

“FIRST MIRACLE, LASTING IMPRESSIONS”

John 2:1-11

All of us go through difficulties. Illness. Marital troubles. Family or financial worries. Career setbacks. Unhappiness. Loneliness. Loss. And when we go through difficulties, we are always tempted to doubt God’s wisdom, goodness, fairness, and power. We ask questions we don’t like to ask: “Where is God? Why isn’t He helping? What’s taking Him so long? Does He care? Does He have better, more important things to do?”

Of course, we are not alone in asking such questions. Many other believers have asked similar questions throughout the ages. When frustrated by the injustice of society and the disregard for God’s law, the prophet Habakkuk asked: **“How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but You do not listen? Or cry out to You, ‘Violence!’ but You do not save? Why do You make me look at injustice? Why do You tolerate wrong?”** Habakkuk 1:2-3.

When perplexed by God’s delay in delivering Israel, the writer of Psalm 44 said: **“Awake, O Lord! Why do You sleep? Rouse Yourself! Do not reject us forever. Why do You hide Your face and forget our misery and oppression?”** Psalm 44:23-24. And when Job was convinced that God was causing his problems instead of solving them, he lamented: **“The arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks in their poison; God’s terror are marshaled against me,”** Job 6:4.

If you’ve ever asked such questions; if you’ve ever doubted God’s motives or methods; if you’ve ever accused God of heartlessness or unfairness or indifference to your problems—even the most minor of matters; then follow me this morning to the wedding in Cana of Galilee. Your wedding invitation is in the words of John 2:1-11.

¹On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, ²and Jesus and His disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to Him, “They have no more wine.” ⁴“Dear woman, why do you involve Me?” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.” ⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever He tells you.” ⁶Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water,” so they filled them to the brim. ⁸Then He told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.” They did so, ⁹and 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 ¹⁰and 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.”¹¹This, 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.

Three days after calling His first disciples, Peter and Andrew, James and John, Philip and Nathaniel, Jesus attended a wedding in Cana of Galilee; a small town located on the road from Nazareth to Capernaum. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was also at the wedding. And judging from her actions in this text—notifying Jesus of the wine shortage, then giving instructions to the servants—Mary may have been a relative or close friend of the bride or groom.

Marriage receptions in ancient Israel lasted for several days. They were joyous occasions celebrated by family, friends, neighbors, and at times, the entire community. Much preparation was needed. For whatever reason, whether poor planning or unexpected guests, the reception in Cana ran out of wine—by no means a world catastrophe, but certainly a major embarrassment for the newlyweds and their families; and perhaps a legal headache for the groom, who, as part of his premarital contract with the bride’s father, may have guaranteed an ample supply of wine for the reception. If so, a shortage of wine would be a breach of contract, punishable by a fine. Not the best way to start a marriage or impress the in-laws.

Learning of the shortage, Mary said to Jesus, **“They have no more wine,”** John 2:3. How many of you were startled by the Savior’s response? **“Dear woman,”** He said in John 2:4, **“why do you involve Me? My time has not yet come.”** Yet, despite this mild rebuke, Mary did not stop trusting in Jesus. How do we know? Because she told the servants, **“Do whatever He tells you,”** John 2:5. She expected Jesus to do something about the problem. Do we have the same expectation?

Six stone water jars stood nearby, which the Jews used for washing and ritual purifications. Each jar held from twenty to thirty gallons of water. After telling the servants to fill the jars to the brim, Jesus said, **“Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet,”** John 2:8. As they did, a miracle occurred. By His almighty power—the same almighty power by which God the Son created all things, as John wrote in 1:3, **“Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made”**—Jesus changed ordinary water into extraordinary wine. If you’d like the chemical formulation, it was H₂O to C₂H₅OH.

Imagine the master of the banquet raising the cup to his lips, sampling, his eyes widening, examining the cup, sipping again, and then saying to the bridegroom: **“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,” John 2:10.

Imagine the look on the face of the bridegroom, who had no idea what the banquet-master was talking about, but likely agreed with him anyway “Kept the good wine until last? Well, sure I did. Only the best for my guests”

And imagine Jesus at that very moment glancing at the bride and groom—two young people so excited, so happy, so much in love and looking forward to their lives together; joined now in the very institution that Jesus Himself had created along with the first man and first woman—imagine Jesus glancing at the newlyweds and smiling. A smile of infinite love and compassion.

The significance of this text is stated in verse 11: **“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.”** Firsts of any kind are special and memorable: First steps, first words, first haircut, first day at school, first date, first kiss, and so on. Firsts often set the expectation for things to come. Hence the saying: “First impressions are lasting impressions.” This being true, what lasting impressions should we have of Christ’s first miracle? Let me suggest four.

FIRST, no matter what problems you face in life, God is involved and God does care. SECOND, invite God to solve your problems; don’t try to go it alone. THIRD, trust that God will act at the right time and in the right way. And FOURTH, be confident that God’s outcome will be infinitely better than anything you could have imagined or done for yourself. Let’s briefly discuss each of these.

First, the question of God’s involvement. How involved is God in our daily lives? Does He in fact know what we’re going through? Does He care? And frankly, why should He care? Why should the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God care about insignificant, sinful mortals. His very majesty dwarfs our comprehension. We say with the psalmist in Psalm 8: **“When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars which You have set in place, what is man that You are mindful of him, the son of man that You care for him?”**

Our daily experiences constantly reinforce how difficult it is to reach even important people; how commonplace it is for them to lose interest in us. If you invited a world leader to attend your wedding, would he or she come? Doubtful, unless you were wealthy, powerful, influential, and offered a meaningful photo opportunity. We live in a world where leaders ignore us; where the wise and wealthy disdain us; and where we spend hours on hold, listening to elevator music and recorded assurances that

“your call is very important to us” and “someone will be with you shortly.” Only someone never is.

Yet, when we look at our text for today, what does it teach us about the Most High God? He loves. He listens. He cares. He’s involved in every aspect of our lives, from our biggest worries to our smallest headaches. Think again about the words of verse 11: **“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.”**

But how did Jesus first reveal His glory? Was it only through this miracle of changing water into wine? No. I suggest to you, Christian friends, that Jesus also revealed His glory to us—the **“glory of the One and Only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth,”** as John wrote in 1:14—through the humble circumstances in which He performed His first miracle.

Where did Jesus perform His first miracle? Was it in Jerusalem or the world capital of Rome or on the temple mount or at the luxurious palace of King Herod? No. Jesus chose the small, don’t-blink-or-you’ll-miss-it village of Cana. *Why did Jesus perform His first miracle?* Was the reason a national crisis or natural disaster or death in the family—as would later be the case with Lazarus of Bethany? No. The first problem Jesus chose to remedy with a miracle was the minor matter of a shortage of wine.

And for whom did Jesus perform His first miracle? Emperors, kings, rulers, generals, politicians, religious leaders, the wealthy and wise of this world? No. Jesus chose to perform His first miracle for two newlyweds whose names we don’t even know; two people who were just starting their lives together. What does this tell you about your God? That’s He is distant and disinterested, or that He cares about everything in your life? Everything, including the smallest detail and the littlest worry.

And if the wedding at Cana isn’t proof enough of God’s involvement in our lives and hopes and heartaches and problems, what about the cross of Jesus Christ? What about the Savior who came to be one of us and one with us, so that He could experience what we experience, and carry our sins and diseases and sorrows, and suffer and die in our place? What of the Son of God who, as Paul wrote in Philippians 2, **“being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”** How involved is that?

Second, how often do we invite Jesus to solve our problems rather than trying to solve them on our own? This too is a question raised by our text. How often do we bring our problems and shortages and shortcomings to the Lord and leave them there? How often do we simply present our problems to Jesus in the same simple way that Mary said, **“They have no more wine?”**

Instead, we too often inform God how He should be involved; the means He should use; the type of miracle He should perform; the timing we expect. And when God doesn't solve our shortages to our timeframe or specifications, what do we do next? We say “thank you very much, God, but I'll take my problems back now.” I wonder what would have happened had Jesus Christ not been invited to that wedding in Cana?

“Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest.” If we invite Jesus to dinner, shouldn't we invite Him into our marriages, our ministries, our problems, our heartaches, our sorrows? Of course we should. Unlike the high and mighty of this world, the Most High God will accept the invitation. He promises. Don't take my word for it; take His. Revelation 3:20, **“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me.”**

Third, God will act to solve your problem at the right time and in the right way. Commentators often focus on the mild rebuke Jesus gave Mary in verse four: **“Dear woman, why do you involve Me? My time has not yet come.”** Yet, I think that mild rebuke was also an invitation; and that in this invitation Jesus was saying: “You've brought the problem to My attention. Now trust Me to act at the right time and in the right way. You know who I am.” Mary understood this. Clearly this is why she told the servants, **“Whatever He says to you, do it”** What an expression of faith. She expected Jesus to act. She expected a miracle. Shouldn't we?

Even in the best of times, waiting for the Lord to act or answer can be difficult. But when we are in deep trouble, as was the writer of Psalm 130—**“out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD,”** he wrote—waiting for God to act can seem impossible. Long days and sleepless nights become fertile soil for seeds of doubt. And then the questions come: “Where is God? If He cared about me, why would He make me wait?”

Yet amid his tears, the psalmist also insisted, **“I wait for the LORD, my soul waits.”** The Hebrew word he used, KAVAH, like many other Bible words for waiting, contains the idea of strength and patience. The psalmist was willing to wait for the LORD because he fully expected the Lord to deliver him. Where does this type of hope originate? The psalmist tells us this too. His ability to wait for the Lord to act came from the same infallible power source that you and I have in our homes and hearts: the

word of God. **“I put my hope in his word,”** wrote the psalmist. The only word on earth that will never disappoint us or fail to deliver what it promises.

God does not make us wait because He’s indifferent, uncaring, or too busy governing the universe; but rather because He’s loving, caring, and irrevocably committed to our daily and eternal well-being. To know and believe this is to find the strength we need to wait for Him to act in “His time” and not ours.

And lastly, the miracle at Cana teaches us to expect the very best from God. At the wedding at Cana, what began as ordinary water by God’s grace and power ended as extraordinary wine; wine of far greater quality and in far greater abundance. Like you, I’ve faced many challenges and difficulties in life. But I say this with all sincerity and with God as my witness: Each time I’ve given problems to God instead of attempting to carry them alone—given them to God, or perhaps better said, I’ve had them pried from my clutching fingers—what started as ordinary water was miraculously changed to extraordinary wine. The outcome was far better than anything I could have imagined.

If you looked at your own life, wouldn’t you say the same? Abraham had no idea where God was leading him; but at the end of the journey he found himself in the Promised Land. Job went through more heartache and loss than most of us can imagine. But Scripture describes the end of his life in these terms: **“The LORD blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the first.”**

I don’t know why this always surprises us when we have the clear declaration of Scripture: **“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?”** Romans 8:31-32.

All of us face difficulties; and when we do we are tempted to doubt God’s goodness and involvement. We ask questions we hate to ask: “Where is God? Why isn’t He helping? Doesn’t He care?” But the wedding at Cana tells us a different story. God does care. God is involved. God will act to solve our shortages at the right time and in the right way. Let these be our lasting impressions of Christ’s first miracle.