

Extravagant Gifts  
John 2:1-11

My son married a girl from Uzbekistan, which is a poor country in the Middle East. It is just north of Afghanistan. My daughter-in-law's mother is a college English professor. She makes the equivalent of \$50 a month. Her father is an electrical engineer. He makes about \$300 a month. They are very frugal people. They have to be in order to survive.

However, when it comes to weddings, frugality goes out the door. At my son's wedding, they hired a nationally known television personality to host the festivities. They had a band. There were many guests at the wedding. And there was far more food and drink than anyone could consume. There was wine, vodka and beer at each place setting. They ate and toasted all night long. Now, I'm used to handling toasts at receptions. I just drink water. But no one drinks the water in Uzbekistan. There was no water served. Although I tried to drink sparingly, because I'm not used to alcohol, I could not escape its effects.

I learned a lot about weddings in the Bible from this experience. They celebrated weddings in the same extravagant manner as the people of Uzbekistan.

The people of that region are extravagant when it comes to guests. Jesus was true to his roots.

Last week we talked about Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist. The Gospel of John doesn't tell us about John baptizing Jesus. There's a reason for that. When you were baptized by someone, you became that person's disciple. John had a great many followers, and some of those followers believed that Jesus was a disciple of John. After all, he was baptized by John. That meant that John was more important than Jesus. That's why all four gospels quote John as saying that someone greater than he was coming.

In the Gospel of Matthew we are told that John didn't want to baptize Jesus. He told Jesus that he, John, needed to be baptized by Jesus instead. But Jesus commanded John to baptize him.

The Gospel of John just leaves out Jesus' baptism by John completely. But he does talk about John telling some of his disciples to become disciples of Jesus.

Three days later Jesus and his disciples went to a wedding in Cana of Galilee. This was probably a wedding of one of his relatives, because his mother and his brothers were there. The relatives must have been fairly poor, because they didn't buy enough wine for the wedding celebration. For anyone in any culture, it's embarrassing to run out of refreshments at a party. But in that part of the world, to run out of refreshments at your daughter's wedding was a shameful thing. The poor parents would never live it down.

Mary was determined to save her relatives from this horrible faux pas. She knew Jesus could help them. So, she asked him to do something.

Jesus response sounds kind of rude. He says, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."

Mary didn't understand what she was asking him to do. Jesus had been waiting to reveal his power and authority until the right time. He was waiting until the time when his ministry could have the greatest impact, because he knew his ministry would last only a very short time and that it would end with him dying on the cross.

By asking him to perform an act of great power, Mary was asking Jesus to take the first step that would lead to the cross. Jesus understood that. He was not yet ready to begin the journey to the cross. He tried to talk her out of her request. But she would not take no for an answer. She simply told the servants to do whatever he told them to do and walked away.

Jesus could not bring himself to let his mother down.

There were six large stone jars. These jars were to be used to hold the water that the Jews washed themselves, their clothes and their cooking utensils with, to fulfill the requirements of the Law. Altogether these jars would hold about 150 gallons of water.

Jesus told the servants to fill the jars with water. Then he told them to take some of the water to the steward of the wedding party. The steward was the emcee of the wedding party. The steward tasted the water and declared it was the best wine they had had all night.

Imagine! 150 gallons of fine wine at a party that was nearly over. The bride's family was probably left with enough wine to sell and pay for the whole wedding and live on the rest for a very long time.

That's extravagant. But that's the way Jesus does things.

You remember when he fed the five thousand with the two loaves and five fish. The gospels tell us that Jesus used that little bit of food to feed everyone until they couldn't hold anymore, and then the disciples gathered up the left over and saved it, so that they would have enough to eat for several more days.

At the Christmas Eve services, we had really good attendance at all three services. So much so, that by the last service, we didn't have much bread left for the Communion service. I told Bonnie to give everyone really small portions of bread.

I don't think Jesus would have done that. He would probably have said, "Give everyone a whole loaf of bread and bottle of Welch's grape juice."

Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10) That's so Jesus. He didn't just say, "I came that they may not die," nor even, "I came that they may live." No, that's not good enough. Jesus came so that we can have life in abundance.

Jesus came so that we can have an abundance of love and joy and peace. He came so that we can spend all eternity celebrating the goodness of life, as we look at the wonderful glory of God.

Jesus tells us that we will be resurrected to an eternal wedding banquet in which the wine and the food will never run out. We will laugh and sing and dance and celebrate for all eternity.

So, let me ask, are you enjoying the abundant life now? If not, it may be because we didn't listen carefully to what Mary said.

You remember what Mary said to the servants? She said, "Do whatever he tells you to do." Remember, the jars were empty. Before Jesus turned the water into wine, first there had to be some water to turn into wine. What if the servants had not obeyed Jesus when he told them to fill the jars with water? There would not have been 150 gallons of fine wine for the wedding party to enjoy.

I wonder how many Christians are not enjoying abundant living because their jars are empty. Jesus is telling them, "Hey, put some water in that jar and I'll give you some fine wine." But instead of doing what Jesus is telling them to do, they are sitting around saying, "I'm not enjoying my life. Jesus promised me abundant life, but my life isn't abundant. I'm just existing. I don't enjoy going to church. I don't enjoy my work. My life isn't fun. I just don't understand why Jesus has failed me."

Well, who has failed whom?

Now, keep in mind that abundant living isn't necessarily easy living. Mary says to us, "Do whatever he tells you to do." So, what does Jesus tell us to do? He says, "Take up your cross and follow me."

Wait a minute, Jesus. You don't understand. I didn't say I wanted to suffer and die. I want abundant life, not suffering and death. And Jesus says to us, "He who would save his life will lose it. But he who will lose his life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel will have life in abundance."

If you really want abundant life, you have to be willing to follow Christ, to do what Christ calls you to do.

I don't know where those servants had to go to fill those 20 or 30 gallon jugs of water, but I'll guarantee you it was hard work. When I was a boy, I used to help my father deliver milk to grocery stores. I would lift four gallon cases of milk. Those four gallon cases of milk weighed about 25 pounds. How much would a stone jar filled with 30 gallons of water weigh? Maybe 200 pounds? I don't know. I do know that they had to work hard to fill one of them, and they had to fill six of them.

It was because of their obedience that the wedding party enjoyed Jesus' extravagance.

If you want to enjoy Christ's extravagance, you have to be willing to do what he tells you to do. What he tells you to do may not be easy. But it is the only way to abundant life.

Jesus wants to pour out blessings on you. But before he can, you have to do whatever he tells you to do.

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