

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We continue in the season of Epiphany. We are marveling at the things God revealed about Jesus that set him apart from every other person that has walked planet earth. Two weeks ago, it was revealed that this King of the Jews was also **Savior of the world** as the Magi came and worshiped. Last week was the baptism of Jesus where the Father and the Holy Spirit testified to Jesus' **real identity** and anointed him for his **work of salvation**. This week, something new and very interesting is revealed about Jesus.

When you face problems, challenges, difficulties... when your mistakes and failings bring negative consequences to your life... do you find yourself doubting that God will help? Here are symptoms of a doubting heart: You don't pray because you don't think God will listen, or will help, or can help, or that he cares. If you do pray, you feel compelled to give God lots of reasons why he should help. Or you ask over and over again or make emotional appeals to convince him to help. Or you bargain with God and promise him to make a change in your life if he will only do the thing you are asking. All of these instances demonstrate a heart that believes God is not ready to help, is not quick to help, and may not help. Is this a proper way to think of our God? The Gospel text before us today reveals something very important about our God:

John 2:1-11

**2 On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, 2 and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.**

Why were they invited? He's been on the job about 3 days and has 5 students / disciples. He's not a prominent teacher yet. So why did they invite him? Maybe it was fun to hang out with Jesus! Maybe some people just like him. Don't you think Jesus was just fun to hang out with?

**3 When the wine was gone,** [that's a bad deal for a party. It's also very embarrassing and shameful for the wedding couple. A wedding celebration would last up to a week long, and they would be the guest of the wedding feast. **Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."** [Why did she know? We don't know for sure, but for some reason she brought the problem to Jesus. She wants him to do something.]

**4 "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied.** [Sounds kind of harsh, but it's actually a term of endearment. It's the same term he used from the cross to address her. "Dear woman, here is your son." Why involve me? Jesus does have to make clear that she doesn't call the shots. She doesn't have authority over him who is the Messiah. How and when he uses the glory that is his to demonstrate his true identity... that's not up to her. And then he explains further:

**"My time has not yet come."** Now there is much written about this statement. What did Jesus mean? One commentator meant that his time for helping this young couple had not yet come... not quite. The wine was running out, but was not yet gone. As soon as it was gone, then Jesus could fill the need and show his power, but not before it was completely gone.

I don't know if that's what Jesus meant. You see, this phrase is used throughout the John's Gospel, and every time, it is referring to the time of Jesus suffering and death. The hour of his suffering has not yet come.

But here, that doesn't seem to fit. I heard one person give this interesting explanation. What does a 30 year old single guy think about at a wedding? Doesn't he start to think about his own wedding celebration? Doesn't it make sense that Jesus was thinking about his own wedding banquet? Now by that I don't mean getting married to a woman. I mean the marriage of Christ and his church. Before you dismiss this idea, do you know the most frequently used picture of heaven Jesus used? It was the wedding banquet. Over and over again, Jesus compares the joy of heaven with the joy of celebrating the union of two people. In heaven the union of Christ and his church will be complete. And it will be a party unlike any party you ever went to!

So perhaps Jesus was thinking that the real solution to this embarrassing situation was to inaugurate the eternal heavenly banquet where his glory would truly shine forth and there would be nothing lacking, and the party would go on forever. But that time was not yet. He was 3 ½ years out yet from suffering and dying for the sins of the world.

Nevertheless, Mary says:

**5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."**

She still has hope that Jesus will be moved to help this young couple. At 30 years old, Mary knew her son. She knew his compassion and love for people. Though he had not done a miracle yet (that we know of), Mary knew that Jesus would do something because he loved people. She didn't know what or how, but she did make it clear to the servants that whatever Jesus told them to do, they should do it without question.

**6 Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.** [This wasn't their normal drinking containers, but their washing containers.]

**7 Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.**

**8 Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."** [The head waiter over the whole thing. So he turns it into over 100 gallons of wine.]

**They did so, 9 and 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 10 and 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."**

[Not only was there a great quantity of the wine, but it was excellent wine. It was by far the best wine that had been served at the wedding banquet.]

Now if you will permit me to go off on a little tangent. This miracle of Jesus causes many people to stumble. He creates an alcoholic beverage in a situation where it's likely some will get drunk. What is the Bible's teaching about alcohol? First, let's be up front that abuse of alcohol is very dangerous. There are about 100,000 alcohol-related deaths each year. (By the way, that is three times the number of deaths caused by firearms.) 62% of high school seniors report having been drunk. 31% of high school seniors have had 5 drinks or more in a row in the last 2 weeks. 37% of rapes and sexual assaults involve alcohol on the part of the attacker. Number one cause for babies born with intellectual disabilities is fetal alcohol syndrome. Clearly alcohol is a problem. Or more accurately, alcohol can be a problem.

So does this mean God forbids the use of alcohol? Although there are churches that teach this, the short answer is: no. As is so often the case, what God gives as a good thing, man uses to

excess to make it a harmful and sinful thing. What God gives as a good thing, man turns into a “god” thing. God gave the good thing that man might love the giver, but man instead falls in love with the gift. **Food** is a good thing, but when used to excess it is harmful and leads to the sin of gluttony. **Money** is a good gift from God. But when you love money you have the sin of greed. Sexuality is a gift from God, but it could lead to adultery, fornication, lust and more. **Alcohol** is a gift from God, but excess use of alcohol God forbids. When alcohol is abused or overused it causes loss of self-control, it causes poor decision making, it causes a loss of motor control and good judgment which is what makes driving a car so dangerous, it also kills brain cells, harms the liver and in general damages the body which God has given you. Also, obey government, so you can’t drink before 21 even if used in moderation. We will obey the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment. We also must allow differing opinions and practice when it comes to alcohol. Some should not drink. They are prone to alcohol addition, and even drinking a little tempts them to drink too much. Others regularly drink in moderation, and they just don’t have the temptation to get drunk... they always properly moderate their drinking. Who is right? They both are. The one is not drinking at all to the glory of God. The other drinks in moderation to the glory of God. But please understand that it is not possible to get drunk to the glory of God because of the reasons mentioned before.

We also should be careful that we do not cause someone else to stumble in their use of alcohol. Although God gives us freedom to use alcohol moderately, we will refrain from that freedom if it means that we will be leading someone else to sin.

But wasn’t Jesus leading people to drunkenness? No. Jesus provided an excellent gift from God, and did so in great abundance. That’s just the way God gives. What he gives is always excellent. The wine was the **best**. It would have had a fancy French name if it was bottled and sold. Not the cheap stuff. And what he gives is always **superabundant**. God doesn’t know any other way to give. God is not responsible for how people misuse or abuse his good gifts. Certainly, Jesus desired that everyone at the banquet would drink it, enjoy it and have a good time. Jesus did not desire that anyone would get drunk on his good gift from God and so abuse the gift. Did some abuse the gift and get drunk? I don’t know! I hope not. But even if they did, Jesus is not responsible for their abuse of God’s good gift.

Think about it: should God stop providing **food** to our world because some are gluttons who overeat? Should God collapse to world economy because some **love money**? Should God stop giving the **gift of children** because some parents wrongly love their children more than God? God is good, so he gives excellent and superabundant gifts. When human beings misuse those gifts or worship and love the gift instead of the giver, God is not responsible for that. Sinful human being are. To wrap up the tangent: Is alcohol a gift from God? Or a temptation to be avoided? It is a good gift from God.

So Jesus’ first miracle, his first ministry is making wine. And what was the result of this first miracle:

**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.**

And here is the season of Epiphany connection. This is the season when we marvel at the amazing things revealed about Jesus. This week, what was revealed was: **his glory**. And if you want to get more specific, we learn that Jesus used his power and love to save a young wedding

couple shame and embarrassment at their wedding banquet. Where there was a need, Jesus felt compelled to help.

God likes to throw parties. At the end of the age: the great wedding supper of the lamb. A great, eternal party and celebration where all his people are redeemed and taken to be his own. So it makes sense that Jesus' first miracle would take place at a wedding party.

And just as Jesus took care of a need that would have hindered the wedding banquet he attended... he removed the shame and embarrassment from the young couple, so also Jesus has taken action to take care of your shame and embarrassment which would have kept you from partaking in his eternal banquet.

What shames you and embarrasses you the most? Isn't it your sins? Your sin has separated you from your God. You need to be reconciled to him. So Jesus did what needed to be done. He lived a holy life for you. He died in your place on the cross. He provided what you were lacking so you could party with God in eternity.

So we learn this important truth about Jesus: **Jesus can't not help.** *[Repeat]* Demonstrated in this first miracle and repeated throughout his ministry, when Jesus saw a need, he couldn't not help. He was always compelled to do something! Isn't this good news? He was compelled to help with your greatest need: sin. And it was at great personal cost that he did help. But he is just as will and eager to help with whatever need you have in your life. He promises to listen to your every request, and *every* time he will answer by giving you what is best.

Go to Jesus in your time of trouble! Remember his love and his glory at the wedding of Cana, and know that the very same Jesus listens to your need, and will provide what is best, he will give what is excellent, and he will provide in overabundance. That's the kind of Savior we have! Amen.