

Jesus at a wedding

29 January 2023

INTRODUCING TODAY'S THEME

Today's Bible story is about a wedding ... a happy occasion when people gather and watch while two people agree to live together for the rest of their lives. Then there's a big party ... lots of food, lots of drinks, plenty of music and dancing.

In Australia, a wedding and the party afterwards might last a few hours.

In Israel where Jesus lived, weddings lasted up to a week ... a whole week of partying. But when Jesus was at a wedding something bad happened ... they ran out of wine to drink.

What to do?

Go to the nearest shop? I had to do this for a friend for their wedding many years ago... Maybe there weren't shops or they were closed.

Borrow some wine from a neighbour? ... but maybe they didn't have any.

When everything else fails, ask Jesus! And Jesus turns some water into wine!

What a party trick! But it showed people that Jesus was pretty special and he could do amazing things to help people

When we get stuck and don't know what to do, maybe we should ask Jesus too, by talking to him through prayer.

BIBLE READINGS

Isaiah 25:6-8

On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare
a feast of rich food for all peoples,
a banquet of aged wine –
the best of meats and the finest of wines.

On this mountain he will destroy
the shroud that enfolds all peoples,
the sheet that covers all nations;
he will swallow up death for ever.

The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears
from all faces;
he will remove his people's disgrace
from all the earth.

The Lord has spoken.

John 2:1-24

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in 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.'

'Woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. 'My hour has not yet come.'

His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from eighty to a hundred and twenty litres.

⁷Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water'; so they filled them 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 realise 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 till now.'

What Jesus did in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, 'Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!' His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'

The Jews then responded to him, 'What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?'

Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.'

They replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?' But the temple he had spoken of was his body. 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.

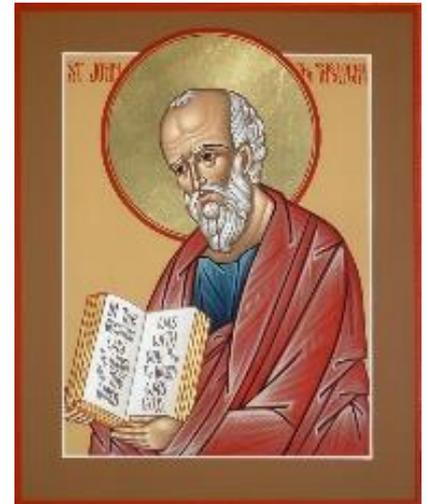
Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to

them, for he knew all people.

MESSAGE

I'm excited to be embarking with you today on our journey through the Gospel of John. My somewhat ambitious plan is to preach right through this wonderful Gospel up to and beyond Easter. Unlike the Lectionary that just occasionally takes passages at random from John, we're going to hear the whole story as the author intended. I've prepared an introduction to John that you can pick up after the service today that will help orient you to John's story and how he tells it.

The tradition is that the fourth Gospel was written by the disciple John, brother of James, who along with Peter formed an intimate inner circle among Jesus' disciples. If Peter likes to speak directly – as reflected in the Gospel of Mark – then John is much more contemplative. He appears less interested in what Jesus did and more interested in what he said and especially in who Jesus claimed to be.



While there are many ways to tell any story, each of Matthew, Mark and Luke use similar stories and sayings of Jesus and often in the same order, so they can be placed side by side in three columns and seen together – hence they are sometimes called the **syn-optic** Gospels ... literally having the same eye or same approach.

§ 8 THE TEMPTATION

MAT 4:1–11	MAR 1:12–13	LUK 4:1–13
<p>1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.</p> <p>2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.</p> <p>3 The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4 But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"</p>	<p>2 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.</p> <p>3 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts;</p>	<p>1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.</p> <p>3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." 4 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"</p>

It's a bit like the tabloid newspapers of News Corp in Australia. The daily tabloids share many of the same stories and often use the same photos as each other – whether it's the *Herald-Sun* in Melbourne, the *Daily Telegraph* in Sydney or the *Courier Mail* in Brisbane. There may be some local stories or sport unique to each paper but basically they are telling the same news in the same way ... like the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.



But there is another News Corp publication called *The Australian*. It's a national paper and is a broadsheet so it looks and feels different. It has longer and more in-depth articles and different writers. It presents the same news as the Murdoch tabloids but in a different way. So

it's more like John who has fewer episodes that the other three Gospels, but spends longer on each incident, probing more deeply.

John tells the same Jesus story but in a different way. So in this Gospel, for instance ...

Jesus heals people, but not very often.

He never casts out a demon or an evil spirit.

He offers almost no moral teaching and rarely interacts with his disciples.

Most of the action happens in Jerusalem rather than in Galilee.

And Jesus talks a lot in long monologues, but never in parables.

So is it the same story? Yes – but John chooses different episodes to highlight and focuses on them in depth.

Is it presenting the same Jesus? Yes – but again John chooses to highlight different aspects of Jesus' message.

In Mark, Matthew and Luke, the Jesus story is told **from below** as it were, from an earthly human perspective. We travel along with the disciples and the crowds and watch as Jesus heals, teaches and annoys the Pharisees. Everyone is trying to figure out who this Jesus is. Is he a great teacher like Moses? Or a prophet? Or is he more than that? Could he be the Messiah, the long awaited king and deliverer of Israel?

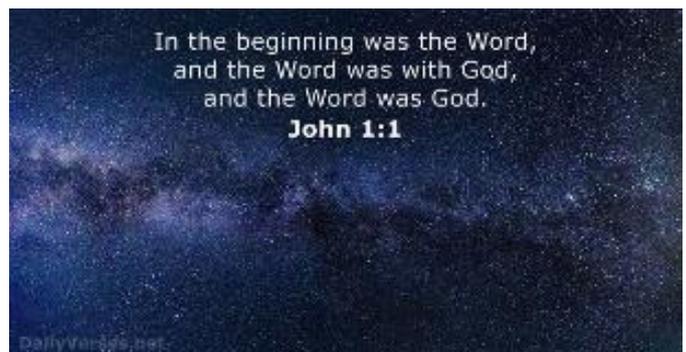


The story reaches a climax after Jesus travels to Jerusalem and drives the money changers from the Temple. The Temple authorities – led by the High Priest – seek to have Jesus arrested and killed as a pretend Messiah and potential political threat to Rome. There is a brief trial before the High Priest where Jesus is asked directly whether he is the Messiah, the Son of God. He refuses to answer the charge but says they will see him sitting at God's right hand.

The High Priest quickly condemns him of blasphemy.

Within the space of just a few hours, Jesus is brought before the Roman Governor Pilate, is flogged, crucified on a cross and dies. Then on the third day Jesus mysteriously rises again. This is the story of the **earthly human Jesus**, but with glimpses and suggestions – especially at his baptism, at the transfiguration and at the resurrection – that Jesus is more than an ordinary human being.

John, however, approaches the story of Jesus from **above**, from a heavenly perspective. Right from the opening chapter, Jesus is presented as having his origins not in a stable in Bethlehem but in heaven. He is the Word of God, is present with God at creation, and carries

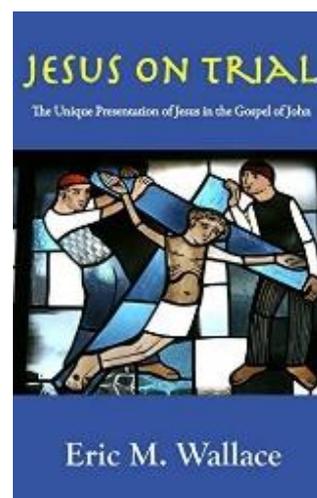


within him the light and life of God, the grace and truth of God. From the very outset he is openly and publicly declared to be the Son of God, as well as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and the Messiah and King of Israel. There are no guesses or speculation as to who Jesus might be. We're told very clearly from the beginning of the story.

The incident where Jesus chases the money changers from the Temple happens right at the start of Jesus' ministry rather than at the end – and the whole Gospel is

presented as a trial of sorts – not in private before the High Priest but in the public domain.

What is Jesus on trial for? For claiming to be the Son of God who was sent to earth by God the Father to show people what God is like and to offer people life, eternal life. Nearly every speech and incident in this fourth Gospel is presenting evidence as to the truth of Jesus' claim. Various witnesses affirm his claim, other witnesses – especially his opponents who are simply labelled as 'the Jews' – refute his claim as a perversion of Judaism, while a few others such as Nicodemus who we meet in chapter 3, initially sit on the fence.



The purpose of this Gospel is to help us – the readers and hearers – to decide for ourselves whether or not Jesus really is the Son of God – sent by God to bring God's offer of eternal life ... whether Jesus really is one with God and whose word is to be fully trusted ... or whether Jesus is in fact a blasphemer speaking lies, as his opponents regularly claim. We the reader are like the jury in a trial – we have to decide whether to believe and trust in Jesus – or not.

In John's telling of the story, there is lots of symbolism – for instance the seven 'I am' sayings – where Jesus claims to be the bread of life, the light of the world, the way the truth and the life and so forth. Seven is the Hebrew number for completion or wholeness and I am is the name God revealed to Moses at the burning bush. So each time Jesus speaks in this way he is claiming to embody some aspect of God's character using symbols and stories from the OT Scriptures – such as God feeding the people with manna in the desert and Jesus claiming that he instead provides the true bread of life. There are seven such sayings – hinting they provide a full or complete sense of who Jesus is.

7 "I AM" Statements	
1. "I am the bread of life"	John 6:35
2. "I am the light of the world"	John 8:12
3. "I am the door for the sheep"	John 10:7, 9
4. "I am the good shepherd"	John 10:11, 14
5. "I am the resurrection and the life"	John 11:25
6. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life"	John 14:6
7. "I am the true vine"	John 15:1, 5

Similarly, there are seven signs – actions that point to who Jesus is. The first of these signs comes in chapter 2 that we heard earlier, at the wedding in Cana, where Jesus changes the water into wine.

So let's get into some of the detail of that story ...

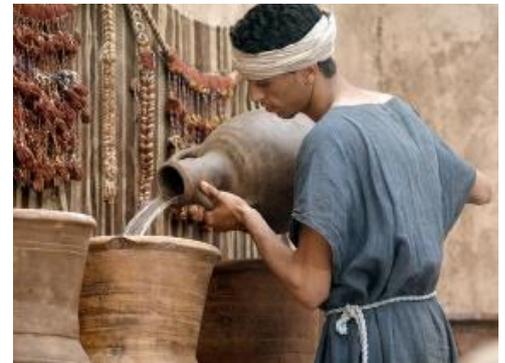


Weddings are happy social occasions. But on this occasion someone has committed a serious faux pas ... the wine has run out, which is embarrassing if not shameful for the host. Something similar happened at a wedding we attended years ago. I was approached by the best man whether I could quietly go and procure some more. Fortunately it

was a day time wedding on a Saturday and there was a pub not far away ... so I went and purchased some more wine. Any embarrassment was averted.

Jesus does something very different at Cana. Given what we've been hearing of John's approach to telling the story and given that we already know that Jesus is the Son of God, it's not too surprising that John takes a simple story from a wedding and imbues it with depths of meaning.

The water jars most likely represent the Mosaic covenant between God and Israel where purity was important. Before eating or approaching God in worship one had to purify oneself by washing. At a wedding with lots of guests this meant lots of washing and hence lots of water needed to be on hand.



Jesus takes this understanding and transforms it. He himself will provide the point of connection with heaven and bring new life to the wedding ...



As the Word of God, Jesus speaks and something happens. In this case the water changes into wine. Not just any wine but the very best of wine ... which points to passages like Isaiah 25 where the life of the age to come is pictured as a feast with rich food and the finest of wine. We might also think of the book of Revelation where one of the images

used for the heavenly life is that of a wedding feast with Jesus as the groom and the church as the bride.

This life of heaven breaks into the present through Jesus, who provides not just a glass or two of wine but hundreds of litres of the very best wine. Later, Jesus will say

that he has come that we may have life and have it abundantly, which is what happens here. One imagines that this story would also have set a few tongues wagging ...

This incident – the first of seven such signs in John’s Gospel – reveals Jesus’ glory – his connection with God – and his bringing of God’s life into the present. We’re told that his disciples believe in him. After the next incident in the Temple, we’re told that many people believed in him because they saw the signs he was doing. So here are two early pieces of evidence – two different groups of witnesses – putting their faith in Jesus.

Of course, at another level, this is just a simple story of what happened at a wedding, a story that shows the compassion of Jesus meeting people’s needs where they are at ... bringing God’s blessing into the present when we need it most.

So we may choose to take the simple lesson from the story – or we may take up John’s suggestion to see deeper truths and a sign that points to who Jesus is and his connection with God and God’s desire to bring blessing and abundant life to our world and indeed into our own lives. Amen.