

What's the takeaway from the wedding in Cana? The easy answer is Jesus meets our need, and meets it abundantly. So why make this hard? Jesus meets our deepest needs abundantly.

The problem at the wedding was they ran out of wine. How embarrassing. The wedding planner botched it; or maybe the crowd was larger than they expected. Whatever the cause, the party outlasted the wine. The mother of Jesus – John doesn't mention her name – knew the tension of the moment and brought the problem to Jesus. He called her 'woman,' but he wasn't trying to be mean. 'Woman' wasn't an unusual way to address females in that time. "Woman," Jesus said, "why should we get involved?" I like it when Jesus sets boundaries, when he knows what isn't his to solve necessarily. Still, his mother turned to the servants and said, "Do whatever he tells you," as if he might rectify the situation.

Jesus, as you can tell, was free to act or not to act on his mother's request. He chose to act, and we're all glad he did, and not just for the sake of the wedding. We now have a glimpse of the abundant gifts God gives in Jesus Christ. Full to the top, superior quality, more than you can imagine, when you least expect it. When the servants did what Jesus told them, about 150 gallons of new wine filled six stone jars. Not the cheap stuff, either. After the steward took a sip – his name is a mystery, too –

he made a straight shot for the groom and said, "This party is not like the others. Usually we get the \$50 per bottle wine on the front end. Then, when everybody's taste buds are numb, we pull out the box wine. But you, Mr. Bridegroom, have saved the best for last." Lots and lots of the best wine. No more running on empty. God's abundance came through Jesus to meet the need. The first sign. Do you believe it?"

Well, we would like to, we really would. But is it that simple? All we need times a thousand given to us through Jesus? Of course we're not talking about the need for wine anymore, but what satisfies the deepest and truest longing of the human heart. Are we supposed to believe that God overstocks the shelves in Jesus, that his supply for our most basic need is accessible and inexhaustible?

Yes. It's a promise written all over the gospel of John. Jesus provides abundantly for that need that runs even deeper than hunger and thirst. I struggle to give that need a name. I just know it's there. The need for real life, true life, life as it was designed to be, life that only God can give, life with God, life in God. Something like that. Whatever the name for it is, Jesus abundantly meets the need. That's the promise. We're asked to believe in it.

Well, we already have some beliefs. You have to believe in something, don't you? You have to build your life around

something. And sometimes I wonder if the things we believe in aren't very helpful. Do you think some of our beliefs might even get in the way of what God wants to give us?

I catch myself believing that if I apply myself more dutifully, if I work a little harder, I can reach those elusive goals that haunt me, and finally I will be satisfied. Maybe you believe that if you keep giving yourself to those around you, if you keep going the extra mile for them, they'll love you back and they'll become what you want them to become, and finally you will be at peace. Perhaps some of us have the idea that a religious formula is out there somewhere – a certain way to pray, a new area of service, a Bible Study format, a style of worship – and if we could only get plugged into it, then the disjointed pieces would come together, and finally we would be whole. So how are these beliefs working out for us? Not too good, I'm afraid. They keep us scrambling and dissatisfied. They don't deliver. But we keep going back to them, not sure what else to believe in.

But what if we don't have to strive and claw to meet our truest need? What if the thing we want the most isn't hidden behind Door #1, #2 or #3, and too bad if we guess the wrong one? The gift has been given, and it is not in short supply. No need to work even harder for it. The only work is to believe. We receive the gift when we trust it's real. Now that we have amassed many

letters behind our names; now that we have surrounded ourselves with more possessions than we know what to do with; now that we've exhausted ourselves trying to take care of everyone within reach; now that we have enough cash put back for every future need we can imagine, maybe we can turn to the one who truly satisfies and believe in him, Jesus Christ.

Not everybody at the wedding party knew what happened out by the six stone jars. Everybody benefitted, one way or another. But not everyone knew what they were drinking. The servants knew, though we don't know their names, either. The servants always know what's going on, more than the ones they serve usually. Just watch *Downton Abbey*. The disciples also knew what had transpired in spite of their inexperience. They had been with Jesus only a little while, but they saw and believed. Everyone else was just drinking the wine and enjoying the evening, which is always an option. The wedding party had the gift right in front of them, but they didn't know it. If I can borrow a line from Dave Matthews, "What I want I don't got, but what I need is all around me." They just didn't see it. The personal link to the living God was right in front of them. And whoever wrote this gospel wasn't writing this story down for history's sake. He wrote so we might see, too, the gift right in front of us.

People who study John often pick up on the theme of 'realized eschatology.' I hate to even bring it up because we're not in theology class and it has a snobbish sound to it. But the phrase is helpful and worth some explanation. Eschaton is the Greek word for the end, the final chapter, the climax of history.

Eschatology then means the study of the end. Christians believe in the good ending promised by God. God has a saving purpose, history is on its way there, and finally we'll arrive. Heaven and earth will be one, peace will reign, joy will abound, sin and death will be no more. Christian faith sings of the God's ending in all its redeeming glory.

But in John, the end has come already in Jesus. There is no waiting for that day out there somewhere. The day has dawned in Christ. Old Testament prophets had said a mark of the end was an abundance of wine. Isaiah described that day as a feast of rich food and wine, well-aged wine strained clear (Isaiah 26:4). Amos said of the end "the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with it" (Amos 9:13b) Joel echoed those words and added milk to it. "The mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and the hills with milk" (Joel 3:18). Well, here we have it in Jesus. Right now, salvation. Right now, the floodgates of forgiveness and peace are open. Not tomorrow, or the next day, but today, all the fulness of God come down. Abundant life flows through Jesus

into the present. The beautiful, promised goal is realized in Christ.

That's why the author only mentions one name in this passage – the name of Jesus - so our focus can be solely on him.

Believe in Jesus. It's not complicated. We may have heard the call a million times, especially where we live. But we keep offering it because maybe finally something will click. Maybe Christ's glory will come shining through, and we will let go of other beliefs that aren't helping us too much, and build our lives around him. Receive the gift in Jesus that meets the need.

Believe in Jesus, and all will be well. Is that what we're saying? Not exactly. Believing in Jesus doesn't protect us from the difficulties that most humans face. Believers may falter in business, suffer from terrible diseases, endure break ups and make big mistakes just like everybody else. All will not always be well. But when we drink from the cup God gives, we can be okay, we can even thrive, even when all is not well. We grieve, we worry, we fear. But the gifts we have in Jesus are much more than enough to hold us together.

John wrote this story, hoping something would click for us, hoping that, though nothing may change, everything will change for us. He doesn't want us to go through life empty, full of what doesn't satisfy. I believe John is telling the truth. In Jesus, all God

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has to offer is in front of us. Believe in him. Receive life in his  
name.