

January 20, 2019

*John 2:1-11: **“When the Wine Runs Out”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

At Cana in Galilee we have a wedding. Jewish weddings were important and joyful occasions in the lives of the bride and groom and their extended families, and the entire community joined in the celebration. Every wedding is a picture of something spiritual. God has created man to be a picture of himself, and he has created woman to be a symbol of humanity as a whole. When a man and woman are joined together in marriage, they are designed by God to point us to a greater wedding. God wants to marry us on a spiritual level forever.

Since the fall into sin, the picture of marriage has become horribly distorted. Since men and women are all a mess, and marriages are touched by grief, and the similarities and distinctions between men and woman are now horribly blurred, the whole institution is a wreck. Most people can hardly see how marriage has anything to do with God and humanity. In the reception of the wedding at Cana, the wine runs out. That pretty much sums up marriage in this rebellious and imperceptive world. Wine runs out.

Now, in the Bible wine can be a symbol of joy and celebration in a right relationship with the Lord. An abundance of wine is a particular blessing. The prophet Joel writes (2:24-26):

The threshing floors shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten... You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

The absence of wine can be a hardship or a judgment from God, as Isaiah writes (24:7-11):

The wine mourns, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh. The mirth of the tambourines is stilled, the noise of the jubilant has ceased, the mirth of the lyre is stilled. No more do they drink wine with singing; strong drink is bitter to those who drink it. The wasted city is broken down; every house is shut up so that none can enter. There is an outcry in the streets for lack of wine; all joy has grown dark; the gladness of the earth is banished.

When the wine runs out, it is a picture that tells us first and foremost that there is something wrong with our relationship with God. When the wine runs out at the wedding at Cana in Galilee it is catastrophic. The symbol of joy and celebration has vanished. Without God and the hope of our forever relationship with him joy and celebration disappears.

Has the wine run out in your life? Are you running on empty? Whenever we are disconnected from the Lord, or when we find ourselves allowing the sinful flesh to have dominion over us, true joy and celebration suffers. The future doesn't look so bright. Sin in general and our own sinful natures are constantly trying to rob us of the joy and celebration that is ours in a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We may work hard to fill ourselves up through many means, but the bottom line is that the end of this life is stone cold. There is nothing but death and hell.

Spiritually speaking, we are looking for the joy and celebration that lasts. But down here the joys and celebrations are fleeting, and don't touch upon the forever future. You can have everything in the world, but what good is it if your inner being is tormented, or will be tormented without end because you do not have the only thing that is truly meaningful and lasts forever? To have no wine is to have no solution to this messed up world. To have no wine is to not have the one who has made and saved us. And while we may find what we may call "cheap wine," it will not last. The "good wine" is the wine that comes from the forgiveness of sins, and with that, the joy and celebration of heaven.

A small boy was asked on a television variety show if he attended Sunday school. When he said he did, he was asked, "What are you learning?" "Last week," came the reply, "our lesson was about when Jesus went to the wedding and made water into wine." "And what did you learn from the story?" After thinking for a moment, the boy answered, "If you're having a wedding, make sure that Jesus is there!"

There's a lot of truth in what that boy had to say. Joy and celebration is not what is found in the wine, but ultimately in the one who is behind the wine - the one who has made it and can sustain it. In this life down here, the wine has run out because of sin, death, and the power of the devil, but in our midst is the one who can turn all of that around. The one who can deal with the emptiness is the one who will allow us to really see the depths of that emptiness so that we may be filled with him. We should not forget that his mother came up to him to inform him of the fact that there wasn't anymore wine, and in her prayer is also our own. The point is that she knew that he could do something about it and trusted that he would take care of all things despite the harsh words that he spoke to her.

Sometimes we feel that when Jesus allows the wine to run out and doesn't appear to do anything about it, as we think he should, we feel that he is out to get us. The truth is that we are bid to trust that he has it all under control. He bids us to focus on that which we must consider. In the text, he focuses the attention on the stone water jars that were appointed for ceremonial washing in order that we might know how he provides the wine that we truly need to drink. In other words, the stone water jars take us to the cross and the work of redemption that Jesus did for us there to bring us to the forever wine of joy and celebration in the kingdom of heaven.

The mission and purpose of Jesus isn't strictly about providing the earthly comforts of wine at a wedding, but a wine that is far greater than that. That is why he attaches the wedding wine to the ceremonial water jars for purification. We often think that what is empty in our lives must be filled with more of the down here, but Jesus takes the earthly concepts of wedding and wine and transcends it to our greatest need of all. We need to be married to our Lord and drink deeply from his miracle wine - the joy and celebration that comes from the forgiveness of sins and our being with him forever.

In this house at Cana were six stone water jars used for ceremonial washing. By focusing on these, Jesus wants us to understand that our real need is spiritual. Our real need, and the source of joy and celebration is to have him and only what he can do. Jesus commanded that these jars be filled to the brim with water. It all doesn't seem to have anything to do with what is most needed. One can imagine that the servants must have thought to themselves, "how is this going to help the lack of wine?" And yet, a miracle

takes place. The wine that flows from the six stone water jars used for ceremonial washing indelibly marks what we really need from the Lord.

You see, the six stone water jars used for ceremonial washing were a symbol of the Law. The Law reminds us that because of sin we are all running on empty. Simply having more earthly wine isn't the solution to anguish and despair. Nothing can be done by our power to somehow create joy and celebration. Rather, Christ changes the harsh Law into the sweet wine of the Gospel. What we are unable to do, Jesus does by fulfilling the Law and sending us the wine of real purification in the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. These are the real and true cause of joy and celebration. Wine is just a symbol of it all. He is the only one who truly knows what our needs are, and his timing to save us and give us the wine of forever joy and celebration are best left in his hands. Luther writes:

For when the heart hears that Christ fulfills the Law for us and takes our sin upon himself, it no longer cares that impossible things are demanded by the Law ... This is because the heart now has in Christ all that the Law demands ... the Law is delightful now and easy which before was disagreeable, difficult, and impossible; for it lives in the heart by the Spirit.

Our hearts are in need of a wedding and wine that are far greater than what we can find down here, a mere picture that is now so distorted. We need the wedding and wine that only Jesus can provide by the fulfilling of the Law for us and the sacrificing of himself on the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Through the eyes of faith, the wedding and the wine are here in the Sacrament of the Altar, for Jesus says, "I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom (Matthew 26:29)." And so, we look forward to that moment, when the eyes of faith give way to immortal eyes that see our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our groom face to face, and the words of the book of Revelation are fulfilled (19:6-9):

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott