

7th Grade New Testament (Gospels)

Lesson Plan: The Wedding at Cana

Learning Goals: Students should be able to differentiate between “miracles” and John’s category of “signs.” Students should also be able to identify the symbolic significance of Jesus’ first sign.

Question: What is the best party you’ve ever attended? Why was it so great?

Prayer.

Discuss question on board. (5 minutes)

Read John 2:1-11

Weddings

Weddings became major social events. Perhaps the dominant feature of life in the ancient world was . . . boredom. This was a world without newspapers, television, movies, magazines, radio, computers, the Internet, and telephones. No one traveled faster than a horse could run. Millions of people never ventured more than a day’s walk from the place of their birth. The pace of life was slower than we can imagine.

In this context, weddings were big - even bigger than they are today. Everybody would stop working for up to a week and spend time feasting, drinking, and rejoicing. The groom’s parents paid for the wedding. Relatives and friends who didn’t live nearby would stay at the bride and groom’s homes.

Les Christie and David Nystrom, *A Youth Worker’s Commentary on John*, Vol. 1, p. 86-87

It is significant that this event happens at a wedding. It is a reminder of the Incarnation (the Word became flesh - joining of flesh and spirit). Weddings are one of the clearest examples of the joining of flesh and spirit.

Wine was a symbol of joy and staple food. Since there wasn’t always access to safe drinking water, wine would be served for daily drinking because it would contain enough alcohol to kill bacteria but not enough to make one drunk.

Hospitality was an important aspect of Middle East culture. To run out of wine would be extremely humiliating and embarrassing.

Mary tells the servants in the house to “do whatever he tells you.” Her words remind us that if we want the Lord to move in our lives, we must be prepared to do what he says.

The Stone Water Jars

- Ritual Cleansing: Before the wedding guests were able to eat, they would have gone through a special ceremony to cleanse themselves. They would have used these jars of water for this purpose. This was seen to wash away the impurity and uncleanness of the secular world.
- The water jars used for this ceremony held about 20 to 30 gallons each.
- Wine was symbolic of Jesus’ blood (Last Supper - “This cup is the blood of the new covenant”) - it is no longer the ritual cleansing that purifies us, but Jesus’ blood.
- Fulfillment of OT prophecy that abundant wine is a sign of God’s restoration of Israel.

- *“And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Shittim.” (Joel 3:18 ESV)*
- *“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them,” says the LORD your God. (Amos 9:13-15 ESV)*

- There could be a connection to the idea that Jesus is the true bridegroom (not in a literal sense, but a symbolic sense as the bridegroom of the church).
- There could be a connection here to the idea of Jesus as creator (see. 1:3)
- It is possible that there are six jars (one less than the perfect seven) because Jesus is the seventh.

Signs in John’s Gospel

- not necessarily the same as miracles
- Purpose: (1) to reveal the glory of Jesus (2:11)
(2) for the purpose of leading people to belief and life in Jesus (20:30-31)
- These signs can also be understood as “clues” to Jesus’ true identity (“I am” statements - resurrection, bread of life, light of the world, etc.)

Seven Signs in John’s Gospel

1. Turning water into wine (chapter 2)
2. Healing the nobleman’s son (chapter 4)
3. Healing the invalid (chapter 5)
4. Feeding the five thousand (chapter 6)
5. Walking on the sea of Galilee (chapter 6)
6. Giving sight to the blind (chapter 9)
7. Raising Lazarus from the dead (chapter 11)

Lesson Summary/Review:

Students should review and highlight the following vocabulary terms and concepts from this lesson in their notes:

- Signs
- Ritual Cleansing
- What is the significance of the “stone water jars” in John 2?
- What were the seven signs Jesus performed in John’s gospel?