

THE RADICAL RABBI: "A RADICAL RESPONSE" (John 2:1-11)

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INTRODUCTION

Miracle. A lot of power in that word. Miracle. What comes to your mind? Sports has often been the arena for witnessing what has come to be popularly viewed as miracles. For some baseball fans of a certain age, the 1969 New York Mets may be one of the things you might think of. In fact, one of their nicknames was "The Miracle Mets" because of their being perennial losers in every season they had existed before amazing the baseball world by winning that year's World Series.

For others, they quickly remember "The Miracle On Ice," the performance by the US Olympic hockey team in the 1980 Games, when they stunned the four-time defending champion Soviet Union hockey team in a 4-3 shocker on the way to their gold medal.

Because of the story we are going to be looking at today, I thought I would check out a definition of the word "miracle." The online *Dictionary.com* defines it as: "An effect or extraordinary event in the physical world that surpasses all known human or natural powers and is ascribed to a supernatural cause." A wonderful resource for Bible study, *The Dictionary: Finding Meaning In God's Words*, defines miracles as: "Ordinarily impossible events that reveal divine intervention in the affairs of men" (page 239). And *Richard's Complete Bible Dictionary* defines a miracle as: "An event that so overrides what observers understand of natural law that it creates wonder and serves as evidence of God's active intervention in this universe" (page 699). Just like David noted of the heavens in Psalm 19, miracles are also designed to **declare the glory of God**; just like the heavens, miracles likewise **proclaim the work of His hands - David, Psalm 19:1**. Essentially the Bible tells us that, as God was the One who authored the laws of science and nature, as a measure of His sovereignty, He is free to rewrite them, if even for a moment, if it results in the furthering or completing of His plans. Remember the old spiritual: "He's got the whole world in his hands?" Miracles basically come alongside us to confirm exactly that - YES, He absolutely does have the whole world in His hands. Always has, always will.

But before we take this look at the first recorded miracle in the gospels, let's begin with a **moment of prayer**.

TEXT (John 2:1-11)

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and His disciples had also been invited to the wedding - John 2:1-2.

OK, a little background. A wedding was taking place in the village of Cana. Now that's where the disciple Nathanael was from. If we are assuming correctly that John (the apostle) is simply continuing the narrative unbroken from Chapter 1, then the "third day" is three days after Christ's meeting with Nathanael. Now Cana was located just a few miles north of Nazareth.

Now weddings back in the day of Jesus were community-wide celebrations - partly because everybody knew everybody else - and they could last as long as a week. But they were not just celebrations of a special moment in this life, but they were also seen as a foreshadowing of what the Jewish people saw as the promises of God for messianic times - specifically an eternity of love, joy and celebration such as that mentioned by the prophet Jeremiah: ***"They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord - the grain, the new wine and the olive oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered***

garden, and they will sorrow no more. Then young women will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and My people will be filled with My bounty"- God speaking, Jeremiah 31:12-14.

During this celebration, there would be multiple opportunities to eat and drink, all of the expense and supply of the food and drink falling on the family of the groom. As to the guest list, not only was Mary the mother of Jesus there but also Jesus Himself as well as the disciples He had initially connected with Andrew, likely John, Peter, Philip and Nathanael.

When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to Him, "They have no more wine" - John 2:3.

Ancient weddings assumed a lot of planning, so to run out of any item - food or drink - would have been considered a great social embarrassment. In fact, running out of the stuff to eat or drink was considered such a major breach of protocol that the bridegroom's family could actually be fined, or even be the subject of a lawsuit brought by the family of the bride. Now there's a great way to start off a marriage. Now the fact that Jesus' mother Mary was aware of this happening suggests that this might have been a relative's wedding or at least a close family friend and, because of that, she was conceivably a part of the planning and hospitality process.

Now the fact that wine was available at this wedding does not mean that the drunkenness of a wild party would result. Jewish weddings had used wine to celebrate the event for centuries. And wine, appropriately used, was declared in the OT to be both a reflection of the joy of this life and, in fact, also a reflection of the joy in the eternity with God to come:

- 1) In a psalm written to praise the Lord, the author makes note of the fact that: ***He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for people to cultivate – bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens human hearts, oil to make their faces shine, and bread that sustains their hearts - Psalm 104:14-15.***
- 2) And in looking ahead into eternity, the prophet Isaiah wrote: ***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 - Isaiah 25:6.***

Clearly wine was designed not to abuse but rather to enhance the joy of life's greatest events. But, because wine in that climate fermented quickly, in an effort to reduce the likelihood of drunkenness, wine was routinely diluted with water to diminish its strength by anywhere from a tenth to as much as a third. Besides this, because of a lack of any means of water purification, a wine/water mix was actually safer to consume than water alone.

Now, as to why Mary would have sought out Jesus to help her to deal with this particular problem, there is speculation that Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, had passed away by this time. With Jesus as the eldest son, it would have already fallen on Him to take his father's place in managing the affairs of the household, so there may have already been a pattern in place that would find Mary specifically seeking Jesus for His assistance at any time that she needed help.

"Woman, why do you involve Me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever He tells you" - John 2:4-5.

Now in the English, Jesus' reply to His mother sounds a bit harsh. But the Greek reflects a much more appropriate and polite tone - much like the word "ma'am" might be taken today. But there is something else happening here. While we don't know a lot about Jesus' growing-up years, we do know this from Luke's gospel: ***Then [Jesus] went down to Nazareth with [Joseph and Mary] and was obedient to them - Luke 2:51a.*** As Jesus was growing up in their home, He placed

Himself under their parental authority. But now as His ministry is beginning, He is separating Himself from parental authority because He is now coming under His heavenly Father's authority: His plans, His timing, His direction. By using a subtle change in address with Mary, He is gently letting her know that Somebody else is ruling His life going forward.

But back to the story: Another reason why we believe this may have been a wedding of a relative or family friend of Mary is that, as best we can tell, the servants employed at the wedding acknowledge her directions regarding their being obedient to her son. She had some level of authority over them that she could legitimately give this direction, and they would follow through - which they did.

And we can't overlook Mary's faith in all this. She seems to understand that Jesus' life now clearly belongs to Somebody Else. Her mind may have even gone back to the words that the angel Gabriel spoke to her some 30 years ago, still so indelibly etched into her mind: ***"You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. . . . The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" - The angel Gabriel, Luke 1:31-32a, 35.*** He will be called the Son of God. And you can almost see Mary nodding to herself, even as she looks at this One she has known all His life. It's time to let Him go - but not before from that understanding making sure that the wedding servants know that He may have some directions for them. So, "Whatever He says," she tells them, "just do it."

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons - John 2:6.

Depending on one's devotion to the Mosaic Law, the requirements for mealtime were to wash one's hands before the meal, between each course of the meal, and after the meal - meaning that, for a community-wide celebration like this, they would need a whole lot of water available. The six stone jars were available for just that reason. And they were specifically made of stone because stone was obviously the most reliable means of both keeping water contained and also keeping the water pure - which would obviously make them suitable for such a task as maintaining ceremonial purity. They would have been as required as any other part of the celebration.

Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim - John 2:7.

Now it may have been that the servants' angle on this was no more than blaming Mary if all this didn't tum out so good: "Hey, it's not our fault; she told us to do whatever He said. How in the world were we going to know He'd do something as crazy as this?" But the fact is, an argument can be made that the servants showed their own faith in Jesus by following His directions, no matter whether it made sense to them or not, that all this would wind up having a good ending.

Then He told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so - John 2:8.

Now the master of the banquet was kind of like the master of ceremonies for this whole event. His taste buds would be the first to test what the servants had just drawn out of those water jars. And, if this all went wrong, he would be the first one to tell them about it - no doubt with his volume turned way up!

[T]he master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew - John 2:9a.

It would have been a pretty small crew of people who would have had even an inkling of what

Jesus had done - besides Jesus, of course: the disciples (judging by their later reaction to what He had done), Mary and the guests with the most to lose, the servants.

Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now"- John 2:9b-10.

The banquet master was thrilled with what he had just tasted. This was the kind of breach of party protocol he could live with. Obviously if people were consuming a lot of wine, their discerning palettes would become somewhat less discerning as the alcohol dulled their senses. But this bridegroom apparently had held out the best wine for last - to the great delight of not only the banquet master but, more than likely, his guests as well.

What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which He revealed His glory; and His disciples believed in Him - John 2:11.

With this first miracle - or "sign," the term John alone uses in his gospel - the disciples took their first steps in the faith journey of realizing exactly who Jesus of Nazareth truly was. That was the purpose of the miracles that Jesus performed, to come alongside His words, to communicate who this Nazarene really was - the one and only Son of the one true God. John himself would communicate exactly that towards the end of his gospel as he summed up the purpose of why he had written his gospel with these words: ***Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name - John 20:30-31.***

APPLICATION

This story, this first recorded miraculous sign of Jesus during His earthly ministry, is at its core a story of transformation - in this case, water to wine. But transformation is most fundamentally the story line of the entire Bible. We see it throughout the Scriptures: from blind to sight, from deaf to hearing, from lame to walking, from hungering to satisfied, from sickness to health, from death to life - and, most importantly, from sinner to saint.

The Greek word for "transformation" is the word "metamorphoo" ("meta" implying change, and "morphe" meaning form) from which we get our English word "metamorphosis." When this word is used in connection with believers, as described in *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, it means "the obligation being to undergo a complete change which, under the power of God, will find expression in character and conduct." In other words, an inner change that shows itself in outer actions - thoughts, feelings, emotions, perspectives, responses, words, everything. This is what Paul is talking about in his second letter to the church in Corinth when he says: ***"[W]e all, who with unveiled faces (in other words, seeing the Lord for who He truly is) contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit - Paul, II Corinthians 3:18.***

Do we really understand what this means, the transformation for which Christ died? He's not talking about partnering with us; He's talking about conquering us, owning us, being our Master, being the indisputable King of our lives - in all areas of our lives - that we are transformed into the outcome that Paul famously described to the Corinthian church: ***[Christ] died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.***

Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! - Paul, II Corinthians 5:15-17. The Greek defines what "the old has gone" really means: It means that all our old ways have passed away - they have died. They no longer live - in any way, shape or form.

So, what does this look like? That's probably the most fundamental truth we need to acknowledge as a group that calls itself a body of believers: The Christian life, and thus the life of the body in Christ, is supposed to look like something - something unlike anything this world sees anyplace else. That is designed to be part of the attraction. If the world sees something existing here and thriving here that they can't find anyplace else, it will underscore the reality that the truth the church preaches and teaches and lives in Jesus Christ simply can't be found anyplace else because Jesus IS the **"(only) way and the (only) truth and the (only) life"** - **Jesus Christ, John 14:6a**. And that only works if our life in Christ, our life now transformed by Christ, looks like something - something that people in the world, people in this fellowship, our family and even ourselves notice as being profoundly different than how we behaved, acted, thought and spoke before. As Jesus Himself said (and I love the NASB translation): **"You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? ... Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven"** - **Jesus Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:16, 21 (NASB)**.

The most obvious characteristic that we are told can make such a difference is love. It is the first fruit listed in the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5. But listen to how Jesus described it - first as a command: **"A new command I give you: Love one another**. Then we are told how we are supposed to love: **As I have loved you, so you must love one another**. OK; Jesus is the example, the model, of how we are supposed to obey His command to love. But then comes the "why" we are supposed to love: **By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another"** - **Jesus Christ, John 13:34-35**. For a Christian, love is our ID; it identifies us as belonging to and transformed by the love Jesus Christ had and displayed for His disciples. And that ID is intended to be on display to all people, in all circumstances - in how we talk, in how we act, in how we respond, in how we view the world.

And the whole point of the "fruit of the Spirit" is meant to tell us that a life transformed by the presence of Jesus Christ should show itself in such a way that people can see the results of our surrendering to Christ and the implanting of His Spirit in our lives: **[L]ove, joy, peace, forbearance (patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control - Paul, Galatians 5:22-23a**. Those aren't just words; in fact, thinking of them as "just words" is likely the worst thing that could happen to them. They are intended to be a part of our ID, to mark the incredible amount of change that we have undergone since the Holy Spirit began its "heart operation" in our lives. And the apostle Paul, the guy who brought us those words through the Spirit, was one who in various texts fully disclosed what he was like before, and the profound change he initially experienced, and continued to experience, as a result of his encounter with Jesus Christ. That is our example, and our call, as well - that all the ways we acted and thought and responded before are dead and buried, very literally killed with Christ on the cross, and replaced with a new life that reflects that same Christ, now risen and triumphant!

APPLICATION

A question: Where is your citizenship? To what "country" has your heart and your life pledged allegiance? If your answer is "America," that's fine, but with a fatal flaw: America's on its way out. But so is Canada, and Mexico, and Russia, and China, and Europe, and Africa, and Asia - and the world.

This world is finite, with an ever-decreasing amount of time remaining. But the "country" Christians have to look forward to - the kingdom of heaven - now there's a country with staying power - eternal staying power.

Too often it's the politics of this moment or the issues of this moment or the prejudices of this moment that we allow to define us. And as we engage in those moments, very often our citizenship in heaven can take a back seat to what we view as more important - issues, elections, politics, rights, all that stuff. And for a lot of Christians, that earthly stuff can take over. Why, if heaven is in our future, would we ever want to give any consideration to anything part of a world that is on its way out?

Jesus Christ came to transform lives, making them completely brand new. But His life was not given so things could go better for us here. His life was given so that His kingdom of heaven could be prepared here for the heaven that's on its way. So, if in fact my life has been transformed, no more is life about my opinion or my perspective or my rights - or anything else I might claim as mine. When I surrendered to Jesus Christ, I bailed whatever is mine is be transformed by all that is Him. In that life, all that matters is bringing glory to God. So, my words? Are they bringing glory to God? My actions? Are they bringing glory to God? My attitudes, my opinions, my conclusions, my perspectives? Are those bringing glory to God? You see, if what I say or think doesn't bring glory to God, it's completely worthless; if my attitudes don't bring glory to God, they are completely worthless. What's the point of having an attitude that the Father would never see in His Son - no matter how good that attitude might feel?

It really comes down to this: Have you been conquered by Jesus Christ? Is there any part of you that in God's eyes is still up for grabs? There is nothing this world can offer that amounts to anything compared to the all-encompassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Have you surrendered everything to that incredible King of kings and Lord of lords?

We talk a lot in churches today about the health of our church - are we growing, are we becoming more Christ-like, things like that. You know where those questions start? Right here - in each one of our hearts. Our church will never be as healthy as possible until all our hearts have become as surrendered as possible. And our church will never be as blessed as possible until God's glory is the one and only outcome we live for. Let's pray!