Sunday School Commentary Lesson

By

Dr. Jason Thrower

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A Wedding in Cana, John 2: 1-12

Adam Hamilton writes in his book, *John The Gospel of Light and Life* - "Van Gogh had a deep love for God. He felt called to be a pastor, served briefly in England as an assistant to a Methodist pastor, and sought to enter seminary. Unable to pass the entrance exam, he went on to serve as a volunteer missionary, but he seemed to rub people the wrong way. (You may know that Van Gogh struggled with mental illness.) As a result of his actions, the church told him that he could not serve anymore. Some think his love for God and his struggle with the Church are captured in his remarkable painting, The Starry Night. The painting shows a town and a church at night, and above them is the most amazing sky: the moon and the stars whirl like pinwheels overhead. Many see the lights in the sky representing Christ, the light of the world. But there is no light at all in the church, which is in the very center of the painting. This may be Van Gogh's way of venting his frustration with the church of his day - a cold building without the light of Christ."

The Gospel of John is like a great work of art. It invites us to see a deeper meaning than what is merely on the surface. For example, the Gospel of John has no parables, but it's filled with double talk, such as Jesus offering the woman at the well living water, or saying to Nicodemus that he must be born again.

In our passage this week, we uncover Jesus' first miracle, turning water into wine at a wedding at Cana.

Commentary Lesson

John believed in miracles. John told of miracles. But unlike Matthew, Mark, and Luke, where often Jesus was moved with compassion to do a miracle, John is driving us to think deeper. William Barclay writes in his commentary, The Gospel of John:

* In John the miracles are not so much deeds of compassion as deeds which demonstrate the glory of Christ...
* To John the miracles were not simply single events in time; they were illustrations, examples, insights into that which God is always doing and what Jesus always is; they are windows into the reality of God.

"Jesus did this, the first sign of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him" (2:11). Beyond the miracle of changing the water into wine was the intention of Jesus to show forth his glory and prompt belief in his disciples.
Our text is set early in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus has gathered four disciples, to go to Cana for a wedding. Cana was a village near Nazareth in the district of Galilee. Jewish wedding banquets in the first century are thought to have lasted seven days. Mary the mother of Jesus was present and prominent in the wedding. Joseph, Mary's husband, is not mentioned. He is probably dead. Perhaps since Mary felt responsible for the wine running out; it could be because she had some part in the sponsorship of the event. Jesus may have been at a "family event."

Mary turned to Jesus for help. The embarrassing situation that arose was that the wine ran out. Would I have felt some of the embarrassment of running out of food or drink at a friend's party? Of course I would. It is not my primary responsibility to provide refreshments, but I would care. In this story from the life of Jesus we are given tender and powerful picture of Jesus. Jesus is a human, caring Messiah.

Jesus used what was at hand. There were some jars used for ceremonial washing. They were large jars holding "twenty or thirty gallons" (2:6b). The servants were told to fill these six, large jars with water. They did. As soon as the jars were filled with water, Jesus told the servants to take some to the "chief steward." I wonder what the servants thought was going to happen since they knew it was only water in the jars. When the steward tasted "the water that had become wine," the steward was amazed. He only knew the new wine was better than the wine that had first been served and that was highly unusual.

In the Hebrew Bible, wine is often used as a metaphor or a sign of blessings. Here it represents the new abundant life that Jesus offers. When we choose to come to Christ we find a life of abundance, better than our old way of life before coming to know Christ in faith and commitment. When Jesus took water and turned it into wine, he showed us that he can take what is ordinary and make it extraordinary.

Contact Jason - throwerjason@gmail.com