

## John 2:1-12 Do whatever He tells you

### Introduction

In July 2000 I had flown to the USA with an elderly friend with a schedule of both visiting some of their friends, together with attending a Baptist history conference in North Carolina. We were fortunate for the first part of the trip in having lifts provided and that was greatly appreciated. For the rest of the trip I was hiring a car in North Carolina that would carry me around several states during the next part of my particular schedule. This all seems rather ordinary, but in the back of the car one day, our host for the first part of the trip, happened to remark about his difficulties on a particular visit to the UK, some years earlier when a wallet was lost. How could he hire a car without his driving license? In my mind a sudden doubt cropped up—where was my driving license? It was across the Atlantic back in my home in Cumbernauld and the rest of our family were away on holiday. Acute embarrassment and panic on my part as I wondered how can I get my license here to the USA within the next couple of days? Cutting a long story short a friend from our church had a key and they found the license and posted it to the USA by courier and I got it 48 hours later, just in time! It was actually more complicated than that, but the point here is that something very ordinary had been overlooked and threatened to derail an otherwise well-planned trip. Two thousand years ago at a wedding in Galilee, what had begun as a happy and successful celebration was on the brink of total disaster and embarrassment for the bridegroom and his family. This was of course Jesus' first miracle, which in itself was important, but John, the Gospel writer, sees a much greater significance in the context of the life and ministry of Jesus. This reminds us that our lives and the various things that happen to us can have a greater significance than we had ever expected or anticipated. In all of our lives there are special moments when the Lord touches us in ways that we had not expected nor anticipated. For John, the events of the seven days culminating in this miracle at Cana would transform the rest of his life—only the events of the first Easter and Pentecost would rank higher in their transformative impact on his life and experience.

### 1. The Special Marriage (John 2:1-2)

*On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, <sup>2</sup> and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.* (a) **The significance of this event in John's Gospel** A wedding in a village in Galilee could not have been a more natural or familiar event to the participants of this particular celebration. No-one attending expected anything out of the ordinary to take place. Such events were a welcome relief from the hard manual labour they were all engaged in year after year. Life was simple and basic and short. You married in your teens and many would have died before reaching the age of thirty and the vast majority before the age of forty. The comfortable existence of most people in the western world could not be further removed from the spartan, subsistence economies and lifestyle of people in Jesus' day. However, John sees this wedding as the culmination of a week of special events. John chapter two begins *On the third day...* this is to be counted from the last event narrated in the Gospel at the end of John chapter one and by their inclusive reckoning to mean two 'twenty-four hour days' later than the meeting with Nathanael. John in John 1:19 to 2:11, recounts how, with his friend Andrew, as followers of John the Baptist, their lives were totally changed. The sequence began on the first day with representatives of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem coming out to John the Baptist in the desert to ask for proof of his authorisation to teach and preach to Jewish people, and to see especially if he was claiming to be the Messiah, which he had not claimed. On the second day (John 1:29-34) Jesus was baptised by John in the Jordan river; on the third day (John 1:35-39a) the Baptist explained

something of the significance of Jesus to two of his closest followers John (the apostle) and Andrew, in effect saying that man is the Messiah, it is him you ought to be following not me. As a result of their rabbi's direction the two men approached Jesus and in effect enquired about the possibility of becoming his disciples (John 1:39b); it was crucially at the end of that third day (4pm) when they met Jesus, so the statement *that they spent the rest of the day with him* (John 1:39b) refers to the fourth day on which Andrew would introduce his brother Simon Peter to Jesus (John 1:40-42); on the fifth day Jesus encounters Philip and Nathanael (John 1:43-51); nothing of note happened on the sixth day, but on the seventh day of that time sequence we come to the wedding at Cana, that would have taken place on a Sabbath day (Saturday). John has already in John 1:1 made a pointed reference back to creation and Genesis 1:1 and it is likely that he sees this 'new creation' week as a spiritual parallel to the physical creation week of the world in the first book of the Bible. [D. Carson, *John*, pp. 167-168] In effect here, John is suggesting that Jesus' gospel message is a new creation, pointing forward to the re-creation of God's sin defaced universe in *the new heavens and the new earth* (Revelation 21:10). It is, therefore perfectly natural in wedding services today to remind the congregation that marriage is a creation ordinance (Genesis 2:24-25) and a foundational pillar of human society. The question naturally arises - how is Jesus going to make such a difference in the lives of people attending a wedding that it will have a transformative impact upon them? And upon readers of this account in future generations?

(b) **The significance of the participants in this wedding** who had been invited? *Jesus' mother was there,*<sup>2</sup> *and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding* (John 2:1). This was not just any wedding in that community. It is almost certainly one that involved relatives not least of Mary, Jesus' mother, who was a participant in the preparations, but also Jesus and His disciples, many of whom were also related to one another. Mary's sister Salome, for example, was the mother of James and John. However, in any case the vast majority of people at the wedding knew each other very well because they lived either in that village or in a nearby community. The vast majority of people at this wedding would have had some knowledge of Jesus growing up; they would have seen him in his school years; when he was learning his trade as a carpenter; the hardest place to be an effective witness for our faith is amongst the people that know us best in our families and amongst our closest friends. The reason is simple; we cannot hide anything from them. They see us as we are and that includes our weaknesses. Yet having given the bad news, here is the good news! It is in these circles of our family and closest friends that we are most likely to have an impact for the Lord and see people come to Christ, because they cannot deny what God has done in our lives –when we live lives honouring to the Lord. Jesus, in effect then, was about to enter a situation where he had expected to be anonymous in the 'crowd', yet in the sovereign purposes of God he was going to perform an incredible miracle that no-one could forget. The challenge to us in our daily lives is to say –Lord here is my ordinary week in front of me, in the ordinary events of life help me to honour you by the way I do my work; or carry out my social life; or relate to others in my family; may something of your love shine out through me. We must never be simply Sunday Christians –our faith must permeate all aspects of our lives, as was revealed in this social context, two thousand years ago at Cana in Galilee.

## 2. **The Anxious Mother** (John 2:3-5)

(a) **The Way she felt** (John 2:3) *When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, they have no more wine.* Weddings were community celebrations that could last around one week. The majority of the costs were shared as people all brought food for the feast, but ultimately the groom's family were in charge and assumed to be responsible for making up any shortfall in refreshments. In a context where people lived 'from hand to mouth' this potentially could be

disastrous. Even if you had the finances there were no supermarkets offering twenty-four hour availability for those necessary purchases. All the food and drinks had to be planned and prepared in advance. Something went wrong at this wedding and there was a shortage of wine, the only drink available. This common vinegary drink would be considered tasteless to us today, but it was the staple beverage of the population. We must not assume that there had been excessive consumption and that people were intoxicated, as the alcohol content was much lower than today and getting drunk involved drinking much larger quantities of wine which was strongly discouraged in that culture, unlike our own. We all make mistakes in life. However, in that culture failing to provide adequate refreshments at a wedding was near the top of the list of things to avoid doing. If I understand it correctly that the family of the bridegroom were relatives of Mary and her sister Salome then it puts in some sort of context the request of Mary to Jesus to ‘do something’ to sort out this predicament. After the death of Joseph, Mary would have been totally reliant on the support of Jesus as the head of this family. From this account we can appreciate Mary’s sensitivity to people in need. May we seek to be those who are open to spotting when people need our assistance, but who may be too embarrassed or proud to ask for it. Or who may think we might not have time to help them. Sometimes we hesitate to volunteer to help people because we know that we cannot solve their problems, but most of the time there is no expectation of that.

(b) **The request she made** (John 2:3-4) *When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, They have no more wine. <sup>4</sup> Dear woman, why do you involve me? Jesus replied. My time has not yet come.* We have no way of knowing whether Jesus was already aware of the impending crisis for the host family at the wedding. What is clear is that Mary wished to draw the problem to his attention. We must assume in the first instance that she is hoping that Jesus has some ideas about how a natural solution could be found to solving the problem. It is a very normal and natural scene when a family member is asked to give a hand when the pressure is on. As Christians we can sometimes read back into a text of Scripture a potential outcome that might only have been possible, for example, at a later time. Jesus had not performed any miracles or carried out any acts until this time beyond what could have been expected of a devoted and obedient son in a Jewish home of the period. Of course there were glimpses of his fuller identity and mission, such as he displayed in the incident described in Luke 2:41-52. At that time Jesus had become detached from the larger community group from Galilee with whom Mary and Joseph had travelled to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. The plan had been for the whole party to return together. It must have been a large number of people for this couple not to spot for twenty-four hours that twelve-year-old Jesus was not with them. He was eventually located in the Jerusalem Temple. Luke 2:45-52 states: *When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup> Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup> When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.” <sup>49</sup> “Why were you searching for me?” **he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”[or be about my father’s business] <sup>50</sup> But they did not understand what he was saying to them. <sup>51</sup> Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup> And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.*** Jesus is now at least in his late 20s, but until this time has faithfully provided for Mary and her younger children, running the carpentry business that Joseph had managed until his untimely death. Mary didn’t tell Jesus what to do she simply informed him of the need. Is this not a good picture of prayer? we come to bring our needs, or those of other people, to the Lord and ask him to work in these situations. Sometimes we cannot resist the temptation to tell the Lord how he might resolve the problem we are raising! Here was a picture of trust. Mary is concerned enough about the need to raise it and thereby indicating confidence that Jesus could do something about it. In

our prayer life we will naturally have preferred answers to our petitions, but ideally we will, in our better moments, trust him to decide how best to answer our prayers.

Jesus' response in verse four although readily understandable in the context of John's Gospel, as we look back from the period after the start of the Christian Church and in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection, yet at the time his words might have raised more questions than understanding. What is most important for us to learn from Jesus' response is how focussed he is on what is most important in life. It is about priorities. All of us could gainfully fill the twenty-four hours of each day several times over. The people that accomplish the most in life, in whatever social context-not just in Christian circles- are those who have grasped the difference between that which is most important to choose and the things that need to be put to one side. Dr Oakley, my old colleague principal, repeatedly stressed that time management was at the heart of success in daily life. On a good number of occasions he repeated a saying that puzzled me for a time. The gist of it was that someone making the best use of their time 'knew the difference between ten minutes and quarter of an hour'. It was not because of his divine nature that Jesus had this discernment; it was a closeness to God and a sensitivity to accomplishing what needed to be done at that time in his earthly ministry that was the key. The fact that people live so much longer now in our country can dull our minds to the shortness of time and the immanence of eternity. Robert Murray McCheyne deliberately chose to visit the dying residents of his parish on a Saturday evening in order to focus his mind ahead of preaching God's Word the following day.

(c) **The trust she displayed** (John 3:5) *His mother said to the servants, Do whatever he tells you.* Mary recognised that she could not pressure Jesus into doing something inappropriate, but instead had an incredible faith in his ability to do what needed to be done. She didn't keep that perception to herself. Instead she informed the servants employed at the wedding of her faith in Jesus in a perfectly natural way. Our verbal witness to people around us ideally should fit naturally into our conversations and daily circumstances. We need to pray that the Lord will place such opportunities across our pathway and that we will have the wisdom and sensitivity to take them. Mary was not leading these employees in a prayer of commitment to God, but the impact of her witness might have been one step on the way to trusting the Lord. This point was made so clearly in the course we utilised last autumn –*Just Walk Across the Room*. What small step do you want me to take today? Might be a prayer we pray this week? God will provide opportunities for us if we are actively seeking them. However, they may be very different to what we had in mind and with a completely different person to those for whom we pray regularly to come to faith! Yet on the journey of faith each week of our lives – we commit that week to the Lord and offer our availability to him to use us through our words and actions as a witness for him. This is exciting and challenging at the same time – someone who thinks the Christian life is boring has completely missed the point!

### 3. **The Unexpected Miracle** (John 2:6-11)

<sup>6</sup> *Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.* <sup>7</sup> *Jesus said to the servants, Fill the jars with water; so they filled them to the brim.* <sup>8</sup> *Then he told them, Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet. They did so,* <sup>9</sup> *and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realise where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside* <sup>10</sup> *and 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.* <sup>11</sup> *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.* This miracle had a number of key features. First it was: (a) **Supernatural in character** This was not a trick played on the guests or a moment of great relief when more wine was located in another room on the premises. What happened here

was an extraordinary transformation of a crisis situation. It was impossible at such short notice for the host family to purchase it, had they the finance to do so, because the likely quantity of wine needed for the remaining days (?) of the wedding for a party comprising the vast majority of people in the village, together with a few extra family members and friends, was substantial. What can we learn from this extraordinary event? Jesus took the ordinary things that were available to use for this miracle. The large stone jars containing this water were common in that day as people needed to wash before eating and our modern conveniences had not been invented! The servants had done their job in filling them with water. They played their part and Jesus did the rest. If they had not been willing to do what they could then Jesus would not have performed the miracle. It reminds us in our witness today that we have a responsibility to live in a way that reflects our faith and honours our Lord. We cannot just open the doors of the church and expect people to come in –we must go to them and invite them; we need to do what we can, together with regular prayer for other people and at the same time to have confidence that God is at work in the lives of people we pray for, even when we are yet to see evidence of that. (b) **Discrete in execution** possibly between 120 and 180 gallons of water was turned to wine. Guests at the wedding might have overheard Jesus reminding servants on duty to keep the water jars topped up with water. This was a simple ordinary task carried out every day. Taking some to the master of ceremonies was a novel step as this water was normally used only for washing not drinking purposes. I wonder what went through the servant’s mind as he took a drinking container or jug full of ‘water’ down to the top table at the wedding. The servants were used to obeying orders, but this was rather exceptional. Again servants taking wine samples to the host at the wedding would also have been routine at that time. It would only be natural that this man checked what might be served to the guests. You and I wouldn’t invite people to our homes and deliberately serve out of date food, would we? What took place at this wedding happened behind the scenes. Our witness for Jesus is unlikely to be helped by placard-waving, banner erecting or bumper-sticker mounting proclamations that ‘I belong to Jesus’! It will be discrete often one-to-one encounters as we share what the Lord has done for us. If in the last two decades around 90% of people have come to faith primarily through the effective witness of one person close to the individual, rather than major outreach events as the primary cause, then this should indicate to us clear guidance about our strategies today. Incidentally the overwhelming number of people converted on *Christianity Explored* or *Alpha* courses came and stayed and subsequently came to faith because a friend invited them and went on the course with them. (c) **Generous in scope** It is indicated in John chapter two that possibly between 120 and 180 gallons of water was turned to wine. This, on the surface, seems a ridiculously large quantity, but we must not forget that it was a whole community celebration that lasted for a week and when seen in that context is much more proportionate to the needs of the occasion. However, it is certainly generous. This is a reflection on the God we serve whose grace is more than sufficient for our needs. Whose mercy to us when we let Him down and seek forgiveness, time and again shows His amazing love to us. Is this the image of God we convey as Christians to the wider community? God has never watered down His holiness; His principles and values nor the doctrinal content of our faith, but the way He treats us is much better than we could possibly deserve. God does not accept you and me because we are good enough and have earned our salvation –that is impossible. He accepts us because Jesus was good enough. A lot of people even in a nice community like that will need reassurance that God will accept them, if they want to come to Jesus, because they are currently convinced they cannot live up to the standard required to get in to ‘the church’. (d) **Symbolic in significance** the jars had a two-fold purpose, as John 2:6 indicates: *Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing.* It was not merely a hygiene issue, rather the guests at the wedding knew that in Jewish ceremonial law it was a requirement to

wash your hands before meals and on various other occasions. I think it is most likely that God put in place some of those Jewish rules in order to maintain good hygiene standards, in an age long before human beings knew anything about how infections are spread and good health is maintained. The stone jars were symbolic representations of the Jewish law with its unyielding demands. Jesus took that law and transformed it and just as the water was miraculously turned into wine, so He can transform the lives of people who put their faith and trust in Him? It happens gradually, rather than instantaneously as in this story, but it is no less a supernatural work He performs. Have you entrusted your life to Jesus? (e) **Life changing in effect** the master of ceremonies would have thought nothing of tasting a sip of the 'wine' brought by the servants. He had no idea of the source of his drink. His view of the wine is very clear in John 2:9-10: *and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realise where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside <sup>10</sup> and 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.*** An argument ensues as the bridegroom (and in effect his family) were criticised for keeping the best wine till last. A much bigger row would have broken out had there been no wine for the guests, but this man knew nothing of the predicament that has unfolded over the previous hour or two! What God can do with a life totally committed to Him can be nothing short of extraordinary. He delights to use ordinary people to accomplish great things for Him? the question is this – does He have all of your life? Is He your no.1 priority? May we give our lives to Jesus and trust Him to lead us and guide us in our daily lives, for His name's sake, Amen.