

Theme: Signs of the Kingdom

A couple were having their 20th wedding anniversary and on the morning the wife came down stairs to find her husband sobbing his heart out.

She sympathetically asked what was wrong.

The husband replied, do you remember when we were young and your dad caught us together and said to me if you don't marry my daughter you'll go to jail for 20 years – well today I would be a free man.

I really enjoyed my wedding day, we had a meaningful service and a great reception.

There was one glitch at the reception.

We had booked an English Manor house with an elegant reception room.

We had given the management a table plan of where we wanted all the guests seated.

Everyone went in before us and was seated, then Melanie and I were welcomed.

As we came in we noticed at one table people were seated in the wrong places.

The people setting out the tables had the plan around the wrong way and had seated the important guests far from us and the not so important guests near the head table.

That meant that grandmothers, aunts and uncles were seated at the back, while the friends you were sure whether or not to invite had the best seats.

Some of you might think that was a cunning move to seat your relatives as far away as possible, but we were a bit upset because we felt it was their day to celebrate with us.

Worse things have happened, and I imagine all of us would have tales to tell about the weddings we have attended.

When you want the celebration to be just right, there are so many things that could go wrong.

At the wedding in Cana the wine ran out. This is not a little problem, not just a social embarrassment; rather in this culture it was to break faith with your guests and it could in some circumstances mean you would have to pay restitution.

This would not be a good start to a wedding.

I think it is fair to say that all of us, at one time or another, will attend a wedding.

Depending on the size of your family or group of friends some of you will attend many weddings.

Many of you will have been at your own wedding and even more of you will have been part of a wedding party as bridesmaids or groomsmen.

When you were children, some of you might have been flower girls or page boys.

Weddings are a very common part of community life.

They are times of joy and celebration.

Time for family and friends to get together and feast.

Every wedding is a special occasion, but they are not rare of unusual events, rather they are part of everyday life.

It is not surprising that we have a story about Jesus going to a wedding.

This is probably not the first wedding he had been to.

In Jesus' day weddings gave reason for the whole village to celebrate.

Most people lived in relatively small communities and so it wouldn't be surprising if most of the village was at the wedding.

What seems surprising is that a common wedding in an obscure village with an unknown couple would be the setting for the first key sign that Jesus truly was the messiah.

Let's recap to put this chapter in context:

In our study of John's gospel we have found his purpose for writing is so ... *you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* Jn 20:31

John records the stories we read today to help us believe in Jesus.

It is noticeable at the end of the wedding story John writes, *This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.* (Jn 2:11).

And at the end of the temple story John wrote, *After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.* (Jn 2:22).

John has written this so we will believe in Jesus. So when we read the stories it is helpful to ask, *how does this help me believe Jesus is the Son of God?*

In the first chapter of the gospel John hammered home a number of superlative titles revealing the divinity of Jesus:

The Word who was God

The creator of all that exists

The True light

God, the One and Only

Greater than Moses and greater than John the Baptist

The Lamb of God

The Son of God x2

The Messiah

The King of Israel

Therefore as we read chapter 2, and later chapters we can ask,

does Jesus measure up to these titles,
does he deserve them,
or are his actions consistent with what John has claimed about him?

A little bit of information may help us get more out of this story.

Firstly from the Old Testament.

The people of Jesus' day looked to the Old Testament and in it found the promise of a Messiah who would be sent from God.

They understood the coming of the Messiah would be time of great abundance.

In Amos we read, *New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills.* Am 9:13

In Joel we read, *"I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully;* (Joe 2:19).

Providing people with an abundance of wine could be interpreted as fulfilling the OT promises of God.

Also from the Old Testament – the image of betrothal and marriage was used to symbolise the relationship between God and Israel.

God says, *I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord.* (Ho 2:19-20).

And the final piece of information which helps set the scene is from the New Testament, where the end of time/the return of Jesus is pictured as a wedding celebration.

Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!' " And he added, "These are the true words of God." (Re 19:9).

Jesus the groom, returns to claim the church, his Bride and together we enjoy the wedding supper of the lamb of God.

Because Jesus is called the lamb of God, this is known as the wedding feast of the lamb.

We need to keep these things in mind when we read about the wedding at Cana.

Doing this helps us to helps us to see the underlying symbolism of what is happening at the wedding.

It is not Jesus doing a magic trick with water.

It is an action which makes big claims about who Jesus really is.

Today we are looking at two related stories, the miracle of the wine and the claim to rebuild the temple in 3 days.

Wedding at Cana

A bit like Havelock and Havelock North there were two places called Cana. John gives us detail of the location so we know this was Cana in Galilee.

Cana was a small village which could be seen from Nazareth, the village Jesus grew up in.

It is possible this was a wedding of close friends or even family. The way Mary fusses when the wine runs out might indicates she was not just a guest on the fringe but

someone on the inside who felt some obligation to put things right

Jesus, by attending their wedding and blessing the couple with a miracle, reveals his support for the tradition of marriage.

I don't know if Jesus was the life and soul of the party, but the gospels tell us about him being invited to different social events and having meals in different settings.

I imagine him laughing, telling stories and joining in with the banter and happiness of the wedding.

I can imagine him there with his disciples building up a good relationship with them.

The problem occurs and they run out of wine at the wedding.

The bride and groom were obliged to provide for the guests at the wedding, so this was more than a slight embarrassment, it would humiliate them.

Jesus' miracle, while unseen and unknown by most of the guests, was a loving gesture which benefited the newlyweds.

Jesus provided between 550 and 820 litres of wine. That is between 700 and 1000 bottles of the best wine. It could be as much as 6000 glasses.

We are not talking about nipping down to the liquor store for a few bottles to tide things over, this is a significant amount of wine.

This is an abundance of wine. It would provide for the party and leave enough for the couple to sell providing them with a great start in life.

The six stone jars used in this miracle are important to the story.

They are made of stone rather than clay. Clay was thought to become spiritually impure more easily than stone.

The stone jars contained water for spiritual purification. They are large because a great deal of water was needed for the constant cleansing which was required of a good Jew.

At every meal and also at times in between, the Jews would go through a ritual cleansing to maintain spiritual purity.

Containing water for purification, these stone jars are taken to represent the OT system of the Law.

Leon Morris, a Biblical Scholar, says that in this miracle – *Jesus turns the water of Judaism into the wine of Christianity; the water of the law into the wine of the gospel.*

Wine takes on new meaning in Jesus' ministry.

Luke records Jesus' words at the last supper ... *In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.* Lk 22:20

Wine is the symbol of the New Covenant, the new agreement between God and humanity.

Wine symbolises the blood of Jesus that was poured out for our forgiveness.

We shouldn't see the wedding at Cana as some sort of early communion, but the symbolism of the wine is significant.

The beginning of Jesus' public ministry begins with a miracle to provide an abundance of wine, wine which would soon come to symbolise his death.

In this story Jesus' miracle of changing water into wine is a sign that he is the messiah, who fulfils the OT promise of abundance and it is a sign that the KOG is near.

The setting of a wedding brings to mind God's promise to be a husband who provides for Israel.

It also prepares for the imagery of Revelation where Jesus comes for his bride the church.

This reminds us Jesus is ushering a new spiritual age, a new Kingdom.

The second story is related to the first.

In the first story with the common setting of a wedding, in the remote and obscure village of Cana, the Messiah provides new wine that replaces the OT purification.

In the second story, in the biggest city, set during the Passover, the biggest spiritual gathering, and at the temple, the heart of Judaism, Jesus claims authority over the temple precincts and even to be the true temple.

Jesus clears the temple courts, driving out those selling animal sacrifices and changing money.

What should have been something good, helping people to celebrate the Passover, had become a rip off with people losing money when buying temple currency and losing again when they had to buy animals for the sacrifices.

Added to the problem, they had set up the stalls in the area which had been set aside for Gentiles to pray.

A place of prayer had been turned into a market place.

The authorities are a bit stuck because public opinion would have been with Jesus and the authorities knew in their hearts they were in the wrong.

The Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus asked him for a sign to prove his authority.

They were two-faced, dishonest in asking this.

At that time Jesus was doing signs among them, but they wanted more, bigger and better signs.

They couldn't have missed what Jesus was doing because he was doing signs so openly, and we read ... *at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. (Jn 2:23).*

In the next chapter Nicodemus, who was one of the leading council members confessed to Jesus, *Rabbi, 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 3:2).*

They had already seen signs, they already knew Jesus was someone special.

Their request for a sign was duplicitous because they already had signs and they were not going to believe any sign that didn't suit their own purposes.

Throughout his ministry Jesus would do many wonderful signs, but John sums up the attitude of the authorities at the end of the book of signs saying, *Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. (Jn 12:37).*

It didn't matter what Jesus did, they were not convinced and always asked for another sign.

In our story Jesus offers them the biggest sign of all, *Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days. (Jn 2:19).*

To be honest, if I had been there I wouldn't have thought Jesus meant his body. What Jesus meant was cloaked, hidden from their understanding.

I can understand why the leaders were confused by this. Jesus' own disciples didn't understand it until after he rose from the dead.

The greatest and most glorious sign given would be Jesus rising from the dead – but when it happened did they believe – NO!

By offering this sign Jesus is pointing to his death and resurrection.

In Matthew we find Jesus commenting on the temple and claiming about himself, *I tell you that one greater than the temple is here.* (Mt 12:6).

All that the physical temple stood for, the presence of God, the possibility of forgiveness and the privilege of worship, would be surpassed in the person of Jesus.

He was God present among them. He did offer his life, the Lamb of God for the forgiveness of all who would believe. He was worthy of their praise, because he was the Son of God.

John wrote this temple story so we would believe in Jesus.

This story points to Jesus knowledge of the future, of his death and resurrection.

This is divine knowledge which was hidden from humanity was known to Jesus.

Also he is claiming to be a temple, an image which suggests he was more than a mere man.

It points to the truth that just as in the Old Testament people should approach God by worshipping at the physical temple, now Jesus supersedes that and people should worship God by approaching him through Jesus.

This can make a difference to the way we see Jesus and to our strength of belief in him

Sadly, we can't go to weddings and miraculously supply the wine. I doubt many wedding venues have the required stone jars holding water for purification. We can note the kindness of Jesus' miracle. He could have done something spectacular as Satan suggested and jumped from the highest point in the temple. That might have grabbed people's attention for a moment, but then they would have asked for more. Rather Jesus' first miracle is unseen by most, but provides for the need of many, particularly the newlyweds. Neither can we go to the temple – it has been in ruins for around 1930 years.

God is speaking to us through the stories John has recorded.

We couldn't be there ourselves, so John takes us along with him and lets us take a good look at Jesus.

John takes us to a wedding and then to the temple in Jerusalem.

In this way he allows us to see and hear what Jesus does and says.

The point of these verses is to help us see who Jesus is, and when we believe in him it makes a difference to us.

If Jesus is the Messiah who was greater than the temple then it makes a significant difference in our lives.

These signs and claims challenge us to believe in Jesus; and for those who already believe this affirms our trust in Jesus.

Jesus is the Son of God.

This sign is not simply about his power to change water into wine – it is a sign he is the messiah, sent by God and the person we should trust and follow.

Jesus clearing the temple is not simply about moving the traders out, it is claiming authority over the temple, claiming to be greater than the temple.

So I invite you to spend some time today or this week reading these stories.

Think about the meaning which lies behind them.

Think about the significance of the claims being made about Jesus.

Allow your faith in Jesus to be stimulated and strengthened by these events and teachings.

And let us as a church hold evermore firmly to our faith in Jesus the Messiah.