

Every last detail has been carefully planned; everything has been mapped out and prepared. The music is set up; the right songs chosen. The right wine is on the table; the guests have been seated in just the right places. The food has been sampled and passed the test; the decorations have been lovingly positioned. Everything is made to be just right—for on the big day, the day of the wedding, everything must be perfect. How embarrassing an oversight would be—a guest without a seat; not enough food to serve everyone in attendance. Much preparation and planning are done to prevent such an embarrassing oversight.

In that respect, weddings were the same in Jesus' day. Great care was taken to ensure that everything was perfect. The wedding feast would last longer than ours—up to a week long; careful preparation ensured that everything would be just right for the guests who came to the feast. But at this wedding, something went terribly wrong. The wine was gone! And a wedding feast without wine would be a poor feast indeed; in Jesus' day, this simply could not be. To run out of wine brought a huge embarrassment to the wedding party; they had failed in their careful planning for the big event. In a culture that prized hospitality and treating guests well, this was a big deal.

But this time, disaster was averted. Here, at this wedding, Jesus and His disciples were in attendance. At this feast was the Creator of earth and heaven; the one who could change things with the Word of His mouth, just as easily as He had created the universe by the Word of His mouth. Now, as the wine runs out, Jesus' mother turns to her Son and says: they are out of wine. Mary, knowing her Son was no ordinary man, but the Messiah, turns to Jesus for help; she seeks His aid to avoid disaster.

Jesus will have none of it. He brushes her aside: “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” Mary, undeterred, tells the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them. Jesus instructs the servants to fill six large stone jars with water; when they are filled to the brim—holding 150 gallons of water, give or take, Jesus tells the servants to draw from their contents. By His power, Jesus had made the water in the stone jars wine! And not just any wine, but first-rate wine. With the six jars filled to the brim, here was an abundance of wine!

The master of the feast, the one in charge of the wedding festivities, is amazed. Typically the best wine is served first, at the beginning of the feast. Later on, as the feast stretches into its later days, wine of inferior quality would be used. But not here! The good wine—the best wine—had been saved until now, well into the feast. The master of the feast is amazed. Here was good wine, saved until now.

Why was that? Why would Jesus make them wait? Why not provide such wine immediately? And, since He was about to give them more wine, why does Jesus brush aside His mother? Jesus could have listened to her AND given them wine; He could have performed His miracle before there was any lack of wine, preventing the crisis completely. Instead, He lets them run out of wine; instead, He tells Mary that this is none of her business.

Jesus does this to show us who He is and what He does. The miracle is a sign: an indication of who Jesus is; the miracle points beyond itself to the one who worked it; it is a sign that this man is the Messiah. The one who works the miracle shows that He has power over creation. Jesus reveals by this miracle that He is the Creator. He alone can change creation by His Word; He alone could work such a miracle at this wedding in Cana.

But the miracle reveals more about this Jesus. It shows what He does as the Creator, how He works as the Messiah. It is a sign to teach us that, as God, Jesus knows the best time and way to provide His help. He does not allow us to prescribe to Him what He must do and when He

must do it; we, as His creatures, as His creatures fallen into sin, have no right to make demands of what He must do. That is what Mary tried to do. She attempts to exercise authority over her Son in His ministry and work. She tries to direct Jesus in His work of miracles. Jesus will have none of it: My hour has not yet come, he tells her: I know when it is best to step in and help. Jesus is not there to do what Mary wants when she wants it. Jesus is there to do what is best: to give Mary and all mankind what we truly need when we need it.

This truth can be a bitter pill to swallow. Perhaps you have stood in Mary's shoes. Perhaps you have prayed for something, without receiving it. Maybe you have asked for a promotion, a better job, or just A job; perhaps you have begged God that you not be laid off—and things have turned out just the opposite. Or, maybe you have prayed for health, only to struggle through sickness; prayed that your loved one be healed, only to watch them sink further and further into illness. Maybe you have prayed for your children, only to see them get into trouble. Maybe you have prayed for—well, you get the picture. Often times we, like Mary, want to be able to set the schedule for God; we try to dictate to Him what He should do and when He should do it. But, if we fall into this, we are getting things backwards. We are placing ourselves above God; we are abusing the gift of prayer to make ourselves god, to try to call all the shots in our life by ourselves. And is this a fitting way to treat God? To make Him less than we are, obligated to meet our every whim? No, of course not; we are not to act like spoiled brats in dealing with our heavenly Father.

And really—if you got what you wanted always, without fail—would that be a good thing? If we are honest, the answer is, NO. How quickly and easily we would then forget our Maker and Savior. If our every desire were met instantly, how soon we would lose sight of our need and our weakness; how easily we would forget our dependence on God for all things. God makes us wait on His time, wait for His deliverance. He makes us wait for OUR GOOD! When

God is saying “no,” or “later,” He is preparing His help for us. It might not be the help we are hoping for; it might not come at the time we desire that it would. But our loving and gracious God is preparing for us the help that we NEED, and when the time is right, He will give it to us.

In this way, God is testing our faith; in this way, God is turning us to Him in prayer. He lets us see our need that we might be all the more fervent in our prayers. He lets us feel frustration or anguish or despair so that we would cry out all the louder to Him; He lets us then see how much we depend on Him.

And God is also preparing us to receive His gifts with thanksgiving. When we are first led to see our great need; when we are led to God in prayer as our only help in time of distress, then we receive His gifts with grateful hearts; then we overflow in thanksgiving. The gift given before we see our need is despised; the gift given where there is no want is easily received with ingratitude. We can see this in earthly things. Imagine the teen-ager, new driver’s license in his or her pocket, eyeing the presents under the Christmas tree. They are hoping for clothes; they are looking for an ipod. If instead they open up the gift, and it is jumper cables; well, they might be a little disappointed—or VERY disappointed. They might not be thankful for the gift.

But picture that same teenager, stopped at a gas station in the middle of nowhere, miles from home, in the middle of the night. If the car is dead and will not start—THEN they will appreciate the jumper cables they were given. Once they see their need; once they see how useful the gift is, then they appreciate it; then they are thankful for it. Before then, the gift meant nothing to them; now that they see their need for it, they express their thanks and gratitude for the gift. So also God: by letting us first experience our need, He opens our hearts to receive His gifts with thanksgiving. That wedding couple at Cana—facing the embarrassment of no wine; they were prepared to receive Jesus’ gifts with thanksgiving. Likewise, those who are blind and receive their sight from Jesus; they offer Him more thanks than the thousands who could see just

fine. When God lets us experience our need, He is opening our hearts that we might give Him thanks for all the blessings He showers upon us.

As God, Jesus works in His time—that is the time that is best for us! This calls for faith; this calls for patience; this calls for trust as we wait on the Lord to give us the help we need when it is best for us. This calls for us to believe our Lord’s promise that all things work together for the good of those who love Him. In the end, God provides His blessings to His children; in the end, all things will end well for the one who trusts in Jesus.

We see a picture of this in the Gospel. Mary is there the picture of faith, of waiting on the Lord. She is brushed aside; Jesus turns her away when she first comes to Him for help. But her faith is not shattered. Consider her remarkable response: She does not get angry at Jesus; she does not run away from Him. No, she tells the servants: “Do whatever He tells you.” That is remarkable faith! She trusts that Jesus will help, even when every appearance says otherwise. That is faith that trusts God even when it seems He does not care, that He has forgotten; even then, faith stands strong and trusts in Christ and His mercy.

Such faith comes from God; it is given by Him; it is supported by His Word and His miracles. Such faith is founded not on what we think or hope God might be; this faith is founded instead on what God promises to do in His Word. Such faith is based on the signs that identify Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah. Such faith finds peace and joy in its confidence that God will work out all things in His time. Such faith can be at rest, as it places ourselves into God’s hand with the trust that God will save and deliver us. Such faith looks forward to the end, when all things will work out perfectly for us, God’s children. Then our deliverer will remove all sorrow and pain; then our Savior will take away all that ails us. God grant us such faith! God preserve us in that faith until the end. Amen.