

JESUS'S BLOOD AT THE WEDDING IN CANA?

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Abstract: *This article analyzes John 2:4 in the context of John's Gospel, Jesus's opening week in John 1:19–2:11, and John's account of the wedding in Cana in 2:1–11. It focuses on the meaning of Jesus's twofold response to his mother, its significance in the context of John's Gospel, and its theological significance. In order to discover Jesus's intention, especially in connecting the lack of wine with his "hour," various OT texts are proposed as necessary for interpretation. The common views found in standard commentaries are cited and critiqued where necessary, and the work of Richard Bauckham, Jörg Frey, Edmund Little, and R. V. G. Tasker are shown to be especially helpful.*

Key words: *John's Gospel, wedding at Cana, Jesus's opening week, Jesus's "hour," wine as biblical symbol, blood of Christ, Jewish purification*

Don Carson argues convincingly that the Gospel of John's primary purpose was evangelism and that his immediate audience comprised Jews (especially those living outside Palestine) and Gentile proselytes.¹ Nevertheless, Christians have always found that the study of this book deepens their faith, clarifies their calling, and comforts them in their trials. The ultimate goal of John's Gospel is not *belief*, but an ever-increasing and ever-deepening *life*—"that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31).

I believe the Gospel was written by the apostle John, who was likely the anonymous companion of Andrew whom we encounter in 1:35–40 and, therefore, was an eyewitness to the events at the wedding in Cana in 2:1–11.

I. JOHN 2:4 IN THE CONTEXT OF JOHN 1:1–2:11

I agree with Richard Bauckham (against Ridderbos and Brown)² that, after John's prologue, or what Jörg Frey calls his "reading instruction,"³ John describes Jesus's opening week of ministry in 1:19–2:11. John 1:1–2:11 helps tie together the whole Bible, reaching back to the week of creation and ahead to the week of new-creation fulfillment in Jesus's climactic passion week. "Bethany across the Jordan" in 1:28 is probably intended to point ahead to the Bethany near Jerusalem (11:1;

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¹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 90–95.

² Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 102–3, and Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I–XII* (AB 29; Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1966), 106.

³ Jörg Frey, *The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John* (trans. Wayne Coppins and Christoph Heilig; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 285.

12:1) where Jesus's public ministry ended.⁴ As exciting as the "opening week" of football season, this first week also becomes an even more thunderous prelude to the Gospel, encapsulating the gospel message and preparing us for all that follows.⁵

Although many scholars see 2:1 as beginning a new division in the book,⁶ the verse begins with the conjunction *καί*, which, according to Stephen Levinsohn, serves two functions in John's Gospel: (1) "to associate information together in certain specific contexts"; and (2) "to add one or more events." He says that *καί* in John 2:1a "adds a whole *episode* to the preceding material."⁷ Although Köstenberger acknowledges that John 1:19–2:11 "narrates a week in Jesus' ministry"; he also argues that 2:1–4:54 is a narrative unit. He bases this in part on 2:11 ("Jesus did this, the first of his signs").⁸ So although 2:1–11 recounts the events of the seventh day of Jesus's first week, picking up from 1:50–51 the theme of Jesus's miraculous works (the "greater things" his disciples would see) and the theme of the disciples' believing in him, it may also be understood as beginning the next section. I would outline this section as follows:

Day One: The Baptist introduces Jesus to the Jewish leaders (1:19–28).

Day Two: The Baptist introduces Jesus to his disciples (1:29–34).

Day Three: The first two disciples (Andrew and John) follow Jesus (1:35–39).

Day Four: Peter follows Jesus (1:40–42).

Day Five: Philip and Nathanael follow Jesus (1:43–51).

Day Six: Travel to Galilee?

Day Seven: Jesus's first sign (2:1–11).

John was evidently not interested in which day of the week each of these events occurred on. He does not number them. He only uses the term for "tomorrow" or "on the next day" (*ἐπαύριον*, 1:29, 35, 43), except for the reference to "the third day" in 2:1,⁹ which most scholars interpret as meaning "two days later" than the events of day five (1:43–51; using inclusive time reckoning), that is, day seven. The missing day six was evidently the day (or at least one of the days) when Jesus and his disciples traveled to Cana, Nathanael's hometown (21:2).

⁴ Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 138; Carson, *Gospel according to John*, 147.

⁵ Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 131–84.

⁶ E.g., Gary M. Burge, *John* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 45; Craig Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (2nd ed.; Nashville: B&H, 2009), 185–86; Edward W. Klink III, *John* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 66.

⁷ See Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek: A Coursebook on the Information Structure of New Testament Greek* (2nd ed.; Dallas: SIL International, 2000), 84–85.

⁸ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters* (Biblical Theology of the NT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 169 (also p. 147).

⁹ Although v. 40 does not begin with "the next day," the reference to "that day" in v. 39, as well as the time being late in the afternoon, probably indicates that a new day begins in the next verse. See Carson, *Gospel according to John*, 168.

Scholars debate whether “on the third day” in verse 1 foreshadows Jesus’s resurrection.¹⁰ Although John uses the phrase “third day” only here, in 2:19 Jesus says, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days.” I suspect that John intends those of us who know what is coming to see here a foreshadowing of a future day of silence followed by a third day of rejoicing.¹¹ Arguments have been made for the wedding to have occurred on Wednesday, Saturday, or Sunday,¹² but they are inconclusive, so we may suppose John did not consider the day of the week to be very important.

Mary is referred to in this passage only as “the mother of Jesus” (2:1, 3). She is explicitly referred to in John only here and in 19:25–26, when Jesus was on the cross (besides an allusion to her in 6:42). So this is another element of Jesus’s opening week that foreshadows his final week. She is never referred to by her name; it is evidently their relationship that is important.

II. JOHN 2:4 AS JESUS’S RESPONSE TO MARY

Mary’s words to Jesus informing him of the lack of wine sound matter-of-fact, though perhaps they were said in an urgent whisper, with a desperate, pleading look on her face.¹³ But John’s explanation that the wine had “run out” (ὕστερέω) does imply a sense of need, as when efforts have come short of achieving their goal, like our “running out of gas.” Paul uses it in Rom 3:23, for example, to tell us we “fall short” of God’s glory because of sin. So, there was a need at the wedding, and for whatever reason, Mary was looking to Jesus for help, although we do not know what she expected Jesus (and the servants she addresses in v. 5) to do.

But what is really puzzling is Jesus’s response to her. Here we need to heed B. F. Westcott’s advice:

The first steps towards the solution of a difficulty are the recognition of its existence and the determination of its extent. And, unless all past experience is worthless, the difficulties of the Bible are the most fruitful guides to its divine

¹⁰ See the arguments against it in Ridderbos, *Gospel of John*, 102; Carson, *Gospel according to John*, 167. On the other side of the issue is Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary, Volume One* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 497–98; Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 127; Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 182.

¹¹ The exact Greek phrase (τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ), translated here “on the third day,” is found twenty-five times in the LXX, and John’s use of the phrase could allude to one or more of these. The phrase may suggest a turning of events or a momentous or climactic event, such as the day Abraham saw the mountain of sacrifice (Gen 22:4), the day Yahweh descended on Mount Sinai (Exod 19:11, 16), and the day of Israel’s repentance and resurrection mentioned in Hos 6:2, foreshadowing the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 15:4).

¹² For Wednesday, see Keener, *Gospel of John*, 496; Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 140. For the Sabbath, see Carson, *Gospel according to John*, 168. For Sunday, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 91.

¹³ John’s wording in v. 3 might suggest that this was not a casual remark. McHugh calls attention to the “more formal and respectful construction” here, λέγω with πρὸς αὐτόν for “say to him” rather than λέγω with the dative αὐτῷ as in 1:22, 25, 38, 41, 43, 45, 46, 48, 50, 51; 2:10. The construction here, he says, “underlines the importance of the words that follow” (John F. McHugh, *John 1–4: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* [ICC; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014], 179).

depths. It was said long since that “God was pleased to leave difficulties upon the surface of Scripture, that men might be forced to look below the surface.”¹⁴

If we did not have Jesus’s enigmatic words to Mary in verse 4, his changing the water to wine would have been what some critics have called a “luxury” miracle.¹⁵ His other miracles involved things like feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and raising the dead. But here all he does is provide wine for a wedding and save some people from embarrassment. Would such a “sign” have prompted John to select it for recounting out of all those he had to choose from (20:30–31) and even refer back to it in 4:46 (and perhaps 21:2)? I believe these very words that so perplex us serve as a doorway into the significance of this miracle, which, like all his miracles, is a sign or clue pointing to an aspect of his glory and preparing us to understand, appreciate, and appropriate his redemptive cross and resurrection.¹⁶

Jesus’s response to his mother was in two parts, the first striking us as rude and the second as enigmatically intrusive. First, he said (literally), “What to me and to you, woman?” Jesus’s addressing his mother as *γυνή*, “woman,” has the effect of gently suggesting that his relationship of submission to her had changed. Jesus addresses several other women in the Gospels using the same polite but somewhat formal term (Matt 15:28; Luke 13:12; John 4:21; 8:10; 20:15). His use of the same form of address on the cross when he entrusts her to the care of his beloved disciple (John 19:26) affirms that, although his affection and some level of responsibility for his mother continued until his death, the beginning of his ministry had changed the nature of their relationship. His mission in life was now strictly to serve the Father who had sent him. Like the son in Gen 2:24, Jesus had “left” his mother and bonded with his new *γυνή*, his bride, the church (Rev 19:9).

As for the idiomatic “What to me and to you?” Raymond Brown proposes that it is used in the OT in two senses. First, “When one party is unjustly bothering another, the injured party may say . . . [in effect], What have I done to you that you should do this to me?” (see Judg 11:12; 1 Kgs 17:18; 2 Chr 35:21). The idiom is also used in this sense elsewhere in the NT by demons or unclean spirits (Mark 1:24; 5:7), meaning “Why are you interfering with us?”

The other use Brown finds for the idiom is “When someone is asked to get involved in a matter which he feels is no business of his, he may say . . . [in effect], That is your business; how am I involved?” (2 Kgs 3:13; Hos 14:8). This is the sense Brown finds in John 2:4, and he appropriately translates it, “What has this concern of yours to do with me?”¹⁷ I would add a third use of the idiom that is

¹⁴ Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Bible in the Church* (1864; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), x.

¹⁵ G. H. C. Macgregor, *The Gospel of John* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1928), 48, cited in Edmund Little, *Echoes of the Old Testament in the Wine of Cana in Galilee (John 2:1–11) and the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fish (John 6:1–15): Towards an Appreciation* (Paris: J. Gabalda et C^e Éditeurs, 1998), 9. Little surveys some critics of John’s account, who would have preferred that Jesus turned wine into water (p. 10).

¹⁶ See R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction and Commentary* (INTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 55.

¹⁷ Brown, *John I–XII*, 99.

similar to Brown's second. When one of David's followers, Abishai, wants to execute Shimei, a supporter of Saul, who is uttering curses against David, David uses the idiom to mean "You and I are not thinking alike" (CSB, "Do we agree on anything?"; 2 Sam 16:10; again in 2 Sam 19:22).¹⁸ Jesus's point would seem to be that he and his mother are not on the same page, are not concerned about the same things, or have different agendas. Whereas she is concerned about the lack of wine at a wedding and (presumably) the shame this will cause the family, he is concerned about fulfilling the mission that his Father sent him to do.¹⁹

III. JESUS'S REFERENCE TO HIS "HOUR"

The implication of the second part of Jesus's answer, "My hour has not yet come," is that Mary is asking Jesus to do something that it is not time for him to do. Some have thought that Jesus was referring to the proper time for him to reveal his glory by perhaps performing some sign. The problem with this understanding is that Jesus and John refer many times in the Gospel to Jesus's "hour" and to an "hour" that is either "coming" or, as Jesus enters into the final week of his earthly life, "has come." These references clearly have in view the time determined by the Father for Jesus's crucifixion, in particular, and his resulting exaltation.

Jörg Frey points out that the signs in John's Gospel are "narrated signs," where "in every individual episode something of the whole of the salvific event is expressed." Readers are "repeatedly compelled, starting from the narrated individual event, from each 'miracle,' to think further and to reflect upon this in light of the passion and Easter event." This first sign is no exception. It "points ahead to the 'hour of Jesus,' to the event of death and resurrection, in which Jesus' mother will be present again. The wine already conveys something of the taste of salvation, which is grounded in that hour, and it is thus much more than a wonderfully made drink for a village wedding."²⁰

By tracing the theme that Jesus introduces here with his reference to "my hour," we find that we are pulling on a thread that begins to unravel and display a crucial theme of John's Gospel of the cross (see 7:30; 8:20; 12:23–24, 27, 31–33; 13:1; 17:1). The "hour" Jesus speaks of to Mary as not having come would be the time of fulfillment of his mission, the time of his sacrificial death as the Lamb of God for the sin of the world. That is the time for which and toward which Jesus was moving and about which he was concerned. He cares about the genuine needs

¹⁸ A related use, perhaps, occurs in Josh 22:24. When confronted by the other tribes for building an altar east of the Jordan River, the Transjordan tribes explain their fear that future generations might question their relationship with Yahweh by saying, "What to you and to Yahweh, the God of Israel," that is, What relationship do you have with Yahweh?

¹⁹ Jesus's mild rebuke of Mary has been compared to his rebuke of Peter in Matt 16:23: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me because you're not thinking about God's concerns but human concerns." See Köstenberger's citation (*John*, 95) of R. G. Maccini, *Her Testimony Is True: Women as Witnesses according to John* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 102–4. This is a quite different matter, however. Peter was trying to obstruct Jesus's path to the cross. Mary is only trying to prevent someone's emotional pain.

²⁰ Frey, *Glory of the Crucified One*, 288–89.

and hurts of people, but he never loses sight of the goal of redemption and never veers off course into the weeds of superficiality and saving face.

Jesus's unbelieving brothers in chapter 7 would urge him to attend the Festival of Shelters (or Tabernacles) in Jerusalem and to do miraculous works there to impress the crowds (7:1–5). As at the wedding in Cana, however, Jesus was following an agenda and schedule determined by his Father (see 11:1–7). He responded to his brothers, “I am not going up to this festival” (ἐγὼ οὐκ ἀναβαίνω εἰς τὴν ἑορτὴν ταύτην; 7:8). He did not say, “I *will* not go up.” Later, when the Father's schedule did allow Jesus to attend the festival, he went “not openly but secretly” (7:9–10). These factors tell us that the issue was not “to go or not to go,” but when, how, and why Jesus should attend the festival. The issue with Jesus's mother at Cana was similarly not just whether or not to meet the need for wine (somehow, she still believed he would), but how and, more especially, *why*.

IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WATER JARS

Some scholars believe that the answer to *why* is in the “six stone water jars” that were “there for Jewish purification,” each holding “two or three measures [μετρητής],” that is, 20 or 30 gallons (2:6), for a total of 120 to 180 gallons. Their having to be filled (2:7) suggests their inadequacy. Jesus's order to fill them (which they do “to the brim,” ἕως ἄνω, “up to above”) indicates that the inadequacy was about to be changed. According to F. F. Bruce, the water “stands for the whole ancient order of Jewish ceremonial, which Christ was to replace by something better. . . . The appointed time for the ceremonial observances of the Jewish law had run its full course.”²¹ As Ridderbos explains, “If there is a clear hint anywhere for the understanding of the meaning of a miracle, then surely it is here, in the manner in which the Evangelist quantifies the capacity of the ‘vessels of the law’ in order to enable the reader to measure by that standard the abundance of what Jesus Christ provided.” After the miracle, “there is wine as plentiful as water, indeed as plentiful as all the water of purification, which has flowed continually but cannot take away the sin of the world.”²² Leon Morris agrees that a negative view of Jewish purification is taken here: “It is precisely Judaism that is transformed by the power of God in Christ.”²³ Keener agrees with this negative view: “In John's symbolic world, even his language here will suggest replacement of some sort.” Using these jars to hold wine, he says, meant that they could no longer be used for purification. “Strict Pharisees would have regarded transforming the content of waterpots set aside for ritual purposes (2:6) as disrespect toward the tradition of ritual purity, as casting off the law.”²⁴ As Burge says, Jesus made the vessels of purification “obsolete for purification.”²⁵

²¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 71. Or come to fulfillment (Klink, *John*, 166–67).

²² According to Ridderbos, *Gospel of John*, 107.

²³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 183.

²⁴ Keener, *Gospel of John*, 509–10.

²⁵ Burge, *John*, 103.

If Jesus's miracle in Cana was a sign that the waters and perhaps even the whole system of Jewish purification and atonement was being set aside,²⁶ then what was replacing it? What should we say about the wine? Stephen Westerholm says that in the account of the wedding at Cana, "Doubtless John sees the changing of water ... into wine by Jesus as symbolic of the transition from the old age to the new (2:1–11)."²⁷ Jesus, we recall, declared that the old system was incompatible with the gospel, for "no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. No, they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved" (Matt 9:17). But can any more be said?

V. WINE AS BIBLICAL SYMBOL

Absence of wine in the OT could represent the covenant curses on Israel for their disobedience (Deut 28:39; Isa 5:10; 24:7–13; Hos 2:8; 9:2; Joel 1:10) and a general lack of joy (Isa 16:10). God's salvation is often symbolized by abundance of wine. Jesus turned the inadequate water of Jewish purification into wine that symbolized abundant blessing and joy, as when "your vats will overflow with new wine" (Prov 3:10; also Gen 27:28; Judg 9:13, 27; Ps 4:7; 104:15; Eccl 9:7; 10:19).²⁸ The prophesied lion of Judah is described with wine imagery in Gen 49:10–11:

The scepter will not depart from Judah or the staff from between his feet until he whose right it is comes and the obedience of the peoples belongs to him. He ties his donkey to a vine, and the colt of his donkey to the choice vine. He washes his clothes in wine and his robes in the blood of grapes.²⁹

Jeremiah prophesied that the regathering and restoration of God's repentant remnant would bring unrestrained celebration: "They will be radiant with joy because of the LORD's goodness, because of the grain, the new wine, the fresh oil, and

²⁶ A question to be pursued elsewhere is: What exactly was Jesus replacing? Is it the Mosaic law that is being superseded, or is it later Judaism? The OT never speaks of stone water jars to be used for "purification." The term *καθαρισμός*, "cleansing, purification," is used only eighteen times in the LXX, and seven of those are in books not found in the Hebrew Bible. Only in Lev 15:13 is water specifically to be used for "cleansing." This is for the man who has a "discharge." If he touches anyone without first rinsing his hands, the other person becomes unclean. After he is "cured," he is to wait seven days, then wash his clothes, bathe, and "he will be clean." However, after this he is to bring an offering of turtle-doves or pigeons to the sanctuary where the priest is to "make atonement for him before the LORD because of his discharge" (v. 15). Therefore, water alone is insufficient. The emphasis on ritual washing of hands seems to have gained prominence in Judaism after the close of the OT period. Therefore, while there may be implied here a critique of later "Judaism" or "Pharisaism," it may be reading too much into the water jars to say that Jesus or John is implying an end to "the poverty of the old dispensation with its merely ceremonial cleansing" (C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* [2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978], 192), "the whole ancient order of Jewish ceremonial" (Bruce, *Gospel of John*, 71), "the old age" (Stephen Westerholm, "Clean and Unclean," *DJG* 130), "the water/vessels of the law" (Ridderbos, *Gospel of John*, 107). For the superiority of the work of Christ to the OT sacrificial system, we might look at the wine Jesus provided versus the wine that had "run out."

²⁷ Westerholm, "Clean and Unclean," 129–30.

²⁸ See also Little, *Echoes of the Old Testament*, 19–26.

²⁹ OT quotations are from the CSB.

because of the young of the flocks and herds” (Jer 31:12). The coming messianic age is described as a time when “the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and all the hills will flow with it” (Amos 9:13) and “the vats will overflow with new wine and fresh oil” (Joel 2:24; also Isa 25:6; Hos 14:7; Joel 3:8). As Marianne Meye Thompson states, “Jesus is seen transforming the water set aside for the Jewish rites of purification into the wine symbolic of the presence of the messianic age.”³⁰

Carson believes that this OT imagery of an abundance of wine symbolizing the messianic age leads Jesus to use this situation to say that “the hour of great wine, the hour of his glorification, has not yet come.” At Cana, he says, Jesus makes a connection between the wedding and his own role as messianic bridegroom, who “will supply all the ‘wine’ that is needed for the messianic banquet.” Jesus “graciously makes good the deficiencies of the unknown bridegroom of John 2, in anticipation of the perfect way he himself will fill the role of the messianic bridegroom.”³¹ Jesus compared his first coming to the groom’s arrival at his wedding feast (see Matt 9:14–15). Then, at Jesus’s last supper with his disciples, he spoke of his departure but also of his return for them in terms of a messianic banquet: “I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matt 26:29).

VI. WINE AND JESUS’S HOUR

So wine symbolized abundant blessing and joy, and especially the superabundant blessings of the coming messianic age, toward which Jesus’s miracle at Cana pointed, although the “hour” of fulfillment had not yet come. There is more, however, that John has to teach us, even in these verses. Edmund Little rightly questions whether messianic joy is the end of this story. Responding to Schnackenburg, he notes, “The notion of messianic joy in connection with abundance has become almost a cliché of commentaries on Cana.”³² Then he makes two significant observations: “The view of Cana as a joyful event is marred by two aspects of the narrative. First, the apparent tension in the dialogue between Jesus and his mother makes the reader wary.” Second, “no joy is recorded. . . . If the ‘sign’ is meant to be one of joy alone, why is the Lord reluctant to give the wedding party a taste of it? His hesitation might arise from the knowledge that the sign, once given, will not be entirely pleasant for himself or others. His ‘hour’ will embrace suffering and death as well as glory. . . . Messianic joy may be legitimately inferred, but the absence of any reference to it is a fact to be interpreted.”³³

³⁰ Marianne Meye Thompson, “John, Gospel of,” *DJG* 373.

³¹ Carson, *Gospel according to John*, 173. Little, *Echoes of the Old Testament*, 47–48, also notes the Johannine irony that “the true Bridegroom of Israel should manifest his glory as a guest at a wedding in Cana. . . . The steward therefore makes his remarks about the quality of the wine to the ‘official’ bridegroom of the story, unnamed and hitherto unremarked (John 2:10). The reader recognizes Jesus, the unknown provider of the wine, as the real but hidden bridegroom of the story.”

³² Little, *Echoes of the Old Testament*, 51.

³³ *Ibid.*, 61.

There seems to be a huge logical gap between Mary's concern for the lack of wine at a wedding and Jesus's statement that his "hour" had not yet come. It seems that two different conversations are going on at the same time. This is Jesus's point when he tells his mother that they were following two different agendas. And yet, the fact that Jesus supplies the need for wine tells us they are related. "My/his hour" in John would be the time when Jesus was "seized" (7:30; 8:20) and when he would "depart from this world to the Father" (13:1). It was also the "hour" when Jesus would be "glorified" (12:23; 17:1), that is, when he would be betrayed, arrested, and crucified (13:31–32), when the Spirit would be given (7:39; 16:14), when the disciples would understand (12:26), and when Jesus would ascend to the Father (17:5). It was the "hour" when the grain of wheat would fall to the ground and die and bear fruit (12:24). It was the "hour" for which he had come from the Father, but the prospect of which caused Jesus to shudder in anguish (12:27).³⁴ It was the "hour" when Jesus's disciples would be scattered (16:32). Finally, it was the "hour" when Jesus would say to his beloved disciple, "Here is your mother" (19:27). It was the hour of Jesus's crucifixion, not just the hour of his kingdom inauguration.

So, what was it about the lack of wine at a wedding that prompted Jesus to speak of his mission to die for sin on the cross? According to R. V. G. Tasker, Jesus turned this symbol of the "inadequacy of Judaism as a religion of salvation" into "a fitting symbol of the new spiritual power made available for mankind by the shedding of the blood of Jesus."³⁵ But is there justification for thinking that Jesus was making a connection between the need for wine at a wedding and his eventual bloody death on a cross, or, more specifically, between wine and blood? Jesus's reference to "my hour" points to such a connection. But Jesus was not inventing the connection on the spot. It is also found in the OT, as Edmund Little shows.³⁶

Not only is abundant wine a symbol of joy, and absence of wine a symbol of covenant curse in the OT; wine is also a symbol of wrath.³⁷ We have already seen abundant wine symbolizing blessing in Gen 49:11. But in that paragraph (49:8–12), Jacob is describing Judah's descendant as a great warrior and ruler who would defeat God's enemies and then rule not only God's people but also the other peoples of the earth. "Wine" is also called "the blood of grapes" in verse 11, perhaps because it is acquired by crushing the grapes, thus giving us, as Victor Hamilton says, "the intimation of violence." He suggests that whereas those who welcome the lion of Judah will experience blessing and joy, those who reject him will experience judgment and terror.³⁸ A rejected and broken Israel, suffering from God's anger, says to him in Ps 60:3[5], "You have made your people suffer hardship; you have

³⁴ See the study of *παράσσω* in Ceslas Spicq, *TLNT* 3:374–75.

³⁵ Tasker, *St. John*, 55.

³⁶ See Little, *Echoes of the Old Testament*, 25–26.

³⁷ See *ibid.*, 62–64.

³⁸ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18–50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 662. Bruce K. Waltke agrees that the phrase "may connote his violent trampling of enemies" and cites Isa 63:2–3 (*Genesis: A Commentary* [with Cathi J. Fredricks; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001], 609). See also Iain Duguid, "Messianic Themes in Zechariah 9–14," in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite et al.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 268.

given us wine to drink that made us stagger.” God’s judgment on the wicked is described in Ps 75:8[9] as “a cup in the LORD’s hand, full of wine blended with spices, and he pours from it. All the wicked of the earth will drink, draining it to the dregs.” Wine is associated with wickedness and violent, oppressive acts in Prov 4:17, perhaps because the color was that of blood. According to Isaiah, God’s salvation would include the destruction of Israel’s oppressors, who are compared in 49:26 to beasts who eat the flesh of their prey. But now they will “eat their own flesh, and they will be drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine.”³⁹ Israel had “drunk the cup of his fury from the LORD’s hand,” even “to the dregs—the cup that causes people to stagger” (Isa 51:17). But now the Lord would give that cup, “the cup of my fury,” to their enemies (51:22–23).

Wine, intoxication, and divine wrath also converge in Jer 13:12–14. God tells Jeremiah to say to the people,

“Every jar should be filled with wine.” Then they will respond to you, “Don’t we know that every jar should be filled with wine?” And you will say to them, “This is what the LORD says: I am about to fill all who live in this land—the kings who reign for David on his throne, the priests, the prophets, and all the residents of Jerusalem—with drunkenness. I will smash them against each other, fathers and sons alike—this is the LORD’s declaration. I will allow no mercy, pity, or compassion to keep me from destroying them.”

Jack Lundbom describes the scene: “Jeremiah here is directed by Yahweh to join a festive gathering and before *a row of filled wine jars* [my emphasis] to say to those present, ‘Every jar is filled with wine.’ . . . They expect to drink this wine, doubtless of fine vintage, in some quantity.” But Jeremiah turns their expectations upside down. They expect their fill of wine and song (as did the people at the wedding in Cana), but the “people throughout Judah are going to be filled with Yahweh’s cup of vintage wrath.”⁴⁰ This is the same “cup of the wine of wrath” from God’s hand that all the nations would be made to drink, causing them to “stagger” (Jer 25:15–16). God said to them, “Drink, get drunk, and vomit. Fall down and never get up again, as a result of the sword I am sending among you” (25:27; see also 48:26; 49:12; 51:57; Lam 4:21; Ezek 23:32–34; Hab 2:15–16; Zech 12:2; Rev 14:8, 10, 18–20; 16:19).

Is it possible to paint the wine of divine blessing and the wine of divine wrath on the same canvas without creating a grotesque work worthy of Picasso? The cross embraces both the cup of divine wrath that Jesus drank to the dregs for us and also the cup of blessing filled with his blood (1 Cor 10:16: “The cup of blessing that we give thanks for, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?”). Jesus warned his disciples, “Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” He was alluding to the “cup that causes people to stagger.” Although implying that they were not able, he then says they *would* drink it in some sense (Matt 20:22–23/Mark

³⁹ This passage makes a striking contrast with Jesus’s words in John 6:53–56, where he says that true life can only be gained by eating *his* flesh and drinking *his* blood.

⁴⁰ Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20* (AB 21A; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 673–74.

10:38–39). Later, in the upper room at the Passover meal, Jesus gives his disciples “a cup,” alluding to his earlier use of “cup,” and he tells them all to drink it. He calls it “my blood of the covenant,” which he would shed for sin on the cross. “Drinking the cup” was in some way necessary for their participation in the new covenant that he was inaugurating. And he pointed ahead to a time when he would drink it with them again at the messianic banquet (Matt 26:26–29//Mark 14:22–25//Luke 22:15–20). Finally, Jesus refers to his approaching suffering and death as “this cup” in his prayer in the garden (Matt 26:38–42//Mark 14:33–36//Luke 22:42//1 Cor 11:25–28).

So, how likely is it that the need for wine at the wedding in Cana should prompt Jesus to think about his mission as “the lamb of God” (1:29, 36) who would shed his blood to take away or cleanse us from sin? Was his use of the water jars for *external* Jewish purification just convenient, or was there a message in turning that water into something to *drink*?⁴¹ Could the wine he created be intended to point our attention to “the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God” in order to “cleanse our *consciences* from dead works so that we can serve the living God” (Heb 9:14)? John’s purpose in writing was that we might have life. In 1:14 he tells us that life is “in him.” In 14:6 Jesus tells us he *is* the life. And in 6:53–57, Jesus asserts that life can only be found if we *drink* his blood.

Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day, because my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

Tasker suggested that Jesus came to “pour out the wine of His own most precious blood.”⁴² As a sign pointing to his eventual satisfaction of our need for forgiveness in his blood, Jesus supplied the wine they needed at the wedding—but not just any wine. It was the finest wine that pointed ahead to the ultimate purification of the heart.

I am not suggesting a sacramental understanding of the miracle at Cana, but only that Jesus’s words and actions there intentionally foreshadowed his shedding of blood on the cross for our atonement, which would provide not just *external* cleansing but *internal* life and transformation. He was preparing us for his teaching that the Christian life entails our eating and drinking Jesus until at the great marriage banquet we see him face to face. Our regular experience of the Lord’s Supper is a reminder of this.

In their book *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, Jeffrey, Ovey, and Sach refer to the chronological note in John 12:1 (“six days before the Passover”) as the beginning

⁴¹ Klink, *John*, 167.

⁴² Tasker, *St. John*, 56–57.

of a “countdown” to the approaching Passover and the death of Jesus.⁴³ I suggest that the countdown begins much earlier, at John’s announcement, “Here is the Lamb of God!” in 1:29, 36. Carson notes that Jesus’s words about ingesting his flesh and blood in 6:53–56 are placed in the context of Jesus’s second Passover by another chronological reference to Passover in 6:4. As we read the rest of the chapter, he says, we are to have Passover in mind. The connections between events in the chapter are “almost unintelligible” (quoting E. C. Hoskyns) unless the reference to the Passover in 6:4 picks up the identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God in 1:29, 36 and anticipates his Passover lamb fulfillment in 19:36.⁴⁴ With all this in mind, it is striking that John’s first mention of the Passover, which would have been Jesus’s first Passover as “the Lamb of God,” comes just two verses after the account of the wedding in Cana, in 2:13: “It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem.” We might even use the words of Hoskyns and say that Jesus’s words to Mary, and especially his reference to the “hour” of his death are “almost unintelligible” unless he was associating the need for wine with the need for his own sacrificial blood to be shed at the cross in order for us to receive the eternal life he came to provide.

VII. CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude by pointing to Heb 13:10: “We have an altar from which those who worship at the tabernacle do not have a right to eat.” According to Westcott, “The only earthly ‘altar’ is the Cross on which Christ offered Himself: Christ is the offering: He is Himself the feast of the believer. . . . Christ Himself, Christ crucified, is necessarily regarded as ‘the altar’ from which we draw our sustenance, and on (in) which (to go on to a later idea) we offer ourselves.”⁴⁵ And finally, Philip Hughes quotes from John Brown’s 1862 exposition on Hebrews:

We are permitted to feast on the whole sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We not only eat his flesh, but we do what none of the priests durst do with regard to any of the sacrifices, we drink his blood. We enjoy the full measure of benefit which his sacrifice was designed to secure. We are allowed to feed freely upon the highest and holiest of all sacrifices. Our reconciliation with God is complete, our fellowship with him intimate and delightful.⁴⁶

⁴³ Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 40.

⁴⁴ Carson, *Gospel according to John*, 268.

⁴⁵ Westcott, *Hebrews*, 438.

⁴⁶ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 576. Against Catholic scholars who have connected the altar in this verse with the Lord’s table, Hughes states, “The term ‘altar’ is nowhere in the New Testament associated with the institution or the observance of the Lord’s Supper, nor is it found as a synonym for the eucharistic table—indeed, it is perfectly plain that no altar was present when Christ inaugurated this sacrament in the upper room. And it is evident throughout this epistle that the author is not concerned to speak about the eucharist, though he might effectively have done so, had he so wished” (p. 577). Hughes also explains that the use of “altar” for the Lord’s table began with Cyprian in the third century. Aquinas identified it either with the cross or with Christ himself (p. 578).

In order to provide for us the “cup of blessing” and joy in the messianic age, Jesus had to drink the cup of the wine of God’s wrath (Jer 25:15; Rev 14:10) for us at the cross. So the cup of blessing we drink is in effect the cup of Jesus’s blood that cleanses us and infuses us with his life.