

Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ 3-25-18

March 25 we will study John 2:1-11. Discussion questions are:

1. Do you remember any surprising negative feelings after graduating from high school or college?
 - a. How would you contrast those negative feelings with the feelings Jesus promises in John 16:22?
 - b. What does comparing those two moments teach you?
2. Why would Jesus choose the changing of water into wine as his first miracle?
 - a. Why is running out of wine such a big deal?
3. What does Jesus mean by *“my hour has not yet come”*? (See 7:8, 30; 8:20; 13:1 17:1)
4. There are clues in this passage suggesting Jesus saw the wedding as a metaphor of his life. What clues can you find?
 - a. Using ceremonial cleansing water as the source of wine.
 - b. Jesus’ use of wine as a metaphor for his blood at the Last Supper.
 - c. The Bible’s frequent use of a “feast” to describe the Lord’s great moment at the end of time. (Isa. 25:6; Rev. 21:2; 19:9; Jn. 3:29; Mt. 9:13-15)
5. Of the 4 ways mentioned for handling disillusionment in life, which best describes the way you handle disillusionment:
 - a. Blame the things themselves (*“I need a new spouse, job, church, etc.”*)
 - b. Blame yourself (*“I made bad choices. I need to try harder.”*)
 - c. Blame life (*“This is as good as it gets for me.”*)
 - d. Blame your separation from God (Life makes no sense apart from God.)
6. From the C.S. Lewis quote – ask your class to describe a time when they felt *“...if I find within myself a desire which no experience in the world can satisfy, the only probable explanation is that I was made for something in another world.”*
7. Agree/disagree: *“If you want to know if a group of people assembled in a church building are really my church, don’t look first at their doctrine. Look first at their joy.”*
8. How will Jesus feel when the event described in Rev. 21:2 occurs?
9. The text comments in vs. 10 on the unusual occurrence of having good wine at the end of the feast. What is the application of that to our lives?

Sermon: Lord of the Feast

Do you know the children’s song that goes, “The bear went over the mountain. The bear went over the mountain. The bear went over the mountain to see what he could see, to see what he could see, to see what he could see. The bear went over the mountain to see what he could see. He saw the other side of the mountain....” That song is a pretty good summary of the Bible’s description of life without God. We spend the early part of our life preparing for the great climb up the mountain. We are told if we can get to the top of the mountain life will have meaning. If you get the degree, the career, the family, then life will have meaning. Not only do most of us not get there but we fall and break bones

and get frustrated with the climb. We find ourselves somewhere along the trail saying, *“I thought by this time in my life I’d be a lot closer to the top.”* And when we occasionally see someone who got to the top we are so full of envy we almost hate them for getting to where we wanted to be. What do you see when you get to the top? Do you see the Promised Land or just the other side of the mountain? One thing you will always see is that success does not bring happiness. Something is missing. I remember the feeling I had the day after graduating from high school. The feeling was, *“Where did everybody go?”* I remember the feeling I had immediately after graduating from college. The feeling was, *“What in the world do I do now?”*

Contrast those feelings with Jesus’ prediction in John 16. He said, *“You will see me and you will rejoice and no man will take away your joy.”* Was he not saying that the human soul is built for something greater than human achievement and honor and applause. He says to us, *“You are built for something far greater than that. You are built for festival joy because I am Lord of the feast.”*

When Jesus comes to the wedding feast this is no simple occasion. This is not a potluck dinner after church on the first Sunday of the month. This is not homemade ice cream in the parking lot while we watch fireworks. A wedding feast was the biggest day in the life of a person in that culture. The joy of the feast was the wine. These people are facing an absolute disaster. So it was a natural thing for Mary to come to Jesus and say, *“What are these people going to do? They are out of wine.”* Jesus replies cryptically, *“Woman, my hour has not yet come.”* In the book of John, Jesus’ hour is a reference to his death. Mary says, *“Guess what? They are running out of wine. This is terrible.”* Jesus replies, *“Woman, I am not ready to die yet.”* He even says, *“Why do you involve me?”* So Mary, who is probably accustomed to such mysterious comments from Jesus, says, *“Don’t let this throw you. Do whatever he says.”*

What are we to make of that conversation? Jesus seems almost lost in thought. He knows he is about to start down miracle working road and he knows where that road leads. He knows these people are at the top of their mountain and it won’t deliver on its promises. He then begins to see what is happening at this party is a really good metaphor for the very reasons he came to the earth. Joy, which is what the wine represents, always runs out.

For us modern people joy is more important than it’s ever been. And yet it’s scarcer than it’s ever been. Our oil is running out and our great fear is that our joy will disappear with it. We got to the top of the mountain with 2 cars in every garage and now we can’t afford to drive them. We are out of wine! What will we do? You get the diploma, the degree, the job, the marriage, the house, the cars, the boat, the place at the lake and none of it delivers.

When you get to the top of the mountain and it doesn’t deliver there are only 4 ways to respond. You can blame the things themselves. *“I need a new spouse, a new house, a new job, a new church.”* You can blame yourself. *“The reason I haven’t got it is I’ve made bad choices. I just need to try harder.”* You can blame life. *“When I was young I*

was full of dreams and idealistic but now I am realistic. This is as good as it gets for me.” You can blame your separation from God. You can admit you need a relationship with God because life makes no sense without Him being at the core of all you are.

C.S. Lewis made a famous speech in which he said, “*Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger. There is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim. There is such a thing as water. A human being feels sexual desire. There is such a thing as sex. And if I find within myself a desire which no experience in the world can satisfy, the only probable explanation is that I was made for something in another world.*” If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy my desires that doesn’t mean that life is a fraud or that you have failed or that the things have failed. Earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy us but only to arouse us by suggesting there is something better out there.

There is a joy shortage. When Jesus makes the wine he is saying, “*Yes there is a joy shortage and I am the solution for it.*” Christianity gets a bad rap where joy is concerned. Lots of folks think Christianity is about bringing back Puritanism. If you want to be saved you have to frown a lot. Christianity means you have to go to church and you have to find a task to do while you are at church and you have to do it every week or else you will lose your soul. But that’s just the price you have to pay to get to go to Heaven when you die. One of the frequent questions I am asked when I am out in the community is, “Are you that funny when you preach?” It’s like the assumption is, “Nobody has a good time at church. Church isn’t a happy place. It’s a somber place.” Incidentally, my answer to that question is, “Spiritually healthy churches have a great sense of humor. It’s the number one way we express joy.”

When Jesus decided to make his debut what did he choose to do? If it’s your debut you want people to see the essential, not the incidental. So what does he do? Does he preach a sermon? Does he heal the sick? Does he feed the poor? Does he debate the Pharisees? What did he do? He created 100 gallons of unusually good wine for a party. It’s just sad that we use this text to debate social drinking when that is not at all the issue here. The issue here is Jesus proclaiming that he is the Master of the Banquet, the Lord of the Feast, the source of joy in life. He is saying, “*Do you want to know what I am all about? Do you want to know the essence of what I am doing? I am Lord of the Feast and wherever I go I spread joy. When I walk through the woods the trees laugh and sing for joy. When I make my bed under the heavens the stars shout for joy. When I enter a town the lame walk and the blind see and the poor have good news preached to them. Wherever I go there has to be joy. And if you want to know if a group of people assembled in a church building are really my church, don’t look first at their doctrine. Look first at their joy. If you think Christianity is some sort of endurance contest and church is just another thing you must endure then you don’t understand me at all.*”

Don’t you know that at this wedding in Cana Jesus had to be thinking about that which the scriptures repeatedly talk about – the wedding feast of the lamb? When you think of the end of time, the last day, what do you think of? The Bible thinks of the marriage supper of the lamb, the feast to end all feasts. You are going to be in attendance at that

feast and you are going to feel at that feast like a bride felt at the wedding feast. What is a bride feeling at that feast? She is feeling, *"I am loved and respected by the one person I love and admire most and that person is today binding himself to me so that everything he has and everything he is becomes mine. On top of that all my friends and loved ones are coming to the event and their cup is being filled with my blessings."*

I rather imagine Jesus was thinking of his own wedding day. Single people at weddings tend to do that. The metaphor of a wedding was always close to Jesus. At the end of John 3 the question is asked, *"Why are all the people going after Jesus?"* John the Baptist's answer is, *"Because he is the groom...not just the best man like I am."* In Matthew when Jesus is asked, *"Why do your disciples not fast?"* he answers, *"Because I am the groom."* At a wedding the groom sees something the audience usually does not get to see – the bride coming to present herself to her husband. The groom is always amazed. I remember thinking when I saw Judy walk down the aisle 52 years ago, *"I am the luckiest guy in the world."* When Jesus says, *"I am the groom."* he is saying, *"I am ravished with you. I can hardly stand still. I want to run and swoop you into my arms. I want to give you everything I have and am."* He is offering complete reception.

Listen to Isaiah's description of the feast, *Isa. 25:6* – *"On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines."* Does that not sound inviting? Remember the vision at the end of Revelation? *"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.... Then the angel said to me, 'Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'"* – *Revelation 21:2; 19:9* Can you imagine Jesus thinking about his wedding day when he says to his bride, *"All that I am and all that I have I give to you."*

Some of us have never experienced anything like that. Some of you have been brides but you got divorced and it spoiled everything. Some of you have never been a bride. But Jesus says to us all, *"If you come to me in faith there will come a day when you will be at my wedding feast and it will be unending."* The reason Jesus seems hesitant to turn the water into wine is because He knows that the only way we are ever going attend the wedding supper of the lamb is through his hour. Here's Jesus sitting in the midst of all these people who are laughing and singing at the top of their lungs and sipping the cup of joy. But Jesus sits there knowing that the only possible way he can bring the whole world into this position of joy is through his hour. The irony is while they are all sipping sweet wine he is thinking of the acidic cup he will soon have to drink. What an irony that we will only have an opportunity to know joy through his sorrow. That's why he takes those jars of water used for ceremonial washing to make wine. He was saying, *"The only way you will ever have ultimate joy is if my blood is shed to wash your sins away."* He often compared his blood to wine. Remember what he said about the wine at the Last Supper? *"This is my blood."* Wine has a medicinal value. You put it on wounds to cleanse and help heal. Wine also brought joy to feasts. He offers you both cleansing and joy when he offers you his wine.

So how do we receive his blood? We do it the way Mary did. The first thing she did was admit that they were out of wine. Remember what she said? "*Do whatever he tells you.*" If he tells you to repent – repent! If he tells you to be baptized and let his blood wash away your sins – be baptized! Do whatever he tells you.

Let me tell you an important truth about the life you are living. Whatever wine you are sipping, whatever brings you joy, is going to run out. There is going to come a day when you will realize, "*We are out of wine!*" Then what are you going to do? The wine Jesus offers is what you have been searching for all your life. Come sip the wine and do whatever he tells you. Here's some really good news for you, no matter how old you are, no matter how serious your illness, no matter how bad your situation. The good news is, "The best is yet to be." He saved the good wine for last.