

Benefits of Servanthood

John 2:1-11

BI: There is no greater privilege than seeing Jesus use our ordinary service to accomplish extraordinary results to bring glory to God.

Introduction:

These past couple of weeks we have been studying the story of Jesus turning water in to wine and we have learned about the glory of our abundantly generous God. He is no stingy Savior. He loves to give good gifts to His people and rescue us when we are in need. Why? Because He loves us and cares for us like a godly father loves and cares for his children.

Some of you asked some really astute questions about this story after the service last week, so before we get into the text I would like to address two questions very briefly.

The first question has to do with the very practical issue of whether or not it is a sin to drink alcohol. I think this question has come up because in the past two weeks I emphasized that the wine in Jesus' day was nothing like the wine in our day. It was normally diluted to the fraction of one part water and three parts wine. There are a couple reasons why I emphasized that fact.

First, I wanted to emphasize it for the obvious reason that the idea of drinking wine every day during a week-long marriage celebration might otherwise sound like a sure recipe for alcoholism if it weren't for the fact that it was diluted. So I wanted to make the point clear.

Second, I am very aware of the fact that there will always be those who are tempted to take a text like this and use to justify their own excessive drinking of alcohol. But such thinking fails to take into account that the wine believers drank in Jesus' day was not at all the same as what is available to us today.

So let me make this plain. I have never taught that drinking alcohol is sinful. It is not what goes into a man that defiles him but what comes out. In other words sin and righteousness are always matters of the heart. There is nothing intrinsically sinful about alcohol. But if you exercise that liberty in a manner that causes a brother to stumble; or if you drink in violation of your own conscience; or if you're drinking causes you to get drunk than it is sin for you. And it is for these reasons that my wife and I have chosen to abstain from it completely.

Now the second question I heard after the service last week had something to do with the possible symbolism regarding the water pots. I intentionally did not go there last week because I didn't want to distract from what I believe is the main point of the text; namely, that Jesus is an extravagant Savior who pours upon His people grace upon grace.

To the question about the water pots, however, let's just take a minute to look at text of **John 2:6**. Here John explains, "Now there were six stone water pots set there for the Jewish custom of purification containing twenty or thirty gallons each." Now, concerning these water pots, there has been much speculation. Why were there six of them and why was John so careful to tell us that they were "for the Jewish custom of purification"?

One author points out that one of the things the apostle John emphasizes in his gospel is the failure of Judaism to bring salvation to God's people. By the time Jesus came on the scene "Judaism was but a dead husk, the heart and life of it were gone" (Arthur Pink, Exposition of John). When Jesus came He was determined to set aside that old, broken system and replace it with a better hope; namely, the gospel.

In Jesus' day "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" (Ibid)

heart. It had degenerated into a cold, mechanical routine, a stony desecration of the house of God (ibid).

Now I agree with this perspective, and it certainly serves as one of the threads that is weaved through this gospel from beginning to end. For example, in chapter 1, John points out that when the Word came to His own, the Jews did not receive Him (1:11). In chapter 2 we see Jesus cleansing the temple with a cat-of-nine-tails because that broken system of Judaism had converted God's house of prayer into a profit-making bazaar.

Some believe that there may also be a veiled allusion of this theme here in the story of the water turned to wine. It could be that John pointed out that the pots were for the "Jewish custom of purification" because he wanted once again to show the failure of Judaism in the symbol of empty pots and the fact that what Jesus offers is better. But then again, it might be that John explains something about the water pots because he knew his readers would have been familiar with their general size. It would have helped them picture in their minds the fantastic amount of wine Jesus created.

I would just exhort us this morning, beloved, to use caution when reading interpretations of Scripture that rely heavily on allegorizing or spiritualizing things in the text. Frankly, by allegorizing a clever person can make any text of Scripture say anything he wants.

For example, one author suggests the importance of there being six water pots was that six is the number of man because man was created on the sixth day and the mark of the Anti-Christ in Revelation is 666. Furthermore, the number of perfection is 7, so clearly John was showing us the imperfection of Judaism. That the pots were empty shows us that God was no longer in that old religious system. The fact that they were made of stone "not silver which speaks of redemption, nor gold which tells of Divine glory" (Ibid) symbolizes the worthlessness of the old system and on and all we could go.

Once again, let me just plead with you: Don't do that to the text of Scripture. In the vast majority of cases, the meaning of a text of Scripture will become plain simply by reading it in context and asking yourself simple questions such as, "What does this passage reveal about God, man, salvation, sin, holiness, and the like." Don't try to be terribly clever with the text. Just find the natural meaning, and respond to it appropriately.

Now, I wanted to spend one more week in this text because there is an important observation that John makes here that I think might be a tremendous encouragement to us all as we strive to be faithful to the Lord. Before we delve into the specifics, however, let's refresh on context.

Jesus and His 5 disciples have been invited to a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Toward the end of the week of feasting Mary reveals to Jesus that the wedding party has run out of wine. At the very least this was going to be a catastrophic embarrassment to the bride and groom and their families, but what can be done? So Jesus steps in, almost invisibly, to rescue the situation before any of the guest know what is going on.

How did Jesus do it? Well, there were these six stone water pots there which were normally used for the Jewish custom of purification. Jesus instructed the servants to fill the pots with water and take some to the headwaiter. Let's pick up the story in v. 9. (Read 9-10)

Last week I went out of my way to stress the subtlety of this miracle. This was not Jesus' hour to be glorified. He did not want to make a big show here. And He did a good job at keeping it on the down low. Think about it. Who knew that the miracle had taken place? Mary didn't know. The guests didn't know. The headwaiter didn't even know. So who knew? Well, v. 11 tells us the disciples believed in Him because of it, so they apparently knew. But there is one more group of people in this story who knew what happened before anyone else did, and John really wants us to know about them. In fact, he kind of stops the whole story for a second to drop in a parenthetical statement about them so that we would know that they know.

Let's read it again. Read v. 9.

There is an old English axiom that says, "The maids know all." The idea was that even though the maids occupied a low position in the social order yet their duties required them to serve in every room of the house. Because of that, they became privy to important things that others would never know. The same was true for the servants at this wedding.

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The servants were, no doubt, the lowliest people at this wedding. Their job was to serve the guests, to do the menial jobs, to set up, clean up, and shut up. Their presence was necessary only for the purpose of custodial services. Nevertheless, these were the people who were the first to know that Jesus had performed a miracle! In fact, they had been the ones Jesus used to bring it about. It was they who had to haul 180 gallons of water to fill the pots. They were the ones who carried a sample of the water-turned-wine to the headwaiter. And they were the only ones standing there when the headwaiter commented on how good the wine was.

The text clearly says, the headwaiter “did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew).” What does this have to do with you and me? Beloved, WE ARE THE SERVANTS!

Think about it. The cases in which God performs extraordinary works of grace in this world all by Himself are rare. Normally, He chooses to use the faithful labor of ordinary people to accomplish His glorious purposes. Who were these servants? We don’t know! What were their names? We are not told! Did they know Jesus was going to perform a miracle? Not a chance! What did they do? They simply obeyed the instruction of the Lord to haul water. But it was while they were faithfully obeying the Lord in this menial task that they received the exclusive privilege of being first to know that Jesus had done a miracle. More than that, the miracle took place in their very own hands.

Beloved, what a parable this is of the privilege of being a faithful servant of the Lord. We never know when He’s planning to do something amazing. We never know when He is going to regenerate a sinful heart. We never know when He is going to rescue an unsalvageable marriage. We never know when He is going to answer the secret prayers of a family facing a financial crisis. But we do know this: that God is pleased to employ human agents like you and me to bring unexpected joy to the hearts of needy people.

Do you want to know what it’s like to be used of God to accomplish something amazing? Then resolve to be faithful in the little things. Get up every day and haul the water. Live in obedience to the Lord. Speak when He would have you speak. Serve where He would have you serve. Let no task be too menial.

A. W. Pink writes, “Christ’s command to fill those six empty water pots of stone with water, might have seemed meaningless, if not foolish; but there obedience made them fellow-workers in the miracle!” (Ibid). Do you see it my friends? God uses the faithfulness of ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things for His glory and our joy.

Moms, tomorrow it is going to feel like all you do at home is haul water and diapers, and spelling books, and peanut-butter. Be faithful and see what God will do.

Men, at the office tomorrow you might get to feeling that you are doing nothing of eternal value. But do your best at whatever God has assigned to you and see what He will do.

Singles, don’t wait till God gives you a husband or wife before you get serious about being faithful. God has you single for a reason! Be faithful to serve him with your singleness and see what He will do.

Students, tomorrow morning you’re going to look at those same reading, writing, and arithmetic books and think to yourself, “Why do I have to do this every day every day of my life?” The answer is, it won’t be every day of your life but it is what God has given you to do now. He has an amazing purpose for your life. Just be faithful and see what He will do.

Jesus said in John 12:26, “if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him”

To His disciples He said, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God...”

Do you want to see God use you to do amazing things in this world? Than just be faithful with the next duty, the next decision, the next act of service. James 4:10 says, “Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord and He will exalt you.”

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