

#0053 – July 16, 2008 – Water Into Wine – Part 1

[Easley:] I've made the dilemma known to you and I trust whatever you do. I'm still going to be faithful. I'm going to still love my wife even though it's hard. I'm going to still love my husband even though he's not the man I wish he was. I'm still going to hang in there with this problem relationship even though God's not coming through for me. I'm going to be faithful even though the answer may not be right there.

[Lepine:] Philippians 4 teaches us that in everything through prayer and supplication we're to make our requests known to God. Sometimes there is a long gap between when we make the request known and when God answers.

This is *inContext* with Michael Easley. Michael is the President of Moody Bible Institute in Downtown Chicago, Illinois. I'm Bob Lepine.

We're looking together at John's Gospel. And in Chapter 2, Michael, we have the first miracle of Jesus. This was a request that Jesus' mother made of Him, right?

[Easley:] In John's Gospel at the wedding of Cana we see Jesus answer his mother's request right away. In our experience often times it doesn't work quite that way. We pray and pray and pray and God doesn't seem to "answer" our requests.

[Lepine:] Still, Jesus invites us to make our requests --

[Easley:] Absolutely.

[Lepine:] -- known to Him and then to learn the path of trust, obedience, sometimes patience as we wait to see how God is going to respond.

[Easley:] And whether or not He answers it the way I want Him to answer. The life of faith, the life of trust is the challenge for the follower of Jesus Christ.

[Lepine:] I know you're probably going to address this as we listen to your message but I just want to know right up front you think Jesus turned this into fermented grape juice or unfermented grape juice?

[Easley:] No, I think it was the real deal and I think if Jesus Christ did not turn it into fermented wine, it sort of dismisses the whole point of the miracle. The miracle was He was able to overstep the laws of physics to create this wine from water. And as well see in all the miracle accounts, He's able to do something that changes the laws of physics, the laws of nature, if you will, to prove that He's Messiah.

[Lepine:] I just thought I'd see if we can get some mail --

[Easley:] Yeah, yeah.

[Lepine:] -- on the front part of our program today.

[Easley:] Well, I think we will.

[Lepine:] Here is Michael Easley as we look together at John, Chapter 2.

[Easley:] How many of you got married on a shoestring? Oh, so the rest of you had money when you got married. How many of you had money when you got married? Let's see the hands. There's a few who will admit it, all right.

Well, Cindy and I were of the former category. I think she had about \$1,200 and I had nothing. And she paid for her gown and her wedding and the whole shooting match; and we had a rather short wedding as well. We got married about 6 or 8 months after a good friend of mine got married in an enormous church with 3,000 people and a huge wedding party, and I was one of the groomsmen. And halfway through the wedding I started feeling really poorly, so I excused myself rather than pass out. I figured that was a better option. And then came back in to escort the young lady that I was to escort in and out. And so just 3,000 people saw me nearly get sick and come back in the wedding. So Cindy was terrified that I would pass out at my own wedding. So I think our wedding was 7 minutes or something like that. It was rather to the point, yes. We had no money. We had a four-day honeymoon and that's another story, but we didn't have any money there either. We're going to look at a wedding this morning that was a little more than an inconvenience.

If you have a Bible, open to John, Chapter 2. John is the fourth Gospel in your New Testament; Mathew, Mark, Luke, John. John, Chapter 2, we'll look at the first 11 verses this morning.

Verses 1 and 2 of John, Chapter 2, "On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding." The Gospel of John now turns to the Book of Signs, S-i-g-n-s, the Book of Signs. John is going to marshal forth 7 key signs of our Lord Jesus Christ as continued proof, as continued bearing witness of who Jesus Christ is. The signs are going to march toward us in a cadence that is very powerful. Each of the signs will reveal something of who Jesus is, something of His person, of His power, and of His awesome glory.

Now, we conclude at this juncture, we have a wedding, it's a festive time, it's a time of celebration. Jesus, his mother, and probably 5 of the disciples, we're not certain but it would seem at least the 5 that we've read about, are present with Him. His earthly fill-in father, Joseph, is not there. We conclude perhaps that he has died by now in Jesus' lifetime. John, as with himself, does not name Mary. He calls her the Mother of Jesus. We'll look at this in detail. This is likely the end of a betrothal period. In the Jewish realm it was not uncommon to have a year-long betrothal, much more than an engagement, but far less than the consummation of a marriage. The marriage festival and ceremony typically lasted one week with first time brides being married on Wednesdays and widows, widowers being married on Thursdays in Jewish life.

Jesus attends this wedding. That tells us a number of things. It tells us, number one, His presence there is a blessing obviously to the couple. He is supporting, if you will, this marriage ceremony by His attendance, by His presence. This is a good thing He is part of. God, not tradition, ordained marriage, God, not Western Civilization, designed the wedding ceremony, and it is before God that a man and woman become one flesh. So this is not the first wedding but it's certainly the first recorded in the New Testament we have to look at.

Marriage is more than just a ceremony between a man and a woman. It's parabolic of the Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Matthew. In the Gospel of Mark it is a celebration. And in the Book of Revelation and other places it's a culmination eschatologically of all that is going to happen. In our immediate context it's the contrast between Judaism and Jesus Christ. Judaism being the law, Jesus being grace; old wine skins with new wine.

Verse 3 we have a marriage dinner disaster. When the wine ran out the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no one wine." For a moment just think of the emotional energy that if you've been a part of

your own children's weddings or you recall your own wedding, or perhaps you were in a wedding, think of the emotion that goes on during the rehearsal and the ceremony itself. We could all tell stories of wedding day fopahs, couldn't we. People passing out. The most memorable one to me was recently a wedding here where one of the candles starting listing over to another candle and the wax was dripping on the thing up here. Of course, no one is paying attention to the wedding at that juncture, right. They're watching this fire about to break out in the corner of the building. So we all have these stories to tell.

The mother of Jesus reports to Jesus that the wine is running out. Whether due to poverty or miscalculation there is a problem and this is more than a fopah. We think of the ice running out, the hourderves running out, a particular desert that was popular running out, we don't think much of those things. That's a simple solution. You just go on. But in this culture for the wine to run out is significant.

Now, this also tells us a little bit about Mary in her role in this relationship. What kind of person would go to Jesus or anyone and say, "Oh, that wedding party's wine is running..." -- who cares. That's their dilemma. So some commentators speculate that Mary is a very close friend of this family. Perhaps even a relative. And, so she has more of a role in this wedding than just a participant. Maybe one might think of her as a wedding coordinator for our sanctified imagination.

One of our elders at Immanuel who's since moved on to another part of the country we were at his home a number of years ago and he had a lot of people, you know, 50 people in his home, and we were talking about entertaining large parties in our home which Cindy and I are accustomed to as well as this elder. And he said, "We have a little code in our family if the hourderves or the main dish or something is running out, we have a code and its fhb, and we go around and whisper it to all of our family, fhb, which means family hold back." So see, you can take a practical lesson home from this sermon. You can learn that on your own, a new code. Just don't say it when you have church people over, they'll know what you're talking about.

Some commentators believe this is serious enough that legal action could be levied against the groom and his family. If that's true, that's not a way to start a wedding. Does Mary expect a miracle from Jesus? Based on Verse 11 it would seem not, but we do know a number of things about Mary, don't we. Number one, an angel visited her to tell her she was going to conceive. Number two, she gets pregnant without having relations with a man. Number three, she bears a son who is going to be the Savior of Israel. Number four, she saw Ananias, the High Priest confirm that vision. Number five, she went to visit Elizabeth at one point and had a spiritual encounter with Elizabeth. So there's a number of things she ponders in her heart. Did she believe, did she think, did she expect Jesus to pull off a miracle at this wedding? I don't know.

Jesus has a relationship with His mother and that is what is the point, I believe, of John recording this interchange. Not whether or not Mary was asking Him to pull off a miracle, but John is alerting us to the relational dynamic that is changing between His earthly mother and His Father's will. Look at Verse 4. "And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come.'" The address "Woman" might seem hard or unkind. It's not meant to be. It is unusual. We find it elsewhere in the Bible to address a woman this way. But we do get this glimpse into this unique relationship between Mary and her son Jesus Christ.

What does stand out, first of all, is He does not call her mother which would be much more in fitting, in common, in, in -- well, you'd expect that. But there's one other time Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John talks to His mother and that's when He's hanging on the cross. And he says, "Woman, behold your Son." He does not call her mother in the record of John. John seems to favor not only, not referring to himself as John, but not referring to Jesus' human mother as Mary. And, you know, he takes her into be like his mother. So maybe there's a background there that we don't know all about in the dynamic.

What is happening, though, is that Jesus Christ is drawing a clear distinct line between His earthly mother and His Father's will. Jesus Christ is not going to be deterred, or impeded, or side-tracked from obeying the Father. It is now the Father's will He is after, not His mother's will. He's there to fulfill His Father's plan.

He continues this, "What does that have to do with us?", Verse 4. When I ran with a particular boy in my neighborhood and we were often getting in trouble and on more than one occasion when we would be talking about we were in trouble, we were caught, how we were going to handle the situation, and lie our way out of it in other words. And I'd say to him, I'd say, "Steve, what are we going to do?" And he'd say, "What'd you mean we? You got a frog in your pocket?" you know. That's sort of the sense of what's going on here. What does this have to do with us? Jesus is not saying He doesn't care. He's disengaging Himself. This is not my issue He's saying. It's not that I'm discompassionate. And He continues, "My hour" or "My time, has not yet come."

Now, as with many things I've shared with you in the past when you have a problem in the Bible with a word and you don't what the word means or how it's used, there's a fun way to learn how. The word time or hour in your text is an interesting word. "My hour hasn't come." What does this mean? What is Jesus saying here? And the way you study a word, any word in the Bible is to first begin with how that author in that book used that word. So we look at all the ways John in the Gospel of John used the word time or hour in most translations and we tease out at least three different ways he used the word.

One is the cross that Jesus is going to face. My hour, He's talking about the cross. Another is the glorification issue where He says, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son that your Son may glorify You." And there's another way He uses it, when He's perhaps announcing His debut; my hour to become a public ministry. We might think of the synoptics in the so-called triumphal entry or an inaugural-type appearance. Maybe he's referring to that. None of the three is incorrect in application. I think He's referring to His glorification. His time to be known among people is not yet. "It's not My hour for Me to let them know who I am," if you will. "It's not time for Me to do this. I'm not against helping the couple. I'm not discompassionate. But it's not the time for people to know who I am yet." I think John the Gospel Writer is telegraphing the reader then and now the unique precision with everything Jesus does is deliberate and has a purpose. There's no oh yeah, let's go do this. That's a good idea in Jesus' economy.

Mary's reaction in Verse 5, "His mother said to the servants." That's the word *diakonos*, the same word we use for the word deacon. She said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you do it." Now, in a way we could say Mary is very clever and she's handed off the dilemma to Jesus' lap. We might envision 6 servants there and she says, "Whatever He tells you, do it," and she walks away. I don't think that's the case but it's an attractive picture for a movie script, no doubt. She is concerned for this poor couple, but she also has done all she can do.

Scholar D.A. Carson writes, "In short, Mary approaches Jesus as his mother and is reproached. She responds then as a believer and her faith is honored." Mary still doesn't know what Jesus is going to do, but she trusts Jesus; and I think there's a profound lesson for you and me here. No matter how good our prayers may seem many times your prayers and mine are conditional prayers. Lord, if you will do this, then I will do that. When we're in the emergency room, when it's the 9-1-1 spiritual problem, when it's a problem with my husband, with my wife, with my children, with my finances, we say, "God, if you'll get me out of this dilemma, I will fill ... in the blank"; and we do it a lot of clever ways. We have a lot of little nuances that we pray to God this way. God, if you'll do this, then I'll do that.

And I don't think that's what Mary is doing here. I really believe what the mother of Jesus is doing here is saying, "Look, I've made the dilemma known to You and I trust whatever You do." I'm still going to be faithful. I'm going to still love my wife even though it's hard. I'm going to still love my husband even though he's not the man I wish he was. I'm still going to hang in there with this problem relationship even though God is not coming through for me. I'm going to be faithful even though the answer may not be right there. I believe that's what she's saying. Okay, whatever He tells you to do and she's not apathetic, she's not throwing it away, there's no conniving, no bargaining, no manipulating, no puppeteering God upside down. God, you do it. A good lesson for you and me. A good application.

Well, verses 6 through 8, the stone jars, the water well, and wine. "Now there were six stone water pots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each." Verse 7, "Jesus said to them, 'Fill the water pots with water.' So they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, 'Draw *some* out now and take it to the headwaiter.' So they took it *to him*." Perhaps steward would be another way to read head waiter.

Now, these stone jars, there are six of them, they are *lithinos*, they are not clay crocks. John's detail is to let us know they're stone, they're heavy, they're large enough to hold 20 to 30 gallons each so we have some odd shapes and sizes. These stone water pots are probably the same thing referred to in Mark, Chapter 7 where there's an altercation between the Pharisees who are condemning Jesus' disciples for not washing before they eat ceremonially. If that's true, we might envision a compound in the ancient world, a high-walled home we think of it, and when you go through the primary entrance, you're still outside, and there's a courtyard area. In that area there would likely be these stone vessels and they would wash your hands and perhaps even your feet before you would go into the home to eat.

In this week-long ceremony of festive wedding preparation and meal we might envision them washing their hands and feet a number of times. And, so you need a large quantity of water to do that. They're going to weigh a lot. A stone water vessel holding 20, 30 gallons, what, 100 pounds at least, maybe even 200 pounds. Add in 8.3 pounds per gallon of water. It'd be tough for one person to lift one of those stone jars unless he was sort of, you know, like a hulk. I guess you could handle it. But more than likely they would draw the water from a well, bring it, and fill it to the brim. John adds a little detail there, fill them overflowing.

Once these stone water jars are in place then Jesus has the servants take a cup of it, a sample of it, to the head waiter. Now, I don't know. This is pure guess on my part. I don't know enough of antiquity to know but I would wonder if they had a distinction between potable water and water for washing? Did they have a drinking level of water even in that culture? If so, then it would be a tough call for a person to take a drink of this water used for washing. You wouldn't do that. I don't think even in antiquity. We don't know for sure, but this servant is asked to take some of it to the head waiter.

[Lepine:] Now, we have to leave this remarkable scene and the wedding of Cana in John, Chapter 2, and we'll get to the conclusion of it tomorrow.

When I started today's program by tossing you a little bit of a hot potato about whether this was fermented alcoholic wine, I'm going to toss you a different hot potato here at the end. In some faith traditions it is believed that the wedding at Cana, one of the things it teaches us, is that Jesus would not refuse His mother on anything; and that, in fact, she stands as someone we ought to go to and ask her to intercede on our behalf when we face challenges. How do you respond to that?

[Easley:] Well, number one, Jesus Christ will never do anything that His Father does not want Him to do. In John, Chapter 8, Verse 29 he says, "I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." We read further

in the Gospel of John where He says, "I only do what the Father reveals to me." So it cannot be against the character of God the Father.

Number two, when we come to the person of Mary there's no doubt she is a faithful follower of Christ. There's no doubt she is a favored one and that God graced her to be the mother of the Messiah. But it really stops there. She is an extraordinary disciple, follower of Jesus Christ. She holds a unique place in human history, but there is no intercessory, there is no intermediary between God and man except the person of Jesus Christ.

[Lepine:] She is to be highly honored, she is to be revered, but we should not take it beyond that and make more of her, or less of her than the Scriptures make of her. And, as I mentioned we're going to look at Part 2 of this account of turning the water into wine on tomorrow's program.

And, as a prelude to that, let's just listen to this passage again from John, Chapter 2. Here is actor Max McLean reading from the New International Version of the Bible, John, Chapter 2.

MAX McLEAN: On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there; and Jesus and His disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to Him, "They have no more wine." "Dear Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever He says to you." Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing each holding from twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled them up to the brim. Then He told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so and 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 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 'til now." This the first of his miraculous signs Jesus performed in Cana, in Galilee. He thus revealed His glory and His disciples put their faith in Him.

[Lepine:] I love to listen to him read the Scriptures and, in fact, we have the 2 CD set where Max's reading through the Gospel of John. It's available to our listeners this month when they help support the ministry of *inContext*. You can make a donation online at www.incontextradio.org or you can call 1-877, the number 3, and the word CONTEXT.

Make a donation and be sure to request a copy of John's Gospel narrated by Max McLean, a 2 CD set. It's our gift to you as a way of saying thank you for your financial support of the ministry of *inContext*.

Tomorrow Michael continues our look at the ministry of Jesus from John, Chapter 2. I hope you can be back with us for *inContext* with Michael Easley.