

# Gim'me the Good Stuff!

It apparently really bugged John. How could someone follow the Son of Man for as long as Thomas did and still not believe in His resurrection? Why did he arrogantly insist, “*Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.*”? What an unexpected contrast, for Thomas had earlier opted to endanger his life and potentially die with Jesus by going to Jerusalem where they all knew His enemies were lurking. In fact, he had encouraged the others to do the same (John 11:16).

But at the very time of supreme exhilaration and joy for everyone else – Jesus had risen! – Thomas needed yet another sign. Granted, he wasn't there earlier when the others got to see the risen Lord. Yet, before he could believe, he HAD to touch and feel, to see with his own eyes – or else. Now, John had believed when he saw the empty tomb holding only Christ's burial clothing (John 20:8). Belief came somewhat easier for him apparently. But a week after Thomas' pouty proclamation, Jesus mercifully granted him his sign. The overwhelmed disciple replied, “*My Lord and my God.*”

Christ then said, “*Because you have seen me, you have believed;*

*blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*”

Now, John must have pondered this for quite some time. This is evident because decades later he used this incident as the prelude into his rationale for writing his Gospel. He wrote in the verses immediately following this incident (20:30,31), “*Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*”

And so, the ‘Beloved Disciple’, very possibly concerned that there would be no more ‘doubting Thomas’”, chose specific signs to form the framework for his divinely inspired account of Christ's earthly ministry. He knew that none of us would have the luxury of the first few – to touch and feel, to see with iris and cornea, what is more real and substantial than anything we ‘normally’ sense.

So why did he choose the signs he did? I'll suggest that they were probably the ones which impacted John the most. They were likely the very ones that birthed and nurtured his own faith and led him to his own soul-saving conclusion at the empty tomb. You see, he came to saving faith without seeing the risen Lord and this Gospel is his testimony. That makes it extremely practical for us and supremely evangelistic. That's why he could attest that, “*these are written that you may believe*” and he may have thought – ‘like I did.’

Thus, we will begin a series to examine each of these signs confident that if we will listen to His Spirit in the process, we will find greater and greater faith in our Lord.

In Chapter Two of John's Gospel, he recorded an incident in which Jesus turned ordinary water into wine. He concluded with, “*This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.*” (v11) So this was the first sign and John, being one of His disciples says it specifically led him to believe in Jesus. Let's consider why.

“*On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.*” (v1) It appears that this took place on the third day after Christ's baptism. Mary was there. Perhaps the parents of the groom or bride or both were close family friends or even relatives. Mary, as we will see, was a key part of this story. She was clearly involved in a supporting role.

“*Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding.*” (v2) In the short interval between His public baptism and this event, several devoted men had already begun to follow Him. Some had been disciples of John the Baptist. The fact that Jesus and His disciples were invited means that they weren't ‘crashing’ the party, they were welcomed. So either they all knew the hosts or the hosts were simply being generous and hospitable.

If the latter was the case, they probably had more guests than they had planned for and thus we read in

verse three, “*And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “They have no wine.”*”

Based upon the comments of the Master of the Feast later, it's clear that Mary had knowledge of the situation that the others who were celebrating did not. Perhaps she was the ‘wedding planner’. In any event, she knew Jesus could handle the crisis. Now, for a wedding in these days to fail in providing all the wine necessary would have been a ‘black mark’ on all the hosts and would certainly show that their generosity was misspent.

“*Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.’*” (v4) “*Some have suggested Mary's concern over the shortage of wine indicates she may have been a hostess at this wedding. The role of hostess at a Jewish wedding [was] usually filled by an aunt of the groom, [thus] this marriage celebration could very well have been that of Mary's nephew — the Apostle John.*” – Courson

If John was the groom, it would explain why he considered this ‘beginning of signs’ as a turning point. John and Andrew were among the first of Jesus' disciples. You see, John the Baptist had pointed Jesus out to them specifically as the Lamb of God – the Messiah. Therefore, to have Him come to this blessed event was a huge honor. But then, to fail in the wine... with the future King of Israel there... let alone the other guests. This was the ultimate humiliation.

“*None but those who know how sacred in the East is the duty of lavish hospitality, and how*

*passionately the obligation to exercise to the utmost it is felt, can realize the gloom which this incident would have thrown over the occasion, or the misery and mortification it would have caused to the wedded pair. They would have felt it to be, as in the East it is still felt to be, an indelible disgrace."*-- Farrar

And Mary, who already lived some 30 years under the cloud of suspicion that Jesus was illegitimate, could herself only suffer more shame.

Have you ever been at a point in your life when after much personal tribulation, after having those around you put you 'at a distance', after submitting to the Lord's guidance and yet suffering the ravages of a rumor mill as a result... you just want the Lord to set things right?? Surely Mary was in that place. She would have loved some measure of vindication. Perhaps, her Son would now show some masterful gift of leadership, perhaps it was time for Him to show Himself.

Jesus replied tenderly yet firmly. Some have attested that the word He used for 'woman' was a loving term. Others think that is not the case. We cannot hear the tone in His voice and that would be the determinant here. However, what He said after this and what He did spoke volumes. Jesus knew her concern – it wasn't just the wine. She knew who He was and she wanted the world to know as well. Ever tried to nudge God's hand when the time isn't right? Jesus said, 'It's not time yet. It's not My hour.' She sought His glory and possibly her vindication. However,

she didn't realize His road to glory led through Calvary.

*"His mother said to the servants, 'Whatever He says to you, do it.'"* (v5) Now, Jewish moms can be persistent – just ask my kids – ha! But don't you just love the beautiful expectancy Mary had? She was definitely a woman of faith. 'Whatever', in the Greek, means, 'Whatever'. She didn't know what He would do, but she was confident that He'd do something. This is where many of us stumble in faith. If God doesn't do it our way or on our timeline, we simply give up. We need to keep a 'whatever' attitude. No, not like the current trendy, "Oh, WHATEVER!" but the meditation of a submitted, hopeful heart – "Whatever, Lord."

*"Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece."* (v6) These water-pots were to supply water for the washings usual at feasts (see Mark 7:4). The Jews were regarded ceremonially *unclean* if they did not wash both before and after eating. This was done in a formal manner, and was, as with the washing of cups, pots and brass vessels, a ritual observance on which the Pharisees laid great stress. We have an idiom today – I think you've been drinking your bath water! This is kind of what these guests were about to do. However, in figure or type, Jesus was about to turn that which was a part of a dead ritualism into that which gave joy and gladness.

*"Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they*

*filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it."* (v7,8) Now if I were one of these servants, my knees would have been knockin'. Jesus didn't tell them what he was doing so for all they knew, they were serving up ritual wash water to the head honcho of the feast. You just don't expect good tips when you do that sort of thing.

But they did it! And how many of Christ's servants need to do the same – no questions, no doubts – just do it. That blessed 'whatever' attitude. That's often when miracles happen.

*"When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, 'Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!'"* (v9,10) Many, many otherwise excellent teachers launch from this passage into the allowance for or the condemnation of drinking wine. Frankly, that misses the point. John presented this sign to promote belief in Jesus as the Christ, not as the basis for a moral posture.

Whether you believe the wine was fermented or not, the fact is that the Master of the Feast immediately recognized it as "the good wine". Jesus didn't just supply wine but "the good wine" and this fellow recognized it immediately. It was distinctively better – the good stuff. This is a principle with all that God

does – it's the 'good stuff'. It's perfect. It's a 'mind-blower'. The lame man jumped and danced; the blind man beheld the Son of God; the demon possessed became a disciple. It is simply the way He does what He does. When He made the world, the scripture says, *"Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good."* (Gen 1:31) Now, this is really thrilling when you consider the resurrection and our heavenly home!

Thus, *"This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him."* (v11) Here's the point of the story – they believed. When John says, "His disciples" he's specifically including himself. And I'll submit that it wasn't simply the fact of the miraculous transformation but the message, the picture if you would, that it portrayed.

You see, John was a fiery idealist. He had evidently been well acquainted with the religious power brokers of the day. When Christ was arrested and taken from the garden of Gethsemane, it was John who got Peter in to the place of inquisition because he *"was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest."* (John 18:15) Yet, having an 'in' with the highest religious authorities also seems to have led him to a disdain for the deadness of their traditions and their hypocrisies.

Instead of following their teachings or aspiring to climb their religious ladder of success, he ended up following John the Baptist who

labeled these guys as poisonous snakes. (Mat 3:7)

So there at the wedding feast were these ceremonial purification jugs – six big ones. Six is the number of man in the Bible and that's appropriate for this whole deal of ceremonial washing was basically an invention of man – a sanctimonious 'enhancement' to the notion of being clean. The Torah contains many references to washing but this ritualistic washing that was in vogue was purely tradition just like the Urchatz and the Rachtzah of the modern Seder (Passover celebration). Jesus and His disciples didn't support it. In fact, the Word says they were accosted by the scribes and Pharisees who said, "*Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.*" (Mat 15:2)

So the message John saw in the miracle was Jesus taking that which was representative of a dead religious system of man-made traditions and replacing it with that which represents joy.

Ceremonial wash water became "the good wine". To John and to all of us who have been fed up with the deadness of religiosity, whether Jewish or 'Christian', this speaks loudly of Messiah. And the message wasn't lost on John; it resonated in his heart and you can almost sense him dancing in the background – thrilled inwardly. 'Yes! Jesus is the Messiah! His ways are not man's ways. He's not into this religious mumbo jumbo. He's radical! He's real! He can even turn deadness to joy! Wow!

If He can do that to water – He can do it to me!!'

And that's exactly what belief in Jesus Christ does – when He becomes your Lord and Savior, He takes the deadness of a vain life and transforms it into 'the good stuff' of love, joy, peace and their companions. It's the 'good wine' of God's Spirit and only Christ can make it. Jesus isn't asking us to believe in a religious system of traditions. He wants you to believe in Him. There are those who may think 'you've been drinking your bath water' – ha! But you can just tell them it's the new wine of His Spirit.