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The Gospel of John

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The first days of Jesus closed with a promise that the disciples would see greater things, but this promise was tied to his demand that their faith exceed the belief demonstrated across those days. It was not enough to believe that Jesus was the fulfillment of their messianic hopes, nor was it enough to be moved to faith in Jesus by his wonderful knowledge of things that should have been hidden from him. Greater faith will lead them to see the revelation of the heavenly in Jesus, the Son of Man. This promises that the story that lies ahead will tell of how God is made known in and through Jesus. However, it must also involve the response to such revelation. Both issues will be dealt with in the Cana to Cana section but with a stronger focus on how different people from both inside and outside Israel respond to the person and word of Jesus.

The Response to Jesus Within Israel (2:1-3:36)

i. The First Miracle at Cana: Faith in the Word of Jesus (2:1-12)

1. And on the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2. Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples.

3. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4. And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come." 5. His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

6. Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." So they took it. 9. When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom 10. and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when all have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now."

11. This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

12. After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples; and there they stayed for a few days.

Introduction to 2:1-12. The action of the narrative is framed by the movement of characters in the story, Jesus, his mother, and the disciples (vv. 1-2, v. 12). In v. 12 Jesus' brothers, who will reappear later (cf. 7:1-10) join the movement. Within this literary frame where people move from one place to another two exchanges lead to action, one initiated by the mother of Jesus (vv. 3-5) and the other by Jesus (vv. 7-10). Finally, the narrator comments on the significance of the event (v. 11). The story has the following shape:

- (a) Vv. 1-2: The time, place, and reason for the gathering (*eklēthē*) of named characters (the mother of Jesus, Jesus, the disciples) are established. They are "there" (v. 1: *ekei*).
- (b) Vv. 3-5: The mother of Jesus speaks to Jesus and responds to his rebuke by telling the attendants to do whatever he tells them.
- (c) Vv. 6-10: The main action of the story—filling of the jars, the steward's recognition of good wine, his reaction and words to the bridegroom—is triggered by Jesus' speaking to the servants, who do what he tells them.
- (d) V. 11: The narrator comments on the manifestation of the glory of Jesus and the faith of the disciples.
- (e) V. 12: The account closes as the characters from vv. 1-2, who have made a journey (cf. 2: *eklēthē*) to be "there" (cf. v. 1: *ekei*) at Cana, move away (v. 12: *katebē*) to be in another place (v. 12: *ekei*) at Capernaum.

The narrative is rich in Johannine symbolism and anticipates many of the themes that will develop through the story. The miracle and its consequences take place after a discussion over "the hour" (2:4; cf. 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1; 19:27). This is the first of a number of events each described as a "sign" (*sēmeion*: cf. 2:23; 3:2; 6:2, 14, 26, 30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47; 12:18, 37. Cf. 20:30-31). The theme of water will return in chs. 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, and 19, and the revelation of the *doxa* is an important theme throughout the Gospel (see *doxa* in 1:14; 5:41-44; 7:18; 11:4, 40; 12:43; 17:5, 22-24, and *doxazein* in 8:54; 11:4; 12:23, 28; 13:31-32; 17:1-5). "Everywhere in the Fourth Gospel we are further confronted by this self-contained allusiveness" (Hoskyns, *Fourth Gospel* 67).

Introduction (vv. 1-2). The words "on the third day" recall the moment of God's revelation at Sinai (v. 1a). The four days of 1:19-51 look forward to "the third day" (see Exod 19:16). The setting of a marriage feast also summons up biblical images of the messianic era and the messianic fullness, marked by wine and abundance of fine foods (cf. Hos 2:19-20; Isa 25:6-8; Jer 2:2; Song of Songs). The first character introduced is the mother of Jesus (v. 1b). The singling out of this character hints that she may have

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an important role to play in the narrative that follows. She is accompanied at the celebration by her son and his disciples (v. 2). The scene has been set as a group of people headed by the mother of Jesus has gathered (*eklēthē*) for the celebration of a wedding "on the third day."

Action initiated by the mother of Jesus (vv. 3-5). The mother draws Jesus' attention to a fact that the narrator has already commented on: there was no wine (v. 3). She was the first character introduced and she initiates action with her statement. She is met by a sharp, twofold response from Jesus. Jesus asks, "O woman, what have you to do with me?" (v. 4b: *ti emoi kai soi?*). There have been many attempts to soften this retort, but whatever one makes of it, it is not the type of response one would expect from a son to a mother. The expression "is abrupt and draws a sharp line between Jesus and his mother" (Barrett, *Gospel* 191). The narrator did not announce her name but introduced her as "mother" (v. 1). Jesus calls her "woman," and his question puts a distance between his mother and himself. He then makes a statement that indicates that Jesus' life is marked by a sequence of events leading to an "hour": "My hour has not yet come" (v. 4c). This is the first reference to a theme that will develop as the narrative unfolds. The Prologue concludes with an insistence that the Word become flesh is the Son (1:14-18), and the witness of the Baptist repeats it (1:29-34). Jesus is the Son of God, and the life story of the Son will be determined by his relationship with the Father. However, the hour of Jesus is an event that will take place in the human sphere, a part of the story of Jesus of Nazareth that is "not yet." This introduces tension. The story that is only now beginning looks forward to the completion of "the hour" of Jesus. Jesus' initial question and his words concerning "the hour" indicate that there is a distance between himself and his mother and that "the law according to which he works is imposed on him by another" (Schnackenburg, *Gospel* 1:329). A world exists between Jesus and God, and the mother of Jesus is outside that world. The words of Jesus in v. 4 firmly inform his mother that such is the case. It is a gentle rebuke that keeps her in her place.

If the reply of Jesus to his mother is surprising, equally surprising is her reaction to it. In the face of a rebuke, and from her position outside the inner world of the relationship between Jesus and the Father, she tells the servants to do *whatever he tells them* (v. 5: *ho ti an legē humin poiēsate*). However much the interpretation of this scene has been influenced by the Marian traditions of the Christian Churches, nothing in the narrative explains how she can turn away from the rebuke of her son, correctly indicating that she has no knowledge or understanding of God's designs for his Son. Yet she tells the servants, in a carefully worded command, that they should put into action *anything* that he tells them to do. The Prologue announces Jesus as the *logos* of God but this new character, the

mother of Jesus, does not know this. Yet with unconditional trust in the efficacy of his word (*ho ti an legē*) she issues instructions to the servants. She is the first person in the narrative to show, at the level of the action of the story, that the correct response to the presence of Jesus is trust in his word. Her brief appearance at the beginning of this miracle story acts as the trigger initiating a series of events that leads to the miracle (vv. 8-10), the manifestation of the *doxa* of Jesus and the faith of the disciples (v. 11). Following hard upon the response of the emissaries of "the Jews" (v. 19-28), the initial confessions of faith of the first disciples (vv. 35-49), and the promise of Jesus that greater faith would lead to the sight of greater things, the mother of Jesus is the first to show the quality of true belief. She trusts unconditionally, indeed even in the face of apparent rejection and rebuke, in the efficacy of the word of Jesus.

Action initiated by Jesus (vv. 6-10). The narrator sets the scene for the following section with an important description of stone jars (v. 6). There are six of them, one short of the perfection of the number "seven." This is probably a hint that a former gift is to be perfected (cf. 1:16-17). Later Jewish texts indicate that stone was useful for purificatory purposes because it did not contract uncleanness. They are very large jars, each one containing some twenty-four gallons. There will be a superabundance of wine produced from this water, and the problem raised by the mother is about to be resolved. The water in the jars, used for Jewish purification rituals, will be transformed into a "sign" (v. 11: *sēmeiōn*) in and through which the *doxa* will be revealed.

As the mother of Jesus told the servants to do whatever he told (*legē*) them, Jesus tells (*legei*) them what they are to do (v. 7a), and they respond with wordless obedience. The mother's command is perfectly executed: Jesus tells them to fill the jars with water, and the servants fill them up to the brim. The transformation of the water into wine is not reported. Jesus issues a second set of instructions, again in direct speech (v. 8: *legei*), that they draw from the jars and take what they draw forth to the steward of the feast. They again do exactly as they are told. The mother's command, that they do *whatever* Jesus tells them, is being followed to perfection. The steward tastes the water that is now wine. He does not know the origin of the wine (*pothen estin*), while the servants do. They had drawn the water, and they are aware that the wine is the result of a chain of responses to a series of "words": the word of the mother concerning the word of her son (v. 5), and two words from Jesus (vv. 7-8). The importance of acceptance of the "word" of Jesus is a crucial theme.

The bridegroom is summoned and asked to explain the strange appearance of the good wine as the celebration draws to a close (vv. 9c-10). The bridegroom is only spoken to; he never plays an active role in the story. The words of the steward imply that the bridegroom is responsible

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for this remarkable fullness of good wine. The next time a bridegroom appears in the story (cf. 3:29) it will be in the words of John the Baptist, who speaks of Jesus as the bridegroom, and himself as the friend of the bridegroom. At one level of the narrative the steward instructs the bridegroom on common sense, but on another level the encounter raises a question about the source of the fullness provided by the bridegroom. "The steward here seems to be wholly unaware of the supply of wine, of the shortage or of the drawing of water. He merely states that the wine is excellent (*kalos*) and that the bridegroom's actions are not those of ordinary men" (B. Olsson, *Structure and Meaning* 62). In v. 4 the mother of Jesus was told that the hour had not yet come. The steward seems to think that it has, as he tells the bridegroom, who has provided the wine, that he has kept the good wine *until now* (*heōs arti*). But Jesus announced at the beginning of the account that the hour has not yet come (v. 4: *oupō hēkei*). However rich the gift of the wine may have been, the larger story of Jesus points beyond this particular story. This is an important moment, but not the final moment, in the revelation of Jesus.

The narrator's comment (v. 11). The tension between the "not yet" of the hour of Jesus (cf. v. 4) and the "now" of the miracle story (cf. v. 10) is present in the narrator's comment that in this, the beginning of his signs (v. 11: *archēn tōn sēmeiōn*), the *doxa* of Jesus was manifested, and the disciples believed in him. This is a "beginning." The Prologue announced that the *doxa* was seen in the incarnation of the *logos* in the person of Jesus Christ, and that this was the fullness of the gift of God, perfecting the former gift of the Law. This is now happening in the story. "The transformation of water into wine . . . is the first act of the Word in the world, and a type of the transformation to come. Perhaps it is the grace beyond grace, the messianic wine of being that replaces the inferior wine of the Torah, which is appropriate only to becoming" (Alter, "John" 449). The disciples, who attempted to contain Jesus within the limitations of their own messianic hopes in 1:35-51, come to belief when Jesus manifests his *doxa*. The promise implied by the days of preparation for the Jewish celebration of the gift of the Law at the feast of Pentecost is realized in the revelation of the *doxa* of Jesus "on the third day" (v. 11. Cf. v. 1). However, as Israel faced a long history of loyalty, mediocrity, and failure *after* the gift of the Law, so also the disciples are only on the threshold of their experience of the revelation of God in and through Jesus. The unconditional faith of the mother of Jesus in the word of her son initiated a series of events that led to the revelation of the glory of God. What Jesus *said* was done, and his glory was manifested as a consequence of an unconditioned acceptance of his word. But there will be an "hour" in the future when this revelation will come to a final consummation. The mother of Jesus, the woman, will return at that "hour" (cf. 19:25-27).

Conclusion (v. 12). The major players, Jesus, his mother, and his disciples are reassembled, and Jesus' brothers are added to the group. When the brothers return in 7:1-10 the reader will recall that they have been with Jesus from his first days, and from the first manifestation of his glory. The group journeys away from Cana to stay at Capernaum "for a few days" (v. 12). This closing comment keeps the narrative moving. A group that gathered at Cana in v. 1 (*ekei*) sets out from Cana in v. 12 to stay in another place (*ekei*) for a brief time. The narrator's remarks on characters, space, and time lead away from Cana, further into the narrative.

NOTES

1-12. *The literary form of a miracle story.* Bultmann has described this passage as a typical miracle story (Bultmann, *Gospel* 115). In his *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963, 318-331) he argues that miracle stories have the following form:

- (a) A problem is described in some detail to indicate the gravity of the situation.
- (b) A request is made.
- (c) The miracle is performed, accompanied by a description of how it is done.
- (d) The successful outcome of the miracle is described.
- (e) The wonder of all who saw it or heard of it is described.

The Cana miracle has contacts with this tradition, but cannot be described as a "typical miracle story." It unfolds in the following fashion:

1. *Problem:* "The wine failed" (v. 3a).
2. *Request:* "The mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine'" (v. 3b).
3. *Rebuke:* "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come" (v. 4).
4. *Reaction:* "His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you' (*ho ti an legē hūmin poiēsate*)" (v. 5).
5. *Consequence:* A miracle that leads to the faith of others (the disciples) (vv. 6-11).

Those parts of the story where the mother of Jesus plays an important role disturb the traditional form of a miracle story. She points out that there is a problem (v. 3a), but her words generate a rebuke that in turn leads to the mother of Jesus' words to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you" (v. 5). The final element in the story is also somewhat foreign. There is no report of wonder or of the effect the miracle had on the guests. The result of the miracle is the manifestation of the glory of Jesus and the faith of the disciples (v. 11). The

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author has composed this miracle story, no doubt using sources from the Johannine tradition. At 1:51 the question of the appropriate response to Jesus was raised. By the time the narrative reaches 2:12 an initial answer to that question has been provided.

1. *there was a marriage*: Many attempts have been made to discover a pre-Johannine miracle story (cf. Fortna, *Signs* 29-38; idem, *Predecessor* 48-58), perhaps with its origins in a Dionysiac celebration (cf. Bauer, *Johannesevangelium* 47; Bultmann, *Gospel* 118-119). Whatever its origins, the present shape of 2:1-12 reveals a careful ordering of the material from both a literary and theological perspective.

the mother of Jesus was there: Exaggerated Marian reflections, especially from the Catholic tradition, have led to an exegesis of this passage that paradoxically minimalizes the role played by the mother of Jesus (cf. Zappella, "Gv 2:1-12" 59-78). A balance must be found, as the text indicates that her role is crucial to the correct reading of the passage. The fact that she is the first person introduced to the account, even preceding Jesus, is a sign that what she says and does is crucial to the story (cf. Smitmans, *Das Weinwunder* 54-63).

2. *with his disciples*: It is sometimes suggested that Jesus and his disciples may have been uninvited, and thus were the cause of the shortage of wine (Derrett, "Water into Wine" 80-97). There is no hint of this in the text.
 3. *When the wine failed*: Some early manuscripts, including the first hand of Sinaiticus and the Old Latin, have a longer reading at v. 3a: "Now they had no wine, for the wine provided for the feast had been used up." The shorter reading, "when the wine gave out," is attested in both the Bodmer papyri, and must be accepted as the original (cf. Olsson, *Structure and Meaning* 33-34).
 4. *what have you to do with me?*: The interpretation of *ti emoi kai soi* is notoriously difficult. Is it a statement or a question? Once that has been decided, what does it mean in this context? For a survey of scholarly discussion see Michaud, "Le signe de Cana" 247-253. It is widely used in the OT (cf. Lagrange, *Evangile* 56) and appears in the synoptic tradition (cf. Maynard, "TI EMOI KAI SOI" 583-584). As C. H. Giblin has shown ("Suggestion, Negative Response" 197-211), it is part of a Johannine narrative technique, following a Semitic practice, that is "an agreement to disagree, so that the party voicing disagreement expresses a concern . . . not to become 'involved' with the specific concerns of the party addressed" (p. 203). Some element of harshness cannot be eliminated from these words (cf. Maynard, "TI EMOI KAI SOI" 584-585).
- My hour has not yet come*: The "hour" of Jesus unfolds gradually across the Gospel. For the major part of Jesus' ministry it is "not yet" (cf. 2:4; 7:4, 30; 8:20). However, though its first association is with a marriage feast it is eventually associated with violence (cf. 7:30; 8:20). Toward the close of the public ministry, as the threat of Jesus' violent end approaches through a "lifting up" on a cross, the "hour" of violence "has come," and is associated with Jesus' glorification (cf. 12:23, 27). This theme continues into the final section of the Gospel (cf. 13:31) and is further explained as the hour through which Jesus

must pass in order to return to the Father (cf. 13:1, 32; 17:5) and the hour that creates a new family of Jesus (19:27).

5. *Do whatever he tells you*: Despite many reflections on this passage claiming that Jesus responds to his mother's request (cf. Lagrange, *Evangelie* 57; Schnackenburg, *Gospel* 1:331), this is not said in the text. From a position "outside" the oneness that exists between the Father and the Son, which determines "the hour" of Jesus, she shows her openness to trust in "whatever" the word of Jesus might bring. The narrative has not provided the mother of Jesus with a shred of information that might allow her to give such commands to the servants. Her confident command depends entirely upon a yet-to-be-verified belief. "Nowhere is perhaps such trust shewn" (Westcott, *Gospel* 37).

It is possible that the account of the gift of the Law at Sinai (Exodus 19; 24) and subsequent Jewish reflection on that foundational account may still be present to the narrative. On three occasions as the people of Israel receive the Law from the hands of Moses they commit themselves as a people of God by crying out: "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exod 19:8. See also Exod 24:3, 7). As once the *debarim* (words) of the Law offered life to a people, here the mother of Jesus trusts that the *dabar* (word) of her son will do likewise. (Cf. Serra, *Contributi* 139–181.)

6. *six stone jars*: For a collection of later rabbinic documents that indicate the usefulness of stone for purificatory purposes see Str-B 2:406. For the calculation of *metrētas duo ē treis* as eighteen to twenty-four gallons see Barrett, *Gospel* 192. There is no need to link the purification mentioned here with any particular feast, or with rites before or after a meal. The issues that determine the significance of the description of the jars are their association with rites "of the Jews" and the number "six." These details give a Jewish setting to the wedding feast at Cana.

7. *Jesus said to them*: The importance of the "word" of Jesus emerges as Jesus speaks. The narrative depends on a series of encounters where there are never more than two active characters on stage at any one time (cf. Martyn, *History and Theology* 3–16, 49–57), and where all that happens is the result of a "word" (cf. vv. 3, 4, 5, 7–8, 10). Cf. Olsson, *Structure and Meaning* 86–88.

9. *where it came from*: The Prologue has already indicated the importance of the question of the origins of Jesus. Throughout the first days of Jesus the representatives of "the Jews" and the first disciples fall short in their attempts to understand the Baptist and Jesus because they do not understand the importance of Jesus' origins. This theme returns in the steward's not knowing where the wine came from. "The origins of the gift, like the origins of the giver, are hidden from him" (Gnilka, *Johannesevangelium* 23 [author's translation]). There is little to support the suggestion that the wine has links with the early Church's eucharistic celebrations (cf. Cullmann, *The Early Church* 66–71; Suggit, "John 2:1–11" 141–158).

the steward of the feast called the bridegroom: There are at least two levels of reading operating in the identification of *ho nymphios* ("the bridegroom") as Jesus. A surface reading reports what any steward may have done on finding that

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excellent wine had been kept till late in the proceedings. The fact that the bridegroom never speaks, but simply hears the blustering of the steward introduces irony (cf. Duke, *Irony*, 83-84). The provider of the wine, whose origins are unknown to the steward (cf. v. 9), is instructed by a character who responds to the events in a totally "earthly" fashion. As the following comment from the narrator indicates, much more than good wine is provided by the "sign." For the patristic interpretation of the bridegroom as Jesus see Smitmans, *Das Weinwunder* 207-217.

11. *the first of his signs*: The indication that this is the *archē tōn sēmeiōn* has led many to see the miracle at Cana as the first miracle in the Signs Source (cf. Bultmann, *Gospel* 118; Gnllka, *Johannesevangelium* 22). Whatever its background, it will be argued that this numbering is more an indication of the passage's relationship to 4:46-54 than the clumsy remnant of an earlier source.

[he] *manifested his glory*: The verb *phaneroun* is widely used in the Fourth Gospel (cf. 1:31; 3:21; 7:4; 9:3; 17:6; 21:1 [twice], 14). It is closely associated with the Johannine idea of Jesus' revelation of God (cf. Schnackenburg, *Gospel* 1:335-337; Bittner, *Jesu Zeichen* 97-98). This is the only place where it is used with *doxa* (*ephanerōsen tēn doxan autou*). The solemnity of the language recalls the revelation of the glory of YHWH manifested "on the third day" at Sinai (Exod 19:16), surpassed in the manifestation of the *doxa* of Jesus "on the third day" at Cana (John 2:1). For a full discussion of the Sinai connection see Olsson, *Structure and Meaning* 69-73; Theobald, *Die Fleischwerdung* 290-292. Biblical scholars who seek to apply anthropological concepts to the Johannine text play down the links with the Sinai tradition, giving *doxa* its social meaning of "honor" in a society shaped by an honor-shame anthropology. For an application of this paradigm to John 2:1-11 see Collins, "The Question of *Doxa*" 100-109. This commentary will regularly associate the noun *doxa* and the verb *doxazein* with the Sinai tradition, so closely linked with the central Johannine notion that what God gave Israel at Sinai was a first gift and that this gift has been perfected in the gift that takes place through Jesus Christ (cf. 1:17; 1:19-2:12; 2:11). See the remarks of the professional anthropologist J. K. Chance, "The Anthropology of Honor and Shame: Culture, Values, and Practice." *Sem* 68 (1994) 139-149. Chance is critical of the lack of sophistication in biblical scholars' application of these categories, concluding that "there is more to Mediterranean culture than honor and shame," and asking that biblical scholars "recognize the possibilities for heterogeneity in the societies they study" (148). A crucial element in the NT traditions is the link with the OT. In the Fourth Gospel, Torah and Jesus Christ are profoundly related. See Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel*.

12. *After this he went down to Capernaum*: This verse has been the subject of much controversy as "it is difficult to treat this verse as a real connective between Cana and the next scene at Jerusalem, for a journey to Capernaum is a long detour from the road to Jerusalem" (Brown, *Gospel* 1:113. Cf. Dodd, *Tradition* 235). Supporters of the Signs Source theory claim that in the source the verse led immediately into the second miracle story in 4:46-54 (cf. Bultmann, *Gospel* 114 n. 4; Fortna, *Signs* 102-103; Boismard, *Moïse ou Jésus* 44-46). However

inappropriate the geographical movement might be, in literary terms the narrative axes of character, space, and time are gathered in this way to lead into the next event in the life of Jesus (cf. Schnackenburg, *Gospel* 1:342-343).

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