



Lay Preachers' Conference

Marriage and wedding imagery [and water] in the Gospel of John – A covenantal relationship

Dr Sunny Chen, Hong Kong; specialist in Greek grammar, Linguistics, Paul, John

Introduction

A commonly-overlooked theme in John is water:

- Ch 1 - John baptised Jesus
- Ch 2 - Water turned into wine
- Ch 3 - Nicodemus – born of water and spirit
[name Nicodemus means “victor of the people”: but he’s “blind”]
- Ch 4 - Woman at the well – thirsty
[nameless, a “loser”, but having insight]
- Ch 5 - Man healed at Siloam Pool
- Ch 7 - Living water
- Ch 9 - Blind man washed at the pool
- Ch 13 - Washing the disciples' feet
- Ch 19 - Body and blood flow from the side of Jesus crucified

Wedding and Marriage

- Ch 2 – the wedding at Cana
- Ch 3:25-30 – John the Baptist proclaims Jesus as the groom
- Ch 4 – the setting is as for a wedding proposal
- Ch 12 – anointing Jesus' feet
- Ch 14 – the long conversation on the last night
- Ch 20- resurrection

2:1-11 – the wedding at Cana

It was the groom's job to provide the wine for the wedding: Augustine in the 4th century recognised the metaphor here - Jesus is being portrayed as bridegroom, and so the wedding banquet represents eschatological time: union with the heavenly bridegroom.

3:25-30 – John the Baptist

John overtly refers to Jesus as a bridegroom, with Israel as the bride.

Ch 4 – the Samaritan woman

The significance of Jacob's well is easily overlooked: refer to Genesis ch 24 & 29 and Ex 2 – in all three accounts

- A future bridegroom (or his representative) goes to a well in a foreign land
Isaac, Jacob, Moses Jesus
- A woman turns up unaware that she is to be a bride
Rebecca, Rachel, Zipporah the woman
- Water is drawn
- The future bride returns home to tell everyone what has happened
- Betrothal is confirmed when the groom stays in the foreign land.

But also: the matter of the 5 husbands:

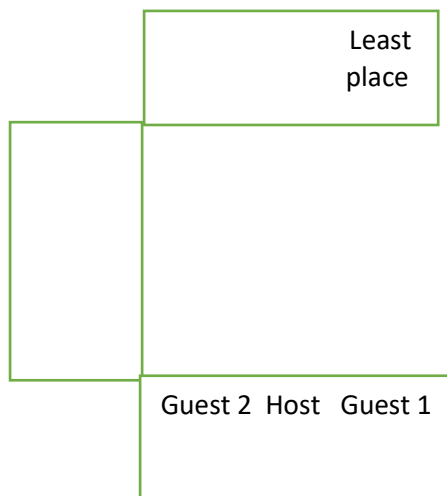
- She has had 5 husbands

- The man she is now with is the 6th man
- That makes Jesus the new “bridegroom” the 7th one, = perfection.

12:1-8 – anointing Jesus’ feet

** It’s actually a matter of dispute whether this action represents a marriage reference *in itself*. However there is the matter of how 1st-century people ate: ordinary people’s furniture was made of stone; Jesus is called a carpenter, but actually he was a stone mason. [And the manger at his birth was a stone trough, the same shape as a sarcophagus, so (in metaphor) a manger of burial: his death is being foretold in the story of his birth.]

Participants in a meal reclined on low couches in a U shape around a table:



1 At Jesus’ last meal [as per John], was Peter #1 guest?

2 Jesus dipped his bread into the bowl at the same time as Judas: the only way he could do that was if Judas was in #2 guest place – right to the end, Jesus gave him a place of high honour.

3 So Mary with her ointment – is behind the men; touching a man’s feet is an intimate act [not least because “feet” was a euphemism for sexual organs – see Ruth and her approach to Boaz].

14:1-7 – In my father’s house

Customary marriage in Jesus’ time began with betrothal: he at the age of 15-16, she aged 14-15. Fidelity was expected, although the marriage was not completed and the couple did not begin living together until later. Over the next year or so, the groom would build an extra room or an annexe or maybe a separate house attached to or close to his father’s house; nobody was ever told when it might be finished, but when it was, and without any announcement, the father of the groom would go to the bride’s (father’s) house to get her and take her to the new house/room(s).

- 14:1-3 is wholly a marriage metaphor.
- Jesus comes to humanity (is born = proposes betrothal), goes away (dies = returns “home”) and returns (“I will return” = the Spirit / Paraclete).
- Revelation 22 has the words “I am coming soon” – the final completion of the marriage.

19:21-23 – crucifixion

** The soldiers threw dice for his clothes: his “clothes”, that is, his cloak, and his “tunic”, that is, his underwear; that is, all his clothing. He was left totally exposed – a separate study is the role of shame in the manner of Jesus’ death.

Jesus’ mother and the “Beloved Disciple”

Recall how, from the cross, Jesus commits his mother [never named, by the way, in *John*] to the care of “the disciple he loved” and commits the disciple to care for her. It’s not quite marriage, but it is the go’el / redeemer at work, so it’s definitely a family metaphor.

There’s also the interpretation of this incident as a metaphor for the (re)union of the Jerusalem and John communities after the death of the community leader John – the background to this is a large part of what ch 21 is about as well.

Table discussion

What are the parallels and contrasts between this crucifixion story and the Cana story?

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. Best wine _____ | low-quality wine |
| 2. “that hour” (disciple and mother) _____ | “my hour not yet” |
| 3. Mother / redeemer _____ | mother of Jesus |
| 4. Jars of water / wine _____ | jar/bowl of cheap wine |
| 5. It’s all done _____ | my hour is not yet |
| 6. I am thirsty _____ | wine ran out – everybody |
| thirsty | |

Presenter

Chapters 2 and 19 form an *inclusion* [two linked passages, eg same theme, or a start and end] through which the intervening content can be interpreted. That is, the Cana event and the Cross event represent the start and the end of Jesus’ ministry, and they contain common themes that add meaning to everything that has gone between them. Apart from the very beginning [the origins of Jesus] and the very end [the future of (the risen) Jesus], everything is to be interpreted through these two stories.

	Cana	Cross
Jesus’ mother		
disappears from the story after this event		returns only now to the story
my hour is not yet		from that hour
my hour [= glory] is not yet		this is the hour of glory
Water jars		
water into wine		a jar of cheap wine
water in, wine out		wine in, water out

A bit of an aside

John 17:3 – this is life: to know you ... and to know Jesus Christ. (Remember life = union.)

Adam *knew* his wife; Joseph did not *know* his wife until after Jesus was born – this is language of intimacy: in John life with God in Jesus is a union of intimacy.