

## A MIRACLE AT CANA AND CHRIST'S REVELATION: AN EXEGESIS ON JOHN 2:1-12

Djenny Ruswandi

**ABSTRAK:** Sebagian orang melihat mujizat-mujizat dalam cerita di Alkitab hanya sebagai satu bagian dari sebuah mitos. Mujizat-mujizat tersebut penting tetapi bukan fakta. Oleh sebab itu, kisah itu sendiri bukanlah sejarah. Seseorang hanya perlu menemukan pesan moral dari model cerita yang demikian. Sementara yang lain melihat mujizat-mujizat hanya sebagai mujizat semata. Mujizat-mujizat tersebut memang dibutuhkan ketika ada krisis. Dan itu tidak memerlukan penjelasan lain. Tetapi, sebagian orang melihat mujizat dengan sudut pandang tertentu yang membuat mereka menyadari apa pesan yang sesungguhnya dari sebuah cerita. Kita harus memahami sebuah mujizat dalam cerita Alkitab yang tercatat di Yohanes 12:1-12 dengan perpektif ini. Karena hanya dengan melakukan hal ini, kita dapat benar-benar meraih maksud dan pesan Yohanes yang tersirat dalam cerita pernikahan di Kana. Ini adalah tujuan dari penulisan artikel ini. Dalam memenuhi tujuan tersebut, kita akan meneliti Yohanes 12:1-12 dengan pendekatan literatur. Kita membahas tentang pengarang dan tujuan penulisan dari Injil Yohanes. Kita juga akan meneliti beberapa kata penting dan mempelajari konteks literatur dari teks tersebut. Lalu akhirnya, kita akan menekankan beberapa poin teologi dari pasal tersebut dan juga mencari pesan yang sesuai untuk masa kini. Secara umum, poin-poin tersebut mengarahkan kita kepada konklusi yang sangat penting bahwa di Kana, Yesus mulai menyatakan siapa diri-Nya kepada murid-murid-Nya. Ia mendeklarasikan diri-Nya dengan tindakan-Nya bahwa Ia diutus Allah; Ia adalah Mesias.

**KATA KUNCI:** mujizat, pernyataan, tanda, transformasi, pernikahan, keajaiban

**ABSTRACT:** Some people see miracles in biblical narrative just as a part of a mythical story. They are important but not factual. Therefore, the story itself is not historical. One only needs to find some moral lessons from this kind of story. Others see miracles just as miracles.

They are needed in time of crisis. No further explanation is needed. However, some others see miracles from a perspective that makes them realize what the message really is. We need to understand a miracle in the biblical narrative recorded in John 12:1-12 with that kind of perspective. Because only by doing that, we can really grasp John's intention and message implied in the story of the wedding at Cana. This is the goal of this writing. In order to achieve this goal, we will examine John 12:1-12 with literary approach. We will deal with the authorship and the purpose of the writing of the Gospel of John. We also examine some important words and study the literary context of the text. And lastly, we will highlight some theological points of the text and also look for contemporary messages to our own world. Generally, those points lead us to a very important conclusion that at Cana, Jesus was beginning to reveal who he was to his disciples. He declared by his action that he was the one who was sent by God; he was Christ.

**KEYWORDS:** miracle, revelation, sign, transformation, wedding, wonders

### **Introduction**

People in the twenty first century may not value marriage as much as people in the past. Many have even decided not to believe in marriage anymore. The same attitude is shown towards miracles. This is why it is very fascinating to discuss about a miracle which occurred in a wedding celebration at Cana about 2000 years ago. However, this article will not only discuss the issues of "marriage" and "miracle," since they are not the main issues in the passage. We will find that the wedding narrative in John 2:1-12 is more than just an extraordinary miracle which solved the crisis at the wedding feast. It is about the revelation of Christ. But how does a miracle which occurred in wedding at Cana relate to the revelation of Christ? This writing will focus on answering that particular question.

Before we examine the passage, we need to discover the social and historical context of the event as well as the literary context of the passage. Understanding the overall narrative in John's Gospel will lead us to an accurate understanding of the passage. For that purpose,

we need to do a little investigation about the authorship, dating, purpose of the Gospel of John and his audience.

### **The Authorship of the Gospel of John**

The external evidences that support John the apostle as the author of John's gospel come from our church fathers. During the second half of the second century AD, church fathers, such as Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, attributed the authorship of the gospel of John to him.<sup>1</sup> Since then, for almost eighteen centuries, none disagreed with them and made statements against that conclusion. The early church obviously accepted the conclusion that John the apostle, the son of Zebedee, as the one who wrote the gospel of John.<sup>2</sup>

Many contemporary scholars, however, give little credit to the view of early church tradition concerning the authorship of the Gospel of John. They view that the author of the Gospel was not John the son of Zebedee as the early church tradition upheld. They argue that the internal evidence did not match with that conclusion, even though the external evidence seems to support it.<sup>3</sup> According to them, the Gospel of John is "the product of a complex history of literary composition which has left the marks of its various stages on the text as we have it, making it possible to reconstruct its literary prehistory."<sup>4</sup> In simple words, the Gospel cannot be a single-person work. The content of the Gospel are from different sources. This conclusion was developed by scholars who used source criticism as their method. Incoherencies and repetitions in the literary sequence of the text and the inconsistencies in its ideology are the bases of the arguments which support their conclusion.<sup>5</sup> Another argument to reject John's authorship of the Gospel is the use of the phrase "beloved disciple." Using our

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<sup>1</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters: Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 74.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 10. For more detailed discussion on the debate concerning the authorship of the gospel of John, see D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1991), 68-81; and also Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 74-79.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 11.

imagination, certainly there will not be any disciple of Jesus who would call himself the beloved disciple among other disciples in his own writing.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, did John's background as a Palestinian fisherman (perhaps uneducated) make him capable to write the Gospel in Greek? Unlikely!

Whether or not we agree with the abovementioned conclusion, it is actually not problematic to admit that the author of the Gospel of John used different sources. Generally, a writer uses many sources to write his account. Then, how do we have confidence that it was John the son of Zebedee who wrote the Gospel? This writing will uphold the authorship of John of the son of Zebedee with these following considerations:

1. We should not overlook the external evidences which support the authorship of John. Obviously, the account itself mentions that the author is a disciple who is bearing witness about what Jesus has done (John 21:20-25). The author was an eyewitness.<sup>7</sup> If we make a comparison between "the disciple" in v.20 and v.24, we realize that the beloved disciple was the writer of the Gospel. And it is not strange to express in his writing that he was "the beloved disciple," if he felt he was loved by Jesus. It does not mean that Jesus did not love the other disciples.<sup>8</sup> I think the internal evidence is quite strong even though, just as Carson says, it is "not beyond dispute."<sup>9</sup>
2. Some asserted that a Palestinian was not able to write fluent Greek.<sup>10</sup> However, the fact that John was only an ordinary Jew living in Palestine does not mean that he was incapable to write something in Greek. He had so many years to improve his skill in writing. Considering the dating of the Gospel, which was the end

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<sup>6</sup> Carson, *The Gospel*, 76.

<sup>7</sup> Carson states that Westcott established five points to reach the conclusion of the authorship of the Gospel of John. He asserted that the author was (a) a Jew, (b) of Palestine, (c) an eyewitness, (d) an apostle, and (e) the apostle John. No one challenges the first two points, but there is no consensus on the last three points. I think we can still use these five points to find out the author of the Gospel of John. See Carson, *The Gospel*, 70-71.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

of the first century, John had more than fifty years (since the Pentecost) to develop his skill.

3. The recent scholar's conclusion based on source criticism methodology is inconclusive and even speculative. In fact, it brings a lot of confusion and uncertainty since the reconstructions of the history of the Johannine community in which the Gospel was developed are many and diverse.<sup>11</sup> Which one is the correct one? Nobody knows for sure. I think we should ask this question to ourselves: why do we want to replace our early church tradition's view with something more uncertain and speculative? Indeed, we may not be fully sure with the old view, but in this case, we should more confidence in the testimony of the people who lived not long after the Gospel was written than the invention of scholars who study diligently two millennia later.

### **The Audience and the Purpose of the Gospel of John**

With John, the son of Zebedee, as the author in our mind, we are able to examine whom John had in mind when he wrote the Gospel. What is his purpose? Certainly, we can decide that we do not really have to reconstruct the Johannine community as did many scholars who opposed John's authorship of the Gospel. They suggest that the Johannine community was "a small and idiosyncratic of early Christianity, sectarian in character, isolated from the rest of the early Christian movement, and formed by its own particular history and conflicts."<sup>12</sup> Instead of using their theory, we can just begin our investigation on the audience and the purpose of the Gospel by examination John's writing in John 20:30-31:

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

The purpose is obvious: "so that you may believe". The focal point is solid. It is to emphasize and verify who Jesus is – he is the Christ, the Son of God! Unlike other Gospels, evidently John

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<sup>11</sup> Bauckham, *The Testimony*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

formulated this conviction explicitly.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the difficult question is to verify who “you” in this verse refers to. This becomes a problem since the phrase “so that you may believe” has two variants: i[na pisteu,hte (present subjunctive: so that you may continue to believe) and i[na pisteu,shte (aorist subjunctive: that you may come to believe).<sup>14</sup> The former suggests that the purpose of the writing is to strengthen the faith of the believers, the later to evangelize the non-believers. The present subjunctive is the preferred reading since it has superior witnesses (manuscripts) on its behalf. However, it has been argued that John uses either tense in the same book to refer to both meanings.<sup>15</sup> In that case, we may use both meanings. Nevertheless, I will take the present tense as the primary meaning since it has more supports and also matches with Jesus’ intention when doing the miracle in John 2:1-12, which we will discuss in detail later in this writing.

One of the most important implications of the particular purpose of John is the selection of the material which he wrote. It is likely that he chose certain historical events in Jesus’ life which strongly supported his purpose.<sup>16</sup> Hence, we should view every event and section in John’s Gospel including the narrative of the wedding at Cana as *unique and significant* to achieve his purpose.

### **Translation on John 2:1-12:**

<sup>1</sup> Now on the third day there was a wedding at Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

<sup>2</sup> And Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the wedding.

<sup>3</sup> When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine (left).”

<sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what *concern is that* to me and to you? My time has not yet come.”

<sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you!”

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<sup>13</sup> D. Moody Smith, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 85-86.

<sup>14</sup> Carson, *The Gospel*, 662.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> I said in this statement “*historical events*,” to emphasize that John wrote the real acts or deeds of Jesus Christ. There will be no point to demonstrate who the real Jesus was using the fake or unhistorical story.

<sup>6</sup> Now there were set there six stone water jars for the purification of the Jews, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim.

<sup>8</sup> Then he said to them, "Now draw *water* out and take it to the master of the feast," <sup>14</sup> and they took it *to him*.

<sup>9</sup> And when the master of the feast tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from, but the servants who had drawn the water knew, he called the bridegroom.

<sup>10</sup> and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first, and whenever *the people* get drunk, then the lesser one. You have kept the good wine until now!"

<sup>11</sup> This beginning of *His signs* Jesus did in Cana of Galilee and revealed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.

<sup>12</sup> After this he went down to Capernaum, he with his mother and brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for not many days.

### **Literary Context of John 2:1-12**

As we have discussed above, in his writing John emphasized the identity of Jesus so that his readers believed that He was Christ. Generally, we can divide the whole of John's Gospel as follows:

- I. Prologue: Jesus, the Word, Became Flesh (1:1-18)
- II. Self-Disclosure of Jesus during His Ministry (1:19-12:50)
- III. Self-Disclosure of Jesus during the Passion Week and through Resurrection (13:1-20:31)
- IV. Epilogue: Jesus recalled His Disciple for Continuing His Ministry (21:1-25)

We realize that even in the prologue, John had already exposed who Jesus was. He mentioned that Jesus was the Word; and he was God who came to the world in human flesh to save the world. In the second and third section he clearly emphasized that Jesus revealed himself by his deeds and resurrection. The last section is a recall for the disciples who were most likely discouraged and felt failure. Jesus empowered them to continue his ministry.

Our passage is in the second section. It is a part of the beginning of Jesus' ministry. This whole picture that we have discussed will help us to understand John 2:1-12 appropriately.

### **The Structure of John 2:1-12**

- I. Prologue: Jesus, the Mother of Jesus, and His Disciples were in
- II. The Crisis Arose: the Mother of Jesus Saw that the Solution was in Jesus (vv. 3-5)
- III. The Crisis was Taken Care of: Jesus' Extraordinary Solution (vv. 6-8)
- IV. The Crisis Ended: an Unexpected and Surprising Result (vv. 9-10)
- V. The Glory of Jesus was Manifested (v.11)
- VI. Epilogue: Jesus, the Mother of Jesus, His Brothers and Disciples Left Cana (v.12)

### **The Analysis of John 2:1-12**

- I. Prologue (vv.1-2)

The word Kai (Now) indicates that a new section of the narrative of Jesus begins. The phrase th/ h`me,ra| th/ tri,th (on the third day) is debatable. Many scholars view that the phrase has symbolic meaning since symbolization seems to be one of the distinct characteristics of John's Gospel.<sup>17</sup> The argument is not unreasonable because it is apparent that in John's Gospel, often time (h`me,ra or w[ra ) is "not calendar times but ideological and relational periods."<sup>18</sup> However, we can see that the use of h`me,ra| in this case is in literal sense. The phrase th/ h`me,ra| th/ tri,th may refer to the third day from the last day recorded in v. 43. Three days was the time that Jesus and His disciple needed to travel from the location where John was baptizing to Galilee (around sixty six miles).<sup>19</sup> Thus, the literal meaning of "h`me,ra|" is more likely here. As mentioned above, John selected events he wanted to include in his Gospel. He chose the "wedding at Cana" event as one

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<sup>17</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2007), 62-63. See also, Jo-Ann A. Brant, *John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 43-55; and Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 82, 264-67.

<sup>18</sup> Neyrey, *The Gospel of John*, 62-63. See also, John Asthon, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 269-70.

<sup>19</sup> B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 36. See also, Merrill C. Tenney and Richard N. Longenecker, *John and Acts* (TEBC 9; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 42.



of the significant historical events of Jesus which maintained his purpose. By providing the exact time (th/| h`me,ra| th/| tri,th) and also the place (evn Kana. th/j Galilai,aj) he demonstrated to his readers that that event was a historical one.

The place of the wedding, Cana of Galilee, is not a well-known place. Now it is identified with Kanet el Jelil; about six miles from Nazareth.<sup>20</sup> The Bible mentions Cana of Galilee only four times – all in John’s Gospel in vv. 2:1, 11; 4:46; and 21:2. It is also difficult to find Cana mentioned in the early literature. This fact seems to indicate that Cana was a small city or village. Morris says that “important people did not live in places like Cana.”<sup>21</sup> It is not surprising that the people who stayed in Cana were probably poor.

Another interesting fact in this section is the phrase h` mh,thr tou/ VIhsou/ (the mother of Jesus). Throughout the passage (and the Gospel) we realize that John did not mention the name Mary as the mother of Jesus. Morris says that we will probably never find a satisfying explanation for this.<sup>22</sup> Morris is probably right. However, we should notice as well that only Jesus’ name appeared in this story. Even the identity of the couple who married that day was not mentioned. It seems that Jesus was really the main focus here instead of Mary and the wedding itself.

The imperfect tense of *eivmi*, (h=n) should not be overlooked. The tense indicates that the mother of Jesus was already there for quite sometime. Perhaps, she stayed there to help the family who celebrated the wedding. Thus we may expect that Jesus’ mother was close enough to the family and even knew and monitored the whole situation of the event. But Jesus and his disciples were just some of the guests who were invited by the family. In sum, the first two verses of our passage inform us that Jesus’ early ministry began in a small and poor village, to a few ordinary or even low-class people whom Jesus and his mother knew.

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<sup>20</sup> Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. John* (TC; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 89.

<sup>21</sup> Leon Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 71.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

## II. The Crisis Arose (vv. 3-5)

Our previous conclusion that the mother of Jesus knew the whole situation of the wedding feast seems to be supported by verse 3. She did not fail to monitor that the host of the wedding was running out of wine. Unlike in our social context, running out of wine was a serious matter in the first century world. It would bring embarrassment to the family and the happy couple.<sup>23</sup> The wedding usually lasted for a week.<sup>24</sup> It was expected that the host provide the wine, at least, for seven days. However, according to Derret, the Oriental law expert, the wine supply was given by guests as gifts as well.<sup>25</sup> He asserts that it was the poor Jesus and also His disciples who failed to contribute their part.<sup>26</sup> It was not surprising that the shortage occurred. Though Derret's information concerning the habit of a guest to bring the gift of wine is probably right, his interpretation that Jesus was responsible for the shortage, of course, was very absurd since Derret indirectly accuses Jesus and his disciples of having heavy drinking habit.<sup>27</sup> The crisis of the shortage of wine can be explained better by understanding that the host of the wedding feast was very poor. Therefore, he could not provide enough wine for the whole seven days. We can imagine how stressful he was. The shortage of wine during the wedding would bring embarrassment for a long time. In fact, some say that it could bring a lawsuit against the bridegroom's family.<sup>28</sup> Thus there was really a crisis during the wedding feast at Cana.

The mother of Jesus knew about the crisis. And because of this she came to Jesus and said: "They have no wine" (v. 3b). The questions are: what did she want by saying this? What did she have in her mind when she made this statement? The present tense (not imperative) of the verb *ε;cw* seems to indicate that she did not command Jesus to do something. Nevertheless, I think she did not only give information to Jesus. She had a certain purpose.

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<sup>23</sup> Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 90.

<sup>24</sup> Carson, *The Gospel*, 169.

<sup>25</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I – XII* (AB 29; New York: Doubleday, 1966), 102.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 179.

Obviously Mary, the mother of Jesus, knew that Jesus was not just an ordinary man. She experienced some marvelous events concerning Jesus: (1) Mary conceived Jesus when she was still a virgin (Luke 1:26-27); (2) the angel told Mary about who Jesus was even before His birth (Luke 1:28 -35); (3) she heard the testimony of Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, when she visited her (Luke 1:41-45); (4) She might have recalled what Simeon and the prophetess Anna said in the temple concerning Jesus (Luke 2:22 -38); and she recalled what the “twelve years old” Jesus said in the temple (Luke 2:49). All the events showed that Jesus was Messiah. Mary was probably not sure what Jesus could or would do to solve the problem in the wedding feast, but it seems that she believed that Jesus was able to help. That is why she said to Jesus: “They have no wine.”

For many of us, Jesus’ response to his mother seems to be impolite. He said: “Woman, what *concern is that* to me and to you? My time has not yet come.” However, the use of the word *gu,nai* (woman) in Greek is not a rude address. In fact we can translate it as “Lady,” a term which shows respect and even tenderness (cf. Mt. 15:28; Lk. 13:12; Jn. 4:21).<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, it is still unusual to address a mother by calling her “woman” or even “lady.” Most likely Jesus said implicitly to his mother that he was not under her authority anymore. It was God who directed Jesus then. It is even more obvious when we observe the phrase *Ti, evmoi. kai. soi,* (literally: what is to me and to you?). This phrase appears in the Old Testament (2 Sam.16:10; 1 Kings 17:18; 2 Chro. 35:21; and Judg. 11:12) and in the New Testament (Matt. 8:29). In every instance the phrase indicates some differences between two persons in thoughts and ways.<sup>30</sup> Jesus’ response expressed clearly that he was now different; he was no longer dependant on his biological mother, especially when doing his ministry. And he said it very early in his ministry.

Now, how do we understand the phrase *ou;pw h[kei h` w[ra mou* (My time has not come yet) in this passage? We find this phrase several times in John’s Gospel (cf. Jn. 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1;

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<sup>29</sup> Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 90. See also, Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 36.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

16:21; 17:1). Ridderbos gives us three suggestions concerning the interpretation of this phrase. Firstly, the phrase refers to “the beginning of Jesus suffering, his going to the Father, his glorification.”<sup>31</sup> This interpretation has been accepted by many scholars. Secondly, the phrase refers to the end of Jesus’ earthly career or to all his future glory.<sup>32</sup> Thirdly, the phrase refers to the beginning of the revelation of Jesus.<sup>33</sup> If we carefully examine the narrative of the wedding at Cana, we realize that the first two interpretations do not fit the story. How can we make a connection between Mary’s statement to Jesus (“They have no wine”) with Jesus’ response – which pointed to the assertion that Jesus’ time for the end of his ministry and his glorification had not come. On the other hand, the third interpretation is not without problem since the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, actually, was only a few minutes, or even seconds, from the time Mary gave the information. However, the problem is solved if we understand the phrase *ou;pw h[kei h` w[ra mou* in the light of previous phrase *Ti, evmoi. kai. soi,( gu,nai.* It is likely that the *w[ra* (time) refers to the beginning of Jesus’ revelation about himself in his ministry. Most likely, Jesus said this phrase to emphasize that he no longer depended on his mother, Mary, in his ministry. So to some extent, it does not matter whether the time would come sooner or later, Mary should know the fact that everything Jesus would do really depended on the timing of God the Father.

In v. 5 Mary clearly was not offended by Jesus’ response. First of all, Jesus did not make a rude response. Secondly, she accepted Jesus’ response. Nevertheless, her confidence that Jesus would do something in the midst of the crisis of the wedding was not diminished. In fact she asked the servants to do whatever Jesus would ask them. This instruction (“Do whatever he tells you!”) demonstrates several things. Firstly, it shows that Mary was not only close to the host of the wedding, but also had some authority to instruct the servants. Secondly, Mary responded to Jesus’ response positively by letting Jesus do whatever he would do in his time. Thirdly, Mary

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<sup>31</sup> Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel according to John: a Theological Commentary* (trans. by John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 105.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

believed that Jesus was able to do something to solve the crisis of the wine.

In sum, in vv. 3-5 we find that when the crisis arose in the wedding, the mother of Jesus was confident that Jesus was the answer. However, Jesus asserted that his time to act or to reveal himself was not his mother's concern. Jesus would do whatever he would do according to his time guided by God the Father.

### III. The Crisis was Taken Care Of (vv. 6-8)

We should consider a few things when discussing this section. Firstly, we should be aware about the amount of water which Jesus asked the servant to fill into the jars. One *metrthh,j* (a liquid measure) is about nine gallons.<sup>34</sup> If one jar held two or three *metrhtaj*. (plural form) then six jars would amount to 120 gallons. Such a huge amount of additional wine seems to be too much for the wedding feast.<sup>35</sup> Some would suggest that it would be an encouragement to drunkenness.<sup>36</sup> However, Morris suggests that the amount of wine was probably necessary for the happy couple. They could sell the wine for their daily living after their wedding feast. The point seems to be that Jesus provided an abundant blessing for the couple through His miracle. One additional noteworthy note is that one may see the abundance of wine as an indication of the prophetic expectation of messianic age in Isaiah 25:6.<sup>37</sup>

Some suggest that the number six symbolizes incompleteness of Judaism, whereas number seven indicates the perfect number of God.<sup>38</sup> Thus, Jesus' miracle symbolized that He resolved that incompleteness of Judaism. This interpretation does not have a strong

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<sup>34</sup> Ernst Haenchen, *John 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 1 – 6* (ed. by Robert W. Funk with Ulrich Busse; trans. by Robert W. Funk; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 173.

<sup>35</sup> Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Gospel of John*, 75.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, "John," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. by G. K Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 431.

<sup>38</sup> Brant, *John*, 57. See, also Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Gospel of John*, 74; and Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 182-183.

basis since number seven does not occur in the story.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, Jones asserts that numbers seldom have symbolic meaning in the fourth Gospel.<sup>40</sup>

Secondly, we may have to pay attention to the tradition of the purification of the Jews. The stone jars were used for purification. The water was used for cleansing unclean hands through pouring water as well as for washing of vessels.<sup>41</sup> This fact should not be overlooked. The water in jars was used for “transformation” from “unclean” to “clean” in Jewish tradition based on Leviticus 11:19 -38. Jesus transformed the water into wine. This should be the first indication that Jesus would transform the life of the man who believed in Him.<sup>42</sup>

Thirdly, we are probably astonished by the obedience of the servants who followed exactly what Jesus said without doubt. They filled the six jars with water “to the brim.” After that they drew the water from the jars and gave it to the master of the feast (or probably the head waiter). One may argue that these servants were just slaves who should obey their master. Though Jesus was not their master, they obviously had to follow His order because of their obedience to Mary, the one who probably had a temporary authority over them. However, one should remember even a slave was able to use his mind to assess the situation. And I think the situation would not be good for them if they just gave the water to the master of the feast. This obedience of the simple people should be our consideration when we want to follow Jesus wholeheartedly. Nevertheless, we have to admit that the servants were only supporting characters in this narrative. John obviously did not really bother to mention the obedience of the servants. The main focus is what Jesus did to resolve the crisis of the wedding at Cana.

One additional examination is noteworthy here. Westcott suggests that the word “Antlh,sate” (avntle,w: draw out) indicates that

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. See also C. K. Barrett, *Gospel According to St John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), 191.

<sup>40</sup> Larry Paul Jones, *The Symbol of Water in the Gospel of John* (JSNT 145; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 59.

<sup>41</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36; Waco: Word Books, 1987), 35.

<sup>42</sup> Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Gospel of John*, 77.

they drew out the water from the well, since the word is used in John 4:7 and 15.<sup>43</sup> However, Morris insists that the word “avntle,w” did not necessarily mean “draw water *from a well*.”<sup>44</sup> Morris is probably right. But I think it does not really matter whether the water was from the jars or from the well. It did not change the fact that Jesus changed the water into wine.

In sum, in vv.6-8 Jesus solved the crisis of the wedding at Cana by transforming the water in the six stone jars – which were usually used for the ritual purification of the Jews – into wine. Jesus’ act can be seen as an indication of the work of spiritual transformation in mankind. His act also indicates that he was able to give provision for mankind abundantly. The plentiful wine may be a sign that the messianic era had just begun – the new order had just started.

#### IV. The Crisis Ended (vv. 9-10)

Ironically, the one who should have taken care of everything in the wedding (o` avrcitri,klinoj: the master of the feast) did not know something very important occurred, whereas the low class people – such as the servants – knew that Jesus had done something they never imagined. Initially, the servant only knew that they just gave the water to the master of the feast, but eventually they knew that the water had become wine, because the master of the wedding feast said to the bridegroom, “Every man serves the good wine first, and whenever *the people* get drunk, then the lesser one. You have kept the good wine until now!” Even though we have no attestation in other literature about the custom in which the bridegroom served the good wine in the beginning and the poor one last, the testimony of the master of the wedding feast at Cana could be evidence that such a custom was practiced in those days.<sup>45</sup>

The master of the feast (and even the bridegroom) did not know where the wine came from – and he did not seem to bother either – but he knew that the wine was good even until the end of the

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<sup>43</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 174.

<sup>44</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 183.

<sup>45</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 100. Murray in his commentary said that the master of the feast’ statement was neither a proverb nor a rule. It might be “an ironical or humorous or simply shrewd comment on human conduct.” See Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC, 35.

feast. He became a good witness of Jesus' remarkable deed without even realizing it. I think for John as the author of this Gospel, this was probably what mattered most. In these verses, John's focus was that Jesus did something remarkable. He did not write the narrative in details. We do not know the name of the master of the feast and the bridegroom. We do not know about the feeling of the servants who brought the water to the master of the feast. It was not relevant for John. The relevant things are these: the wine was good and the witnesses were also there. And even his testimony was more powerful since the master of the feast did not know anything at all about what Jesus had done to the water, he knew only the result. This made him as an unbiased or very objective witness.

In sum, in the previous section we know that Jesus provided the wine abundantly. But in this section John pointed out that He gave a *good* wine. Abundant quantity and also excellent quality! And it was not a made up testimony. John claimed that there was a qualified and unbiased witness for what Jesus had done. I cannot agree more with Morris' statement:

But John's readers will pick up the point that Jesus does not do things by halves. Not only is the wine that Jesus provides abundant in quantity, but it is also of excellent quality. There is nothing to equal it.<sup>46</sup>

#### V. The Glory of Jesus Revealed (v.11)

The word *shmei,wn* (signs) is crucial here. Carson informs us that there are several words which can be used to denote what we called "miracles:" (1) mighty works (it is not found in John); (2) wonders (it usually occurs with the word "signs"); and (3) signs.<sup>47</sup> John preferred the word "signs." It seems that for John, a miracle was not just a miracle or a mighty work. Culpepper says that a sign points to something (it can be only one thing).<sup>48</sup> In the narrative of the wedding at Cana, the sign describes the one who did a miracle more than just the miracle itself. And here in this verse John emphasized that the miracle of changing water to wine revealed the glory of Jesus. I think Borchert's statement is accurate: "In John a sign is more than just a

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<sup>46</sup> Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Gospel of John*, 76.

<sup>47</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 175.

<sup>48</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 182.



wonder; it is a powerful act for the one who has eyes to see because it points to the reality of who Jesus is.”<sup>49</sup>

The other significant observation is the result of the miracle. The wedding feast went on smoothly. The crisis ended. The happy couple and their family were blessed. But that is not the main point. What is more important is that Jesus’ disciples believed in him. For John, the miracle work in Cana was only for a few people: Jesus’ disciples. The master of the feast and the bridegroom did not know a miracle happened. The servants knew there was a miracle but it seems that they did not see the glory of Jesus. The disciples were aware of Jesus’ miracle and saw his glory and believed in Him.

## VI. Epilogue (v.12)

Verse 12 is actually a transition to the next passage. It seems that this verse is not really connected to our passage. However, there are several observations that we should bear in mind when we read this verse. Firstly, the phrase *Meta. tou/to* (after this) denotes the sequence of several events. Staying with his mother, brothers and disciples for a few days (literally: not many days) was the next event that Jesus went through. Perhaps, the event was not that too important. But the sequence of events demonstrates that the wedding narrative in Cana is a historical one. Another indication for that conclusion is the fact that John mentioned Capernaum as Jesus’ destination. Jesus spent the time with his family in a real place and in real time (*ouv pollaj. h`me,raj*).

Secondly, this is the first time in this passage John mentioned about Jesus’ brothers. This fact perhaps leads us to the conclusion that John was really telling us about the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus’ attachment to the family was still strong. Jesus had not given his focus fully to the ministry yet. He was in transition. If we read through the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels, we can see very clearly that Jesus’ attachment to his relatives became less over time. One incident which involved Jesus’ family during his ministry was when His mother and brothers was looking for him while he was ministering to people (Lk. 8:19-21). However, Jesus used this opportunity to teach

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<sup>49</sup> Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11* (TNAC on CD-ROM; Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers & Logos Library System, 2001).

his disciples by saying: “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it” (Lk. 8:21).

In sum, in v.12 we are led to the conclusion that Jesus’ miraculous deed in the wedding at Cana was indeed a historical event which occurred in the beginning of Jesus’ ministry.

### **The Message of John 2:1-12**

The main message of John 2:1-12 is really obvious. It is the story of the “revelation about the person of Jesus Christ.”<sup>50</sup> It is not just a story about a miraculous supply of wine as Dodd has suggested.<sup>51</sup> And it is not a replicate story from ancient Greek myths.<sup>52</sup> Here some detailed examinations should be noteworthy:

1. Jesus’ miraculous deed in Cana can be seen as a first indication of the work of transformation. Jesus’ work of transformation (water into wine) manifested his glory which signified that he was indeed the Christ. As we see later, Jesus did not only transform water into wine but also a man into a new person in Christ (e. g. Jn. 3:1-15; 4:1-45; etc).
2. This revelation about Jesus was a historical fact. There was an exact time and place in which the event occurred. And there was an unbiased and qualified witness (the master of the wedding feast). It is definitely not the story which was taken from the ancient Greek mythology. The person of Christ is greater than any character in Greek mythology.
3. The first miraculous work of Jesus in Cana can be viewed as the indication of the beginning of a messianic age which was

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<sup>50</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 103.

<sup>51</sup> C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1963), 224.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 224-225. Dodd is probably right that a miraculous supply of wine was a popular motive which appears in various fictional myths in the Greek world. For example, there is a legend which narrated the priests of Dionysius changed the water in three great basins into the wine. However, as we have discussed above the narrative of the wedding at Cana was clearly a historical story. Moreover, we cannot assume that the narrative of the wedding at Cana was just a duplication of the Greek myths since we can find a lot of differences between these two stories. The setting, the people who were involved in the story, the place and the main character are absolutely different.

indicated by a banquet with plenty of wine (Isa. 25:6). This leads us to the conclusion that he is the Christ who is to come in the messianic age.

4. Jesus worked in his own time. The story of the wedding at Cana gives so much emphasis on this. Mary was the mother of Jesus, we should give a highest respect to her, but even her, did not have authority over Jesus.
5. The first sign of Jesus was intended for his own disciples. The discipleship process began early in Jesus' ministry. Not everyone witnessed Jesus' miracle; not everyone saw the glory of Jesus through his miracle; only his disciples saw his glory and that he was the Christ.

### **Reflection on John 2:1-12**

The question that we should ask is what does the narrative of the wedding at Cana teach us as Jesus' disciples in our contemporary context? This simple question can be answered in a simple way that we as believers should have confidence that Jesus is the Christ. Many people have been arguing about this for a long time, but his miraculous works in the wedding at Cana is one of many signs that showed he is indeed the Christ. Secondly, we may not have a crisis as the one in Cana. But the historical event in Cana demonstrates that Jesus is the Christ who is able to overcome an unexpected crisis. Thirdly, we will probably never see again the miracle of the transformation of water into wine but we can see Jesus' work of transformation in mankind. So we can offer ourselves to be his channel of marvelous works just as his disciples did.

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