

JESUS and WINE: The First Miracle

Introduction:

It is alleged that Christ not only drank fermented wine but that in his first miracle at the wedding in Cana he created it in great abundance and that he also gave it to His disciples at the Last Supper. There are even some Christians who believe that Jesus was a moderate drinker of fermented wine and that the teachings of the gospel show it is all right to drink alcoholic wine in moderation. Now, the reason for some wanting to believe this is simple. The example and teaching of our Lord is the standard for Christian belief and practice. If Christ made, commended and used fermented wine, then there can hardly be anything intrinsically wrong with a moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages. Simply stated, "If wine was good enough for Jesus, it is good enough for me!"

We want to closely examine the gospel records and Jesus's miracle and statements about wine. There are five wine-related stories or sayings that one would do well to investigate, in this lesson we will only notice the first one.

- 1) The Wedding at Cana -- John 2:1-11
- 2) New Wine in New Wineskins -- Luke 5:37-38, Mark 2:22
- 3) Is the "Old Wine" Better? -- Luke 5:39
- 4) Was Jesus a Glutton and a Drunkard? -- Matt. 11:19, Lk 7:34
- 5) Jesus's Institution of the Lord's Supper -- Matt, Mark, Luke

1. THE WEDDING AT CANA

1. Importance of the Miracle.

- a. Those who believe in moderate-drinking view Christ's miraculous transformation of water into wine at the wedding of Cana as primary evidence that Jesus sanctioned the use of alcoholic beverages.
- b. The belief that the wine Christ provided in Cana was alcoholic rests on five major assumptions.
 - 1) It is assumed that the word oinos "wine" indicates only "fermented-quality grape drink," i.e. wine.
 - 2) It is even assumed that since the same word "wine" is used for both that

which "ran-out" and what Jesus provided that both were alcoholic. (We'll see why that say this later.)

- 3) It is assumed that the Jews didn't know how to prevent the fermentation of grape juice and since this wedding occurred six months after the grape harvest, the wine use at the banquet must have been fermented.
- 4) It is assumed that the description given by the master of the banquet to the wine provided by Jesus as "the good wine" must mean it was a high-quality alcoholic wine.
- 5) It is assumed that the expression in John 2:10 "well drunk" used by the master of the banquet indicated that the guests were intoxicated because they had been drinking fermented wine.

2. In view of these assumptions that the wine Jesus provided was fermented, let's examine each of them.

- 1) The meaning of oinos. We need to understand that in the Greek, both in the Bible in the secular usage, the word referred to both fermented and unfermented grape juice.
 - a) The word oinos is used at least 33 times in the LXX to translate tiros the Hebrew word for grape juice.
 - b) The word "wine" not only in Greek, but in Old English, in Latin, and in Hebrew is a generic term including all kinds of wine, unfermented and fermented.
 - c) It corresponds to the Hebrew word yayin in the OT and vinum in Latin.
 - d) Thus, the fact the wine made by Christ at Cana is called oinos offers no grounds for concluding that it was fermented wine.
- 2) The second assumption is that both the wine that ran out and the wine Jesus made were both alcoholic. The same word is used for both. But this assumption is discredited by two facts:
 - a) First: The word oinos is generic and its use alone doesn't provide evidence that the beverage was either fermented or unfermented. One must look for more evidence than just the word to determine what kind of a beverage the subject is.
 - b) Second: There is a distinction made between the two wines in the text--

that provided by Jesus is call "the good wine." This suggest the two were not identical-- the nature of the difference will be discussed later.

3. **The Preservation of Grape Juice**

- a. The third assumption that six months after the grape harvest they could not have unfermented grape juice rest on the assumption that the techonology for presrvng grape juice unferment was not known at that time.
- b. The assumption is clearly discredited by numerous testimonies from the Roman world of NT times describing various methods for preserving grape juice.
- c. There were several different practices in Palestine in Jesus' day that preserved unfermented beverages.

4. **"High-Quality Alcoholic Wine."**

- a. The fourth assumption is that wine Jesus produced was pronounced "the good wine" (John 2:10) by the master of the banquet because it was high in alcoholic content. This assumption is based on 20th century ideas of taste, etc.
- b. Writers of the Roman world of NT times (Pliny) said that the good wine was the unfermented which did "not inflame the brain or infest the mind"
- c. The common wine drink in Palestine was the simple juice of the grape.
- d. The wine was "the good wine", i.e, a wine of high quality, but not becasue of its alcohol content, but becasue as Henry Morris explains it was "new wine, freshly created."

5. **Rabbinical Witnesses.** The rabbinical witness on the nature of wine is not unanimous.

- a. Some rabbis even recommend the moderate use of wine.
- b. But equally true, many Talmudic Tarris have in vigorous words condemned the drinking of alcoholic wine and liquors.
- c. In light of these considerations we would conclude that the wine provided by Christ was described as "the good wine" because it was fresh and tasty, and not because it was intoxicating.

6. Moral Implications:

- a. Let's look at another reason for rejecting the assumption that "the good wine" produced by Christ was alcoholic.
- b. Let's consider if this assumption were true-- that all the wine mentioned in John 2 was alcoholic -- it alleges that Christ miraculously produced between 120 and 160 gallons of intoxicating wine for men, women and children gathered at the wedding feast.
 - 1) Then Jesus must be held morally responsible for prolonging and increasing their intoxication.
 - 2) His miracle would only serve to sanction the excessive drinking of alcoholic beverages, not moderate drinking!
- c. Joseph P. Free correctly observes that the large amount of wine produced by Christ toward the end of a wedding feast proves either:
 - "1. Excellent [alcoholic] drinking was allowable or
 - "2. The oinos in this case was grape juice. In the light of the whole Old Testament condemnation of [intoxicating] wine, it certainly would appear that the beverage was grape juice."

7. Another point about the Moral Implication:

- a. It is against the principle of Scripture and moral analogy to suppose that Christ, the Creator of good things (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 28 & Col. 1:16) would exert His supernatural energy to bring into existence an intoxicating wine which elsewhere in the Scripture He condemns as "a mocker" and "a brawler" (Prov. 20:1) and which elsewhere in the Scripture it is used as the symbol of divine wrath..
- b. Scriptural and moral consistency require that "the good wine" produced by Christ was fresh unfermented grape juice. The adjective used was not agathos, good, simply, but kalos, that which is morally goodly and morally excellent.

8. "Well Drunk"

- a. The final assumption to be exemplified relates to the expression "well drunk" (Jo. 2:10) used by the master of the banquet.

- 1) The full statement reads: "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now" (Jo. 2:12 KJV).
- b. The assumption is that the word methusthosin "well drunk" indicates drunkenness and since drunkenness is caused, according to the statement of the banquet master, by the "good wine" customarily serve first, then "the good wine" provided by Christ must also have been intoxicating, because it is compared with the good wine usually served at the beginning of a feast.
- c. Some view this meaning of the Greek word methusko "to intoxicate" as proof of the alcoholic nature of the wine produced by Christ.
- d. However, this reasoning misinterprets and misapplies the comment of the banquet master, and overlooks the broader usage of the verb.
 - 1) First-- The comment in question was not made in reference to that particular party, but to the general practice among those who hold feast: "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, than the poor wine..." (John 2:10, RSV).
 - 2) Even if this verb described intoxicated persons, it is not describing this particular wedding feast, but such parties in general.
- e. But another important consideration is the fact that the Greek verb methusko also means "to drink freely" without any implication of intoxication. Ample lexicon citations demonstrates this.
 - 1) The RSV renders it accurately "when men have drunk freely."
 - 2) It simply refers to the large quantity of wine generally consumed at a feast, without any reference to intoxicating effects.

8. The Object of the Miracle.

- a. The stated object of the miracle was for Christ to manifest His glory so that His disciples might believe in Him.
 - 1) This objective was accomplished: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him" (John 2:11).
- b. Christ's presence at this marriage feast was intended to show divine approval of the marriage institution and of the innocent enjoyments of social life.
- c. Yet, all of these consideration were subservient to the manifestation of

Christ's glory in fulfillment of His Messianic mission.

- 1) The glory of God is revealed especially in His act of creation (Ps. 19:1-2).
 - 2) Likewise, Christ's "eternal power and deity" (Rom. 1:20) were manifested at the beginning of His miracles through an act of creation: "He ... made the water wine" (John 4:46).
- d. The wine of this miracle must have been identical to the wine found in grape-clusters, because this is the only wine that God produced.
- 1) R.A. Torrey, writes "There is not a hint that the wine He [Christ] made was intoxicating. It was fresh-made wine. New-made wine is never intoxicating. It is not intoxicating until some time after the process of fermentation has set in. Fermentation is the process of decay. There is no hint that our Lord produced alcohol, which is a product of decay and death. He produced a living wine uncontaminated by fermentation."
 - 2) William Pettingill, "I am satisfied that there was little resemblance in it [wine made by Christ] to the thing described in the Scripture of God as biting like a serpent and stinging like an adder (Prov. 23:29-32)."
9. **Another moral point** to consider is that Christ's miracles were always directed to benevolent ends. He "came not to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Luke 9:56).
- a. If it were true that Christ miraculously manufactured an intoxicating wine, then that miracle would be a notable exception among His miracles.
 - 1) It would be malevolent manifestation of His power. He would have manifested shame rather than glory.
 - b. Christ was aware of the powerful influence His example would have on contemporary and future generations.
 - 1) If, with all this knowledge He created an intoxicating wine, He would have revealed diabolic rather than divine power and glory.
 - 2) His disciples could hardly have believed in Him, if they had seen Him do a miracle to encourage drunkenness.