**Sunday 11th June 2017 Message**

**Where grace is abundant**

**Introduction**

Today I believe God has a special message for us, from a very familiar passage in Johns Gospel. We return back to the beginning of the gospel to continue hearing Johns revelation of the purpose and person of Jesus Christ. Written over 70 years after the death of Jesus and after the other gospel writers, Holy Spirit inspires the mind and pen of John to record a different and deeper perspective of the life of our Saviour.

His gospel is written as a Jew to the Greeks. He writes with all the insight of Jewish thinking and understanding of significant facts, and uses these to capture the minds of Jew and Gentile alike in some of their similar belief systems.

Johns gospel contains

Seven sermons

Seven I am’s

Seven healings

All numbers have great significance to the Jewish mind. Seven is a perfect number and John chose three topics (three being a number of perfection and completeness) to select seven again a perfect number to reveal the gospel in what he considered by the inspiration of the Spirit the perfect revelations of Jesus and His ministry.

In what was the last chapter of Johns gospel until he added one some years later, John declares his purpose in writing.

**Slide *John 20:30-31 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.***

He obviously decided that was an understatement when he added chapter 21 where he writes

**Slide *John 21:24-25 This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.*** NIV

**Slide** Signs

John writes that the miracles of Jesus that he writes about are **sign - ificant.** They are signs pointing to who Jesus is as the Son of God, and the fullness of the gospel of grace.

The grace of God was supremely revealed and given in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus was not only the beneficiary of God's grace (Luke 2:40), but He was also its very embodiment (John 1:14), bringing it to mankind for salvation (Titus 2:11). By His death and resurrection, Jesus restored the broken fellowship between God and His people, both Jew and Gentile. The only way of salvation for any person is "through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 15:11).

**Where would Jesus choose to reveal the grace of God first?**

The miraculous signs that Jesus used to reveal the Fathers grace, was first manifest in Cana of Galilee. If you or I wanted to broadcast the gospel of grace by miraculous signs we might want to do it in a place of significance, to people of great importance. We might put up big signs pointing to the work about to be done in the healing tent.

Not Jesus, He shows the very heart of God, that has His eyes on the heart of the humble, the insignificant. Cana was a small village, possibly just under 100 people, within the view of Nazareth, Jesus’ birthplace. The wedding celebrations would typically go on for seven days and would primarily consist of close family and friends upto the procession of bride and groom to their new wedding home which would be a procession amongst all the people of the village. This was a village girls wedding in a small village.

The people were probably of limited means, but Jesus arrives on the scene at one of the most significant Jewish community events.

So the sign which was to be performed at a joyous occasion which could have turned bitter, but not against the backdrop of vast crowds. It was done within the simplicity of a home setting, miracles can happen at home when Jesus is invited, despite the fact, that home is where our true natures including the bad bits are revealed.

Cana is the same village Jesus is in when the Roman centurion comes and request the healing of his son John 4, and the place from where Nathaniel one of the disciples came from as revealed in John 21:2

It is also a place where Flavius Josephus, the historian visited, in 66 AD to gather information for his writings.

**Slide** – John 2:1-11

**On the third day**

Don’t miss the opening four words of this passage.

Slide – significance of three

In Scripture the number **three** is one of the so called "perfect numbers." (Trinity, completeness)

The third day is often used by God to mark significant change

Gen 1:13-14 separation of water and land

Gen 22:4 On the third day Abraham looked up …

Ex 19:16 God met Moses on the mount

Josh 9:17 the Israelites arrive at their cities

Ezra 6:15 the temple was completed

Esther 5:1 Esther put on her on her royal robes

Hosea 6:2 on the third day He will restore us

Jonah was spewed out of the great fish

Matt 17:23 Jesus predicts His resurrection

John 2:1 Wedding at Cana

So, what I believe Holy Spirit through the writer is underlining that this whole account of the first sign that Jesus performs has more than the surface significance. Something is about to change – what is it?

**Why was Jesus there?**

He was there because He was invited, which means He had some connection with the couple through His family. According to William Barclays commentary historians believe that the bride is probably Marys sister Salome and that is why she is a key figure in overseeing the waiters. They also believe that the groom was none other than the author John himself, which we cannot prove, but it would add an interesting twist as to why it is the first sign that he records.

Jesus arrives with, according to John, six invited disciples. An invite to the disciples probably went along the lines bring your close friends. Six would probably have put a strain on the catering team of this homely event. V2

Jesus has not gone to the wedding with it in His mind to give a sign, I truly believe He performed all His signs and wonders as He looked to His Father.

**They ran out of wine!!!! V3**

This was an incredibly frowned upon thing to happen at any Jewish wedding. Wine for number one was considered a symbol of Gods joy at the covenant made between the couple, no wine no joy. Secondly, because under Jewish ceremony law, family or not, the guests could take the couple to court and sue them for not catering properly for their needs.

Hence Mary was very concerned for the name sake of the family, that wine be found and she speaks to her son, and Jesus’ reply may appear abrupt, rude and unconcerned to the Western reader.

***John 2:4 Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come."***

“Woman” is a word of respect in the culture of the day, our closest translation would be “Lady”. It is also a sign that Jesus has moved from being under her authority as mother to now knowingly operating under His Fathers authority. He uses the same term when He says to Mary from the cross about John being her son.

He acknowledges that He recognises her concern about the situation but questions why she believes He can help. He is not saying it is none of my business. He also uses a phrase He often uses throughout His life to His disciples “My hour has not come”, which shows His focus is on the end goal as priority.

Now for most of us who heard a reply like that from Jesus might have had the wind taken out of our sails, but Mary is still convinced the son that had the wisdom and ability to help her throughout her years without a husband would find an answer now, and tells the waiters to do whatever He tells them to do.

**Six stone water jars**

The story on the surface in the Bible often has a message below the surface as well. The significance of these six stone water jars could be easily missed.

**Slide** – meaning of number 6

As we proceed remember this - Six is the number of incompleteness, the number representing humankind.

So here we have SIX STONE water jars for the purpose of purification.

They would have been there for the multiple hand washing ceremonies before and after every part of the meal, and also for the bathing of the bride before going to the marriage bed.

They should have been full of water for ritual washing and kept full by the waiters for the whole of the ceremony. This begs a question as to whether these were religious Jews or ones just keeping the symbols of religious activity.

Jesus calls on the waiters to fill to the brim the stone water jars with water. If they had been neglecting providing for ritual cleansing this would have been embarrassing enough for them and any of the guests including Mary that may have heard His instruction.

However, I believe Jesus was about to remove the necessity of ritual, and replace it with symbol of covenant and joy when the water is turned to wine.

Note that what Jesus is about to do is provide a 180 gallons or thereabouts of the symbol of covenant of grace and joy, that is more than enough for this wedding feast, it is abundant grace replacing insufficient ritual.

Jesus symbolizes He wants mankind to full and abundantly joyful because of the covenant of grace, in this first and significant sign.

This is also an unusual miraculous sign in that is a sign of creative change. No words are spoken by Jesus “Water become wine”, no laying on of hands. A sign that came about by the faith of Mary and the waiters in filling to the brim, not tampering with the evidence, and serving to master of ceremonies. They did not see wine when they served the master of ceremonies, unless they knew what Pinot Blanc looked like. They new that wine needed grapes, crushing and straining a lot of years of hard work in the farming and production and hey whallah we have the best wine ever.

The BEST gift of grace, the abundant gift of grace, replacing all the ritualistic rules that man had devised to ensure they were clean before God.

**Marriage – a sign of covenantal relationship**

Jesus is preparing each one of us to be a pure spotless bride without wrinkle or blemish. His covenantal love is eternal and it started the day you got engaged to Him by accepting Him as your Saviour. Ephesians 5:22-32 gives us the model for the type of marriage He would have us have with those to whom we are joined. Praise the Lord He knew how much we can mess things up and He provides the grace of forgiveness, the grace of healed broken relationships, the grace of recreation.

He provides the abundance of the covenant of grace for all relationships, and particularly for our relationship with Him.

I believe the Father chose for Jesus to perform His first sign as to the type of relationship He wanted with us, because He wanted to underline the importance of mutual self sacrificial commitment to Gods design. A concept that is sadly lagging in today’s world. Yet He has provided the grace and covenant as our model.

When this wedding in Cana was completed the bride and groom would be crowned as a king and a queen with a crown of gold. They would be carried through the streets to their marital home and there for the week to come they would be visited and honoured as royalty and their words became law.

Today as the bride of Christ we are being prepared for such honour.

**Belief leads to abundance**

***John 2:11 This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.***

NKJV

Jesus invades our lives to manifest His presence and glory that we would believe – trust in Him. Sometimes He does this with signs and wonders, others He does this by speaking to us in our hearts or through His word.

Both His signs and His words are creative, they change things such as water into wine, and He does this in abundance above what we need or could imagine.

Imagine you have capacity for more, and more you can receive. Believe you only can change so much and in the words of Yoda “Change little you will.”

**Grace is abundant but goes beyond the law.**

**Slide *Romans 5:20-6:2 Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.***

***What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? NKJV***