



Thanksgiving should be a time of joy and thanksgiving for all the good things we have. However, when we are hurting or struggling through difficult times, sickness or trials, or just feeling stuck in the rut of our daily routine, we can find it hard to realize or remember what we have to be thankful for or happy about. I certainly find it hard sometimes to feel thankful. There is a story in the bible that always reminds me of what we have or can have in Jesus - true abiding happiness and joy.

At the beginning of John 2 (v1-12), Jesus gives us a picture of what we have in Him in the first miracle (or sign) He performed. There are only eight miracles described in John's gospel, and they are called "signs." As with any sign, they are merely pointers to or representations of something else that lies behind the sign. The signs in this gospel are pointers to a higher, greater reality. Jesus was invited to a wedding with His disciples and His mother, Mary, was there. As with any wedding, after the ceremony there was a celebration, like a reception. At some point, the wine ran out, we are told. In the bible, wine is not a bad thing. According to Psalm 104:15, God makes it possible to produce wine to gladden the heart of man. Wine is a source of joy God gives us. God has made a world full of good things for our enjoyment. We have problems because we put those things before God and desire to enjoy them on our own independent from Him. Here we have the crux of the story. The wine ran out, so their pleasure in the celebration was lessened. It probably was not the only marriage in Cana where the wine of joy had run out. This simple statement, the wine ran out, is a commentary on human experience. We are all seeking to find pleasure and happiness in something. People go into marriage thinking it will be the ultimate source of joy, and eventually (without a lot of effort) the joy of the marriage runs out. People pursue careers thinking if they can just make enough money or reach a certain level of success, they will be happy, and eventually the joy of that pursuit runs out. It is painfully true throughout human experience. Whatever we strive for in this world to find happiness, whether we are seeking love, some job or salary level, wealth, fame, parenting, food, drink, drugs or whatever thinking it will give us true satisfaction and joy, those things either run out or our pleasure in them diminishes. As the writer of Ecclesiastes describes after trying everything to find lasting happiness - all is vanity.

So, how does Jesus restore the wine of joy for the celebration? He could have done it a number of ways, but he chose to use the water pots of cleansing they had for the marriage ceremony and for the Jewish rites of purification. He had some servants fill the water pots up with water and he used it to create wine, which the master of the feast recognized immediately as being better than the wine they had before. Why did Jesus do it that way? I believe the simplest explanation is usually the best. He used water pots of cleansing because our cleansing before God is the necessary condition for our relationship with Him, and that relationship with God is the source of indescribable satisfaction and joy. Jesus would become the means of our cleansing before God by His death and His resurrection, which showed God was satisfied with His sacrificial payment for our sin (Heb 10:10-25). Jesus told His mother that His hour had not yet come. That would be the hour of his glorification (His being lifted up on the cross as He discusses later and His ultimate resurrection).

We will never be truly, sustainably happy doing anything independent from God - see our purpose for being explained in Genesis 1 & 2. We were made in God's likeness with a spirit, so that we could have a relationship with Him and enjoy the good things of this world as part of that relationship with our creator. We are not to compartmentalize and have one part of our life - going to church, spirituality, holiness - that we have to endure once in a while because its proper (like the wedding ceremony), and another part of our life (like the reception) - seeking happiness in wine and other things of the world - that is really our goal in life. God is ultimately the source of all of the world's pleasures, and those pleasures will come and go, but our cleansing before God though Jesus is the necessary condition for ultimate happiness. An unbeliever would have to admit that Christians love singing about God's holiness and being cleansed of their sin. Why? Once we are cleansed of our sin through Christ and know what it means to have our conscience freed from the guilt of sin, we are free to walk with God and enjoy Him without worrying about whether we will fall out of His grace if we stumble.

There are a lot of amazing things in this story. As with every story in John, it is significant on multiple levels. Jesus used water pots of cleansing to produce a better wine (source of joy), more than they could possibly drink. He used servants that knew the source of the better wine, and they able to dispense it. We, as God's servants, know the source of true abiding happiness, and we can dispense it to others through God's word. There is the element of time. Jesus made wine instantly out of water. We all know it takes time to make wine, especially good wine. Jesus can work outside of time. He is independent of time. It is not coincidental that in the next miracle/sign (John 4), Jesus heals a nobleman's son from a great distance, demonstrating that he is independent of space. He is the creator in control of time and space who was with God in the beginning (John 1). He will go on In John 2 to start His ministry seeking a bride. In John 4, He will offer the Samaritan woman (picturing the church) living water, the Holy Spirit, who would be to the church a marriage payment or engagement ring - a token of our future inheritance in Christ sealing the relationship (Eph 1:3-14). The Holy Spirit is an inexhaustible source of spiritual refreshment and strength. Cleansing, salvation, relationship with God, the Holy Spirit, true abiding happiness - these are all free gifts that any and all who put their faith in Jesus can enjoy no matter what they are going through in this life. Let us always remember to be thankful for what we have in Christ. Here are a few more passages that lead us to be thankful - Psa 95, Psa 100, Rom 3:21-26, Rom 5:1-11, Rom 8, Phil 4:6-7, Col 3:12-17, I Peter 1:3-9.