

The First Sign of Jesus
by Forrest C. Gilmore

James Bailey tells about the first time that he was in Disneyland with his children.(1)

I had waited a long time. The day arrived, and I was in Disneyland for the first time. My four children could not have been more excited than I was; I stood at the entrance to the Magic Kingdom excited, filled with great anticipation. Hypnotized by the splendor, I pondered how all this could be created-these miracles, these unexplainable signals and objects. Suddenly I was bumped out of my trance by two elderly ladies. Catching my balance, I apologized, "Pardon me." They not only did not hear me, but they never saw me as they walked on, knitting. Initially, I was impressed with the fact that they could knit while they walked. Then I realized that while they might be able to knit while they walked, they were missing the Magic Kingdom - purl one and purl two, they never missed a stitch. The sweater began to emerge, but they were missing the Magic Kingdom - a world filled with all kinds of miracles and incomprehensible things, a world of joy and happiness.

What about you? Are you so occupied with the mundane affairs of the day that you are missing the Magic Kingdom? We just celebrated Christmas -- did you miss the miracle in this celebration?

The Apostle John tells us about a miracle that happened in a small village called Cana in Galilee.

John 2:1-11 (NASB)

1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there;

2 and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding.

3 When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said* to Him, "They have no wine."

4 And Jesus said* to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come."

5 His mother said* to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."

6 Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each.

7 Jesus said* to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." So they filled them up to the brim.

8 And He said* to them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it to him.

9 When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called* the bridegroom,

10 and said* to him, "Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now."

11 This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.

The Bible tells us very little about Cana. In fact, it is mentioned only in John's Gospel. We know that Nathanael, one of The Twelve, was from Cana, and it was in Cana where Jesus healed a nobleman's son, who lay sick in Capernaum. *This village was so insignificant that it was 1800 years before Bible scholars were able to discern where it was.* The synoptic gospels do not tell us about this event. It is the Apostle John, writing many years later, who gives us more spiritual insights into the events of Jesus' life, and he felt this event was significant. What was it that he saw in this event?

Jewish weddings were special celebrations, and went on for days. The groom's family had to provide all that was needed for the celebration. At this event, Jesus and His mother had been invited, so it was likely that they were relatives of the family in Cana. Of course, Jesus and His family was of humble means, and it was likely that this family in Cana was not very wealthy. The wine served at these events was very important. It

was the standard beverage at meals, since good, drinkable water, was not always available. In fact, we are told that 6 stone jars that normally held water for ceremonial washings were there, but they were empty. Of course, as the adults drank more and more wine, the celebration became more lively and joyous. When the wine ran out, it was an embarrassment for the host.

Mary felt some responsibility for the situation, apparently, or at least she felt that Jesus could help in some way. "They have no wine!" she said to Jesus. What was she thinking? She wanted to do a simple favor, but where did she expect that Jesus could get more wine? Was she anticipating that Jesus could perform a miracle?

Some readers sense that when Jesus responded that He even rebuked His mother, but He used the same expression when He spoke to her from the cross, when he said, in John 19:26 - "Woman, behold thy son!" So Jesus responded, showing respect, but expressing a little concern. "My dear woman," He replied. "Why is this our concern? My time has not yet come!"

In other words, Jesus knew that only through a miracle could He remedy this situation, and He was concerned that it would draw attention to Him that was unwanted at the time. Nevertheless, He consented to His mother's request. He had the servants fill the six containers with water, then draw some out and let the headwaiter taste it. The headwaiter was astounded! He called for the bridegroom and exclaimed, "This wine is wonderful! And you are a special host! Most people serve the good wine at first, then serve cheaper wine as the party goes on, but you have saved your best wine for the last!"

John tells us that this was the first of the signs of Jesus, where He manifested His glorious power, and His disciples thus knew that Jesus was a very special person. I wonder how many of those at the wedding were aware that a miracle had just occurred in their midst?

James Bailey says that this event shows that Jesus was concerned about commonplace things. There are many examples of this, particularly in John's Gospel. Notice, for example, that John does not use any parables in His Gospel. Instead, John sees deeper meaning in many events of Jesus' life, and he has based his story of Jesus around seven of these events. But in all four Gospels, Jesus speaks of common things. He speaks about fishing and cooking, about farming and animals. He tells of a young boy who seeks to go his own way but makes a mess of his life and find himself feeding pigs. He speaks about the birds, of flowers and trees. He speaks of children and says how special they are. One of the first things Jesus did after His resurrection was to cook breakfast for His disciples. "How many fish have you caught?" He asked them. So He is concerned with the mundane affairs of life as well as spiritual matters. *The wedding at Cana was a miracle of transforming the commonplace into that which was important.*

But it also was an example of turning imperfection into perfection. The wine Jesus made was not just good, it was perfect. It was the best the steward had ever tasted! Likewise, when Jesus renews us, He doesn't just change us a little, he makes us new, and eventually, we will be perfect in His Father's eyes. Have you felt His transforming power in your life? Mark Young and I have both sang "The Touch of The Master's Hand" many times. Just as the master violinist was able to transform a worthless violin into something valuable, so the touch of Jesus is able to make each one of us valuable in God's sight. Have you felt the touch of The Master's hand?

Rev. Bailey also says that this event in Cana fulfilled the promise of abundance. John tells us that each of the six stone jars held over twenty gallons each. That was more than enough for the guests at the wedding. The 23rd Psalm tells us that He doesn't just fill our cup, but that our cup runs over. Isa. 55:7 tells us that the

Lord will abundantly pardon. When Jesus fed the 5000, which started with 5 barley loaves and two small fish, the leftovers filled 12 baskets. Acts 4:33 tells us that God's grace was abundant on the apostles. 2 Cor. 1:5 says that our comfort is abundant through Christ, and 2 Cor 9:8 says that God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.

Rev Bailey also says that the event at Cana shows us that we have a lot to look forward to, that life gets better as we go through it. *The Bible teaches us that history moves in a straight line toward a purpose*, one that will be wonderful and ultimately fulfilling. John 14:2 "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. Romans 8:28 - And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Let me share with you how I have come to understand the meaning of this First Sign of Jesus, and how it points clearly to the ultimate purpose of God.

First, I point out that verse 1 tells us that the wedding took place on the third day. Now this may mean the third day of the week, but as I have studied Scripture, I have discovered that whenever this term is used, God is about to do something or show us something special. It was the third day when Abraham came to the place where Isaac was to be offered to God. It was the third day when Pharaoh restored Joseph to his position. On the third day the Lord made His presence known on Mt. Sinai. For three days and three nights, Jonah was in the belly of the great fish, and Jesus would later say that this would be a sign to unbelieving people about His ministry. On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead. So John is telling us, look carefully at this event, for God is about to do something special.

Next, we are told that there were 6 stone jars, and they were empty. The fact that the jars were of stone, not pottery, tells us that they had a special purpose, and John tells us that they were used for purification rites. The number six is symbolic of incompleteness. Jesus had them filled with water.

Then Jesus turns the water into wine. The Scriptures tell us that at the Last Supper with His disciples, Jesus took a cup of wine and said, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood." -- Luke 22:20 (NASB)

Jeremiah 31 speaks of this new covenant: **Jer 31:31-34**

"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. 33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 34 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Blood was the sign of the Old Covenant:

Ex 24:8 — Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

But the wine is the sign of the New Covenant, which was established when Jesus shed His blood to pay the

ransom for our sin.

Thus, at Cana, Jesus first manifested his glory to His disciples through a miracle that symbolized the fact that the old Jewish covenant was incomplete and was being replaced by His sacrificial life and death. The blood of a lamb was to be replaced by the blood of Christ, and the wine was to become the symbol of His shed blood. When we eat the bread and drink the wine during Communion, Christ is made real to us once again.

At Cana, and at the Last Supper, as they drank the wine, the Disciples realized that Jesus was someone special, and after His resurrection they were convinced that He was their Lord, their Master, the Son of God, the Savior of mankind.

Let us pray. Search your hearts... Do you know Jesus? Has he performed a miracle in your heart? Lord, I pray that you would touch us anew. May each Communion we share be a time when we sense anew your presence in our lives. Warm our hearts with your love. Give us the desire and the courage to share this love with others.

Amen.

Notes: (1) This sermon was partially inspired and based on commentary by James H. Bailey, "The Miracles of Jesus for Today," Chapter 5, Abingdon, 1977.