leftovers for supper, but soon it was breakfast time, and Jesus was gone. Even Lazarus eventually died again.

Yes it is trivial, and temporary. But this need is just part of the fabric of ordinary life, where we spend most of our days, and Jesus was (and is) the Lord of ordinary life.

Years ago, I had a little faded red Ford Escort that often failed me and provided me with good sermon illustrations. One hot summer day, I went to Knoxville in my non-A/C 'ed Escort to meet another minister. I pulled up to a stoplight at a very busy intersection. I waited and waited for the light to turn green. Traffic piled up behind me. (It's one of those lights where, when you get a green light, you don't delay - you, and all of the cars in your line, blast as fast as you can to try to slip through before it changes, or else you're in for another long wait). I was about third in line. As soon as the light turned green, my engine died. I tried to start it. Nothing. I began to sweat (harder). I looked in my mirror, and saw cars trying to pull around me. About 2 of them got through before the light turned red. Now I really felt the pressure. I had to get that car started, if just long enough to move it.

What do you think I did in that situation? I prayed.

What do you think happened then?

No, God didn't start the car. But he did provide for me, as Lord over ordinary life. First, he provided for me enough perspective so that I didn't lose my temper (some might call that a great miracle, especially back then). A situation like that (especially in those days) would often infuriate me. Not that day. I kind of enjoyed the adventure. He also provided for me to receive acts of kindness and generosity. The guys working at the Midas shop nearby came out and helped me push the car safely off the road. None of the drivers who were inconvenienced by the Escort beeped their horns or yelled at me. The minister I was going there to meet went out of his way to come get me. Some folks from the church came and towed the car back to Kingston. Some other guys devoted hours trying to fix it. This was true generosity, and it warmed me to receive it. God provided it. Best of all, he provided one other thing: I never had to drive that car again!

Now, that might seem like a trivial thing to pray for (but you weren't the one sitting in traffic!) However, my God is the Lord of ordinary life. He isn't just The God of the Big Deal, he cares about everything you're involved in. The miracle at the wedding feast is one important illustration of this.

That's why we should pray to him, conversationally, about the "little things." Of course, he doesn't always give us what we ask for. I didn't ask for patience or the kindness of strangers and friends, I asked him to start my car and get me on to my meeting. But He's the One who is God, and He said he will answer my prayers, but he doesn't let me run the universe for him. He gave me things that were better than starting my car (far better!)

Some of you are struggling with your prayer life, and it is partly because you think of prayer in terms of that 15-minute block of time at the beginning or end of the day that you never quite get to, but which, if you did get to it, would be where you lifted up needs to God. Well that 15-minute block (or 30 min., or an hour) is important. But how much better off we are when we expand our thinking about prayer and begin to talk to God conversationally at any time of day - about the blessings, the challenges, the big decisions and the small irritations. Talk to him as you drive to work. Talk to him just before you lose your temper (not after). Talk to him before you borrow money, before you need a bailout from a bad decision. Ask him for the things you think you need. Remember, Jesus gives the impression here that he didn't plan to do this miracle, but he did do it because Mary asked. Thank him for your food. Pray a short prayer with your family before you all leave the house. It's called walking with God. He's there, so talk to him. If that doesn't seem a sufficiently dignified way to talk to God, or if you think that you'll do God the favor of not bothering him with the small things when he's got the economy on his mind, you don't understand that Jesus revealed our God to be the Lord Over Ordinary Life.

The turning of water into wine is by no means a pointless miracle. Look at v. 11 and see what John says about it: **¹¹This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.** This miracle showed the disciples not only that Jesus was powerful. It showed them that he cared about the things people cared about. They saw his glory in that, and so they put their faith in him.

Prayer Invitation