

Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 6

CHRIST'S FIRST MIRACLE

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Transcript

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John 2:1-11

First of all we will give a brief and simple Analysis of the passage before us:— 1. The Occasion of the Miracle: a marriage in Cana, verse 1. 2. The Presence there of the Mother of Jesus, verse 1. 3. The Savior and His Disciples Invited, verse 2. 4. Mary's Interference and Christ's Rebuke, verses 3, 4. 5. Mary's Submission, verse 5. 6. The Miracle Itself, verses 6-8. 7. The Effects of the Miracle, verses 9-11. We propose to expound the passage before us from a threefold viewpoint: first, its typical significance, second, its prophetic application, third, its practical teaching. It is as though the Holy Spirit had here combined three pictures into one. We might illustrate it by the method used in printing a picture in colors. There is first the picture itself in its black-edged outline; then, on top of this, is filled in the first coloring—red, or yellow, as the case may be; finally, the last color—blue or brown—may be added to the others, and the composite and variegated picture is complete. To use the terms of the illustration, it is our purpose to examine, separately, the different tints and shadings in the Divine picture which is presented to our view in the first half of John 2. I. The typical significance. It is to be carefully noted that this second chapter of John opens with the word "and," which indicates that its contents are closely connected with what has gone before. One of the things that is made prominent in John 1 (following the Introduction, which runs to the end of verse 18) is the failure of Judaism, and the turning away from it to Christ. The failure of Judaism (seen in the ignorance of the Sanhedrin) is made plain by the sending of priests and Levites from Jerusalem to enquire of John who he was (John 1:19). This is made still more evident by the pathetic statement of the Baptist, "There standeth one among you, whom ye know not" (John 1:26). All this is but an amplification of that tragic word found in John 1:11—"He came unto his own, and his own received him not." So blind were the religious leaders of Israel, that they neither knew the Christ of God stood in their midst, nor recognized His forerunner to whom the Old Testament Scriptures bore explicit witness. Judaism was but a dead husk, the heart and life of it were gone. Only one thing remained, and that was the setting of it aside, and the bringing in "of a better hope." Accordingly, we read in Galatians 4:4, 'But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son.' Yes, the fulness of God's time had

come. The hour was ripe for Christ to be manifested. The need of Him had been fully demonstrated. Judaism must be set aside. A typical picture of this was before us in John 1. The Baptist wound up the Old Testament system ("The law and the prophets were until John"—Luke 16:16), and in John 1:35-37 we are shown two (the number of competent testimony) of His disciples leaving John, and following the Lord Jesus. The same principle is illustrated again in the chapter now before us. A marriage-feast is presented to our view, and the central thing about it is that the wine had given out. The figure is not difficult to interpret: "Wine" in Scripture is the emblem of joy, as the following passage will show: "And wine that maketh glad the heart of man" (Ps. 104:15); "And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man?" (Judg. 9:13). How striking, then, is what we have here in John 2! How accurate the picture. Judaism still existed as a religious system, but it ministered no comfort to the heart. It had degenerated into a cold, mechanical routine, utterly destitute of joy in God. Israel had lost the joy of their espousals. "And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews" (verse 6). What a portrayal of Judaism was this! Six is the number of man, for it was on the sixth day man was made, and of the Superman it is written, "Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred threescore six" (Rev. 13:18). Yes, there were six waterpots standing there, not seven, the perfect number. All that was left of Judaism was of the flesh; God was not in it. As we read later on in this Gospel, the "feasts of the Lord" (Lev. 23:2) were now only "the feast of the Jews" (John 2:13, etc.). Observe, too, that these six waterpots were of "stone," not silver which speaks of redemption, nor of gold which tells of Divine glory. As we read in Isaiah 1:22, "Thy silver is become dross," and again in Lamentations 4:1, "How is the gold become dim?" Profoundly significant, then, were these waterpots of "stone." And what is the more noticeable, they were empty. Again, we say, what a vivid portrayal have we here of Israel's condition at that time! No wonder the wine had given out! To supply that Christ was needed. Therefore, our chapter at once directs attention to Him as the One who alone can provide that which speaks of joy in God. Thus does John 2 give us another representation of the failure of Judaism, and the turning away from it to the Savior. Hence, it opens with the word "and," as denoting the continuation of the same subject which had been brought out in the previous chapter. In striking accord with what we have just suggested above, is the further fact, that in this scene of the Cana-marriage feast, the mother of Jesus occupies such a prominent position. It is to be noted that she is not here called by her personal name—as she is in Acts 1:14—but is referred to as "the mother of Jesus." (John 2:1). She is, therefore, to be viewed as a representative character. In this chapter Mary occupies the same position as the Baptist did in John 1. She stands for the nation of Israel. Inasmuch as through her the long promised "seed" had come, Mary is to be regarded here as gathering up into her person the entire Abrahamic stock. What, then, does the Holy Spirit record here of Mary? Were her actions on this occasion in keeping with the representative character she filled? They certainly were. The record is exceedingly brief, but what is said is enough to confirm our line of interpretation. The mother of Jesus exhibited a woeful lack of spiritual discernment. It seems as if she presumed so far as to dictate to the Lord. Apparently she ventured to order the Savior, and tell Him what to do. No otherwise can we account for the reply that He made to her on this occasion—"Woman, what have I to do with thee?" It was a pointed rebuke, and as such His words admonished her for her failure to render Him the respect and reverence which, as the Lord of Glory, were His due. We believe that this unwonted interference of Mary was prompted by the same carnal motive as actuated His unbelieving "brethren" (i.e. other sons of Mary and Joseph) on a later occasion. In John 7:2-5 we read, "Now the Jews feast of tabernacles was at hand. His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth anything in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, show thyself to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in

him." Mary wanted the Savior to openly display His power and glory, and, accordingly, she was a true representative of the Jewish nation. Israel had no thought and had no heart for a suffering Messiah; what they desired was One who would immediately set up His kingdom here on earth. Thus, in Mary's ignorance (at that time) of the real character of Christ's mission, in her untimely longing for Him to openly display His power and glory, and in Christ's word of rebuke to her, "What have I to do with thee?" we have added evidence of the typical significance of this scene at the Cana marriage-feast—the setting aside of Israel after the flesh. II. The Prophetic Application. What is recorded here in the first part of John 2 looks beyond the conditions that obtained in Israel at that time. The miracle which Christ performed at Cana possessed a prophetic significance. Like so much that is found in Scripture, the passage before us needs to be studied from a twofold viewpoint: its immediate and its remote applications. Above, we have sought to bring out what we believe to be the direct significance of this incident, in its typical and representative suggestiveness. Now we would turn for a moment to contemplate its more distant and prophetic application. "And the third day:" so our chapter opens. The Holy Spirit presents to our view a third day scene. The third day is the day of resurrection. It was on the third day that the earth emerged from its watery grave, as it was on the third day the barren earth was clothed with vegetable life (Gen. 1:9, 11). There is an important scripture in Hosea 6:2 which should be placed side by side with John 2:1: "After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight." For almost two thousand years (two Days with God—see 2 Peter 3:8) Israel has been without a king, without a priest, without a home. But the second "Day" is almost ended, and when the third dawns, their renaissance shall come. This second chapter of John presents us with a prophetic foreshadowing of the future. It gives us a typical picture of Christ—the Third Day, following the two days (the two thousand years) of Israel's dispersion. Then will Israel invite Jesus to come to them: for, not until they say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" will He return to the earth. Then will the Lord be married to the new Israel, see Isaiah 54; Hosea 2, etc. Then will Christ turn the water into wine—fill Israel's hearts with joy. Then will Israel say to the Gentiles (their servants), "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do." Then will Israel render unqualified obedience to Jehovah, for He will write His law in their hearts (Jer. 31:33). Then will Christ "manifest His glory" (John 2:11)—cf. Matthew 25:31; and thus will the best wine be reserved for Israel until the last. Having touched, somewhat briefly, upon the typical and prophetic significance of this miracle, we turn now to consider, III. The Practical Teaching. "And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage" (verses 1, 2). Christ here sanctifies the marriage relationship. Marriage was ordained by God in Eden and in our lesson, the Savior, for all time, set His stamp of approval upon it. To be present at this marriage was almost Christ's first public appearance after His ministry commenced. By gracing this festive gathering, our Lord distinguished and glorified this sacred institution. Observe that Christ was invited to be there. Christ's presence is essential to a happy marriage. The marriage where there is no place for our Lord and Savior cannot be blest of God: "Whatsoever ye do... do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). "And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine" (John 2:3). Mary's words seem to indicate two things: first, she ignored His Deity. Was she not aware that He was more than man? Did she not know that He was God manifest in the flesh? and, therefore, omniscient. He knew that they had no wine. Second, it appears as though Mary was seeking to exert her parental authority, by suggesting to Him what He ought to do under the circumstances. "Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee?" (John 2:4). This is an elliptical expression, and in the Greek literally read, "What to Me and thee?" We take it that the force of this question of our Lord's was, What is there common to Me and thee—cf. Matthew 8:29 for a similar grammatical construction. It was not that the Savior resented Mary's inviting His aid, but a plain intimation that she must allow Him to act in His own way. Christ here showed that His

season of subjection to Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:51) was over, His public ministry had now commenced and she must not presume to dictate to Him. Many of our readers, no doubt, have wondered why Christ here addressed His mother as "Woman." Scholars tell us that at the time our Lord used this word it would not sound harsh or rough. It was a designation commonly used for addressing females of all classes and relationships, and was sometimes employed with great reverence and affection. Proof of this is seen in the fact that while on the Cross itself Christ addressed Mary as "Woman," saying, "Behold thy son" (John 19:26 and see also John 20:13, 15). But we believe our Lord chose this word with Divine discrimination, and for at least two reasons. First, because He was here calling attention to the fact that He was more than man, that He was none less than the Son of God. To have addressed her as "mother" would have called attention to human relationships; but calling her "woman" showed that God was speaking to her. We may add that it is significant that the two times Christ addressed His mother as "woman" are both recorded in the Gospel of John which sets forth His Deity. Again, the employment of this term "woman" denotes Christ's omniscience. With prophetic foresight He anticipated the horrible idolatry which was to ascribe Divine honors to her. He knew that in the centuries which were to follow, men would entitle her the Queen of angels and the Mother of God. Hence, He refused to use a term which would in any wise countenance the monstrous system of Mariolatry. Christ would here teach us that Mary was only a woman—"Blessed among women" (Luke 1:28) but not "blessed above women." "Mine hour is not yet come" (John 2:4) became the most solemn watchword of His life, marking the stages by which He drew nigh to His death. Seven references are made in this Gospel to that awful "hour." The first is in our present passage in John 2:4. The second is found in John 7:30—"Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come." The third time is found in John 8:20—"And no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come." The fourth is in John 12:23—"And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified." The fifth is in John 12:27—"Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour." The sixth is in John 16:32—"Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." The seventh is in John 17:1—"These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy son, that thy son also may glorify thee." This "hour" was the hour of His humiliation. It was the "hour" of His suffering. But why should Christ refer to this "hour" when Mary was seeking to dictate to Him? Ah, surely the answer is not far to seek. That awful "hour" to which he looked forward, was the time when He would be subject to man's will, for then He would be delivered up into the hands of sinners. But until then, He was not to be ordered by man; instead, He was about His Father's business, seeking only to do His will. "His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do" (John 2:5). This is very beautiful. Mary meekly accepted the Lord's rebuke, recognized His rights to act as He pleased, and left the matter entirely in His hands. There is an important and much neglected lesson here for each of us. How prone we are to dictate to God! How often we are disposed to tell Him what to do! This is only another evidence of that detestable self-will which still operates in the believer, unless Divine grace subdues it. Our plain duty is to commit our way unto the Lord and then leave Him to supply our need in His own good time and manner. We turn now to consider the miracle which Christ performed here at Cana. And first, a few words upon the occasion of it. The Lord Jesus recognized in this request of Mary's a call from His Father. He discerned in this simple act of furnishing the wedding-guests with wine a very different thing from what His mother saw. The performing of this miracle marked an important crisis in the Savior's career. His act of turning the water into wine would alter the whole course of His life. Hitherto He had lived in quiet seclusion in Nazareth, but from this time on He would become a public and marked character. From henceforth He would scarcely have leisure to eat,

and His opportunity for retired communion with the Father would be only when others slept. If He performed this miracle, and manifested forth His glory, He would become the gazing stock of every eye, and the common talk of every tongue. He would be followed about from place to place, thronged and jostled by vulgar crowds. This would provoke the jealousy of religious leaders, and He would be spied upon and regarded as a public menace. Later, this would eventuate in His being seized as a notorious criminal, falsely accused, and sentenced to be crucified. All of this stood out before Him as He was requested to supply the needed wine. But He did not shrink. He had come to do the will of God, no matter what the cost. May we not say it reverently, that as He stood there by Mary's side and listened to her words, that the Cross challenged Him. Certainly it was here anticipated, and hence His solemn reference to His "hour" yet to come. In the second place, the manner in which the miracle was performed is deserving of our closest attention. "And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare" (John 2:6-8). Christ was the One to work the miracle, yet the "servants" were the ones who seemed to do everything. They filled the waterpots, they drew off the wine, they bore it to the governor of the feast. There was no visible exhibition of putting forth of Divine power. Christ pronounced no magical formula: He did not even command the water to become wine. What was witnessed by the spectators was men at work, not God creating out of nothing. And all this speaks loudly to us. It was a parable in action. The means used were human, the result was seen to be Divine. This was Christ's first miracle, and in it He shows us that God is pleased to use human instrumentality in performing the wonders of His grace. The miracle consisted in the supplying of wine and, as previously pointed out, wine symbolizes joy in God. Learn then, that the Lord is pleased to employ human agents in bringing joy to 'the hearts of men. And what was the element Christ used on this occasion in producing the wine? It was water. Now "water" is one of the symbols of the written Word (see Ephesians 5:26). And how may we His servants, today, bring the wine of joy unto human hearts? By ministering the Word (see Ephesians 5:26). And how may we His servants, today, "servants" Christ's command to fill those six empty waterpots of stone with water, might have seemed meaningless, if not foolish; but their obedience made them fellow-workers in the miracle! And to the wise of this world, who put their trust in legislation, and social amelioration, it seems useless to go forth unto the wicked with nothing more in our hands than a Book written almost two thousand years ago. Nevertheless, it has pleased God "by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe"—foolish, that is, in the estimate of the worldly wise. Here then is blessed instruction for the servants of God today. Let us go forth with the Water of life, implicitly obeying the commands of our Lord, and He will use us to bring the wine of Divine joy to many a sad heart. In the third place, consider the teaching of this miracle. In it we have a striking picture of the regeneration of a sinner. First, we see the condition of the natural man before he is born again: he is like an empty waterpot of stone-cold, lifeless, useless. Second, we see the worthlessness of man's religion to help the sinner. Those waterpots were set apart "after the manner of the purifying of the Jews"—they were designed for ceremonial purgation; but their valuelessness was shown by their emptiness. Third, at the command of Christ they were filled with water, and water is one of the emblems of the written Word: it is the Word which God uses in quickening dead souls into newness of life. Observe, too, these waterpots were filled "up to the brim"—God always gives good measure; with no niggardly hand does He minister. Fourth, the water produced wine, "good wine" (verse 10): symbol of the Divine joy which fills the soul of the one who has been "born of water." Fifth, we read "This beginning of miracles did Jesus." That is precisely what the new birth is—a "miracle." And not only so, it is always the "beginning of miracles" for the one newly born: regeneration is ever the initial work of grace. Sixth, observe "this beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana

of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory." It is thus, in the regeneration of dead sinners, that the "glory" of our Savior and Lord is "manifested." Seventh, observe, "And His disciples believed on him." A dead man cannot believe. But the first movement of the newly born soul is to turn to Christ. Not that we argue an interval of time between the two, but as cause stands to effect so the work of regeneration precedes the act of believing in Christ—cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:13: first, "sanctification of the Spirit," which is the new birth, then "belief of the truth." But is there not even a deeper meaning to this beginning of Christ's miracles? Is it not profoundly significant that in this first miracle which our Savior performed, the "wine," which is the symbol of His shed blood, should be so prominent! The marriage-feast was the occasion of joy and merriment; and does not God give us here something more than a hint that in order for His people to be joyous, the precious blood of His Son must be first poured forth! Ah, that is the foundation of every blessing we enjoy, the ground of all our happiness. Hence did Christ begin His supernatural works of mercy by producing that which spoke of His sacrificial death. "When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom" (John 2:9). This parenthetical statement is most blessed. It illustrates an important principle. It was the servants—not the "disciples," nor yet Mary—who were nearest to the Lord on this occasion, and who possessed the know]edge of His mind. What puzzled the "ruler of the feast" was no secret to these "servants." How different are God's ways from ours! The Lord of glory was here as "Servant." In marvelous grace He came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister:" therefore, are those who are humble in service, and those engaged in the humblest service, nearest to Him. This is their reward for turning their backs upon the honors and emoluments of the world. As we read in Amos 3:7—"Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto (Ah, unto whom?) his servants the prophets." It is like what we read in Psalm 103:7—"He made known his ways unto Moses;" and who was Moses? Let Scripture answer: "Now the man Moses was very meek above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3)! Yes, "the meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way" (Ps. 25:9). Those who determine to occupy the position of authority (as Mary did here) are not taken into the Lord's secrets. Those who wish to be in a place like the "ruler of the feast," know not His thoughts. But those who humble themselves to take the servant position, who place themselves at Christ's disposal, are the ones who share His counsels. And in the day to come, when He will provide the true wine of the kingdom, those who have served Him during the time of His absence, shall then be under Him the dispensers of joy. Has he not promised, "If any man serve me, him will my Father honor?" "And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now" (John 2:10). This illustrates the ways of men and the ways of God. The world (and Satan also) gives its best first, and keeps the worst for the last. First the pleasures of sin—for a season—and then the wages of sin. But with God it is the very opposite. He brings His people into the wilderness before He brings them into the promised inheritance. First the Cross then the crown. Fellow believer, for us, the best wine is yet to be: "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18). One more observation on this passage and we must close. What a message is there here for the unsaved! The natural man has a "wine" of his own. There is a carnal happiness enjoyed which is produced by "the pleasures of sin"—the merriment which this world affords. But how fleeting this is! How unsatisfying! Sooner or later this "wine," which is pressed from "the vine of the earth" (Rev. 14:18), gives out. The poor sinner may be surrounded by gay companions, he may be comfortably circumstanced financially and socially, yet the time comes when he discovers he has "no wine." Happy the one who is conscious of this. The discovery of our own wretchedness is often the turning point. It prepares us to look to that One who is ready "to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isa. 61:3).

Unbelieving friend, there is only One who can furnish the true "wine," the "good" wine, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. He can satisfy the longing of the soul. He can quench the thirst of the heart. He can put a song into thy mouth which not even the angels can sing, even the song of Redemption. What then must you do? What price must you pay? Ah, dear friend, listen to the glad tidings of grace: "Repent ye, and believe the Gospel" (Mark 1:15). And now, we give a number of questions to prepare the interested student for the lesson to follow. Study, then, and prayerfully meditate on the following questions:— 1. Why is the cleansing of the temple referred to just here?—Note its place in the other Gospels. 2. Why did not Christ drive out "the doves?" verse 16. 3. What was indicated by the Jews' demand for a "sign?" verse 18. 4. Why did Christ point them forward to His resurrection? verses 18-21. 5. Did the Lord's own disciples believe in the promise of His resurrection? If not, why? verse 22. 6. What solemn warning does verse 23 point? 7. What does verse 25 prove concerning Christ?

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