

“ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN #1:  
WHEN THE WINE RUNS OUT...”

(John 2:1-11)

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1. **[BOTH 9am & 11am...]** Read CEB Version of Text: John 2:1-11 and Pray.
2. A young mountain climber had almost reached the top of his climb when his foot slipped and he found himself hurtling downward off the side of the mountain. Thankfully for him, on his way down he managed to grab hold of a branch on the side of the mountain, leaving him dangling in midair.  
 Struggling to pull himself back to safety, called out, "*Help! Is there anybody up there!?*" But there was no answer. So, he called out again, "*Help! Is there anybody up there?!?*", only to be met again with silence. He kept calling out for some time, all with no response.  
 Finally, when he was about to give up, he heard a soft voice calling from above, "*Are you still there? Can you hear me?*" And the climber yelled back, "*Yes, I'm here! Can you help me?*" And the voice said, "*I am the Lord, your God. I love you and I will help you, if you'll just trust me and do as I say.*"  
 "*Yes, Lord, I do trust you, and I'll do anything you say! Just name it!*" the climber exclaimed. And the voice of God whispered back "*Let go!*" ...And after pausing a few second, the climber finally called out, "*Is there anybody ELSE up there?*"
3. I don't know if *you've* ever felt like that before, but *I* have -- times when I was at the end of my rope in crisis, wondering what I was going to do, calling out to God for help, only to have Him answer with instructions that (at least on the surface) didn't make sense.
4. Well, today as we begin a new worship series called "*Encounters with Jesus in the Gospel of John,*" where we'll be appropriating Jesus' life and teachings from John for our lives, I want to point out that this same feeling of desperation is exactly what Jesus' mother faced in the story from today's scripture in John 2 that you heard read earlier.

A--Jesus and his Disciples had been invited to a wedding about 4 miles from home, and since one of the absolute necessities for any enjoyable wedding was having good wine on hand, the protocol was to serve the very best wine first, and by the time the guests were a little tipsy, you could serve them the second (or third)-rate vintage.

B--In this particular case, though, the wine actually *runs out* -- which *was* back then (and still is today) cause for a social *crisis* (at least to *some* people)!

C--So, Mary calls on her son to help -- *what* she thought he could do is not clear, but nevertheless she tells the servants to do whatever he says.

1--Like the advice to mountain climber, though, what he tells them to do (i.e., pour water into the pitchers and serve it) makes absolutely *no sense*.

2--But they do it anyway, and by the time the pitchers are served, their contents are not just a second or third-rate product, but the very *best* wine of the party!

5. Now, this story has been interpreted in a variety of different ways, <sup>1</sup> but for our purposes today, I want us to think about it as advice in helping us get through times in our lives where we're at wits end, and just don't know what to do!

A--The wine in the story, after all, is a metaphor for the energy and vitality of *life*.

1--And we *all* have times when the "wine" of our lives has "run out" -- we're out of the things we need to make it through today and into tomorrow: maybe we're out of courage; out of hope; out of strength; perhaps even out of faith --...

2--...Times when we feel like Jesus has arrived at our "party" and all we can say is, "*You're too late, Jesus. There's nothing left. I've run out of wine. I'm done!*"

3--I have to be honest... I felt that way for a time before I arrived here at Cornerstone... the mean-spiritedness of supposed-Christians as I tried to lead my church the way I felt God leading me to do during the recent pandemic and denominational struggles left me nearly burned out on being a Pastor.

B--And it was in that time -- and times like that for ALL of us -- when the question we may ask ourselves and God is... "**What do we do now?**"

C--Well, the good news is that today's scripture is not just a story about what happens when we *experience* scarcity and burnout in life, but it's also a story that I believe gives us at least **three steps we can follow when that happens:**

--II--

6. Step#1: "**Tell Jesus about it.**" Verse 3 says that "*When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to him, 'They don't have any wine.'*" Let me ask: have you *told* Jesus your problems?

A--I wonder if part of the reason many of us never find relief from our struggles in life is that either (#1) we don't *admit* that we *have* them, or (#2) that we think we can take care of them *all by ourselves* -- that we really don't need God's/Jesus' help!

B--But I want us to notice that Jesus' mother got to the place where she recognized her problem was beyond her ability to solve, and *that's* when she turned to her son for help.

1--When you and I not only *acknowledge* our problems, but also quit trying to "fix" them by ourselves, it's *then* that Jesus can begin to help us.

2--There's an old hymn that says...

Verse 1: *"I must tell Jesus all of my trials; I cannot bear these burdens alone;  
In my distress He kindly will help me; He ever loves and cares for His own.*

Verse 2: *I must tell Jesus all of my troubles; He is a kind, compassionate friend;  
If I but ask Him, He will deliver; Make of my troubles quickly an end.*

Refrain: *I must tell Jesus! I must tell Jesus! I cannot bear my burdens alone;  
I must tell Jesus! I must tell Jesus! Jesus can help me, Jesus alone."*<sup>2</sup>

C--Whatever you're struggling with today, have you told it/them to Jesus?

7. Yet, Step #2 is close behind it: "**Follow His Instructions.**" In Vs. 5, Jesus' mother tells the wedding servants, "*Do whatever he tells you.*"

A--And his instructions were fairly simple in Verses 7-8, "*Fill the jars with water,.. [then] draw some... and take it to the headwaiter.*" -- nothing fancy here, huh?

B--The problem with most of us is that we try to make it complicated.

1--I don't know about you, but too often, I'm willing to *tell* Jesus about my problems, but then I *also* want to tell *Him* how best for *HIM* to "*fix*" them!

2--Yet, there's something beautifully liberating in being willing to listen for, and then follow, GOD'S plan for my life, rather than me messing it up with my own ideas.

C--So, as we listen for Jesus' instructions, He might speak through the wisdom of other *people*, or through a *scripture* we read, some *music* lyrics we hear, or even (remarkably) through a *sermon* we experience at church (haha!).

1--And it could be that his voice is telling us to do something very simple: talk to Pastor; read your Bible; show up for worship more often; go see a doctor; talk to a counselor; go on a mission trip ; sign up for a "Disciple" Bible study class, or (for me in my situation the last few years)... "*Brian, move to your next church appointment and stick with your ministry!*"

2--The only hard part about any of these is finding the courage to just DO them!

D--A number of years ago, Rita Springer wrote a song describing this kind of simple faith:  
*"If You say go, we will go; If You say wait, we will wait  
If You say step out on the water, And they say it can't be done  
We'll fix our eyes on You and we will come.*

*Your ways are higher than our ways,  
And the plans that You have laid are good and true  
If You call us to the fire you will not withdraw Your hand  
We'll gaze into the flames and look for You."* <sup>3</sup>

8. ...Which brings us to the final step (Step#3), which is really more *implied* than explicit, but it's just as important: "**Let Jesus take care of the rest.**"

A--Verses 9-10 say that once the servants followed Jesus' instructions concerning filling the jars with *water*, by the time the headwaiter tasted their contents, he was surprised at how good the *wine* was!

B--In other words, once the servants had done what they *could* do, Jesus took care of the *rest* by doing what they *couldn't* do!

C--Jesus, you see, rarely works alone (by himself). Sure, he *can* & sometimes *does*.

1--But more often, he invites *us* to do what WE can to be the answer to our own prayers (or to someone else's), and then works to do *for US* things that he knows we *cannot* do in our own strength or ability.

2--In my case, you all need to know that I believe you here at Cornerstone have been the answer to my own prayers for healing and wholeness after the deep hurt I experienced in and from some members of my last church.

3--I told Jesus my problems, I followed what he told me to do, and then I was able to *step back* and allow Him to work, doing those things that only *He* can do, and in the manner and timetable that *He* feels is best.

--III--

9. And my point through all of this is that today's Bible story gives us a recipe to follow when the "*wine*" of our lives "*runs out*" and we're facing challenges that seem insurmountable and overwhelming:

A--We should (#1) tell Jesus about them, (#2) follow his instructions for what *we* should do; but then (#3) let him take care of the rest!

B--And when we do these, I believe we'll find.. .

1--...*Our* physical, emotional & spiritual shortages transformed into *God's* abundance;

2--...and *our* problems transformed into *God's* solutions.

10. [PRAYER]

**ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> For example, it's been understood as God's way of publicly introducing Jesus to the world (as "*revealing God's glory*," as Verse 11 says). It's also been understood metaphorically as a reminder of Jesus' ability to transform the "ordinary" parts of our lives into "extraordinary" through Christ's power and presence. And some people have even incorrectly used this passage as a pretext to talk about whether or not it's appropriate for Christians to drink alcohol (which misses the purpose and point of the story altogether).

<sup>2</sup> Hymn "*I Must Tell Jesus*," written by Elisha A. Hoffman (1893), cited from [www.hymnlyrics.org/lyrics/i\\_must\\_tell\\_jesus.html](http://www.hymnlyrics.org/lyrics/i_must_tell_jesus.html).

<sup>3</sup> Contemporary Christian song "*If You Say Go*," written by Rita Springer (2004), cited at <https://genius.com/Rita-springer-if-you-say-go-lyrics>.