

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Special Messages – Palm Sunday	Pastor/Teacher
Text:	John 2:1-11	Gary L. W. Johnson
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VOX SIGNATA

Vox signata is an expression used in Scotch law practice to emphasize an emphatic or essential word. Examples include legal terms such as *habeas corpus*, *pro bono* and *amicus curiae*. These are considered *vox signata* because they have a specific legal meaning and are used in a formal context.¹ Jesus speaks of his hour in this fashion. Ridderos summarizes: “In that connection *my hour has not yet come* is of special importance. The saying occurs over and over in John (cf. 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; cf. 26:21; 17:1; cf. also 7:6, 8). As a rule, the coming of this *hour* refers to the beginning of Jesus’ suffering, his going to the Father, his glorification, and many interpreters understand it thus here. Some think particularly of the hour of Jesus’ death and regard the subsequent miracle as a sign of the forgiveness of sin through Jesus’ blood. But Jesus’ *hour*, as a reference to the end of his earthly career, embraces the fullness of his glory, of which his death is only a part. Others, therefore, think that *the hour* in 2:4 refers to all this future glory. This hour never came during the life of Jesus, and in vs. 11b there is said to be only prophetic mention of Jesus’ glory. In this way the Evangelist is said to have warned his readers that the full significance of Jesus’ glory must be sought not in his miracles but in his subsequent glorification by the Father. But all this pays too little attention to the setting here. It is hard to see what a reference to the hour of Jesus’ departure could mean as a reply to Mary’s appeal for help. After all, she did not in fact have to wait that long before Jesus acted. The reference here is not to the hour of Jesus’ departure but to the hour of the beginning, of the breakthrough of the revelation of his glory on earth and in the flesh, and it is therefore arbitrary, in my opinion, to speak of vs. 11 as an anticipation of Jesus’ future exaltation. All that is at issue here is that Jesus cannot seize this hour, that is, the beginning, beforehand – even if his own mother urges him to do so. This is not to say that for every deed Jesus had to wait, as it were, for a certain cue from God; rather, that he was conscious that the great moment at which the Father called him to this revelation of glory had not yet come. Hence what comes sharply to the fore here, precisely at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, is his awareness that his life was subject to a certain calling that he has to fulfill at God’s direction (cf. 4:35), an awareness that one can describe in the entire framework of this Gospel as Jesus’ messianic self-consciousness and his consciousness of his divine sonship. Meanwhile, the *not yet* also implies that what Mary asked of him was not something that in itself lay outside that order but was something for which she had to await the time.”² Raymond Brown provides a helpful list of the way John uses the word *hour*: “Although the frequency of this word in John (26 times) is not extraordinary for a Gospel, the special connotation given to *the hour* in John is noteworthy. In the other Gospels *hora* almost always refers to the hour of the day, but John frequently uses the word to designate a particular and significant period in Jesus’ life. We can best determine the content of *the hour* by lining up (a) the passages which say that it has not come or is still coming, and (b) the passages which say that it has come.

(a) 2:4: *My hour has not yet come* – Cana.

4:21: *An hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem* – to the Samaritan woman.

4:23: *An hour is coming and is now here when the real worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth.*

5:25: *An hour is coming and is now here when the dead shall hear the voice of God's Son, and those who have listened shall live.*

5:28-29: *An hour is coming in which all those in the tombs shall hear his [the Son of Man's] voice and come forth.*

7:30, 8:20: Failure of an attempt to arrest Jesus *because his hour had not yet come.*

16:2: *An hour is coming when anyone who puts you to death will think he is paying homage to God.* See also 16:4.

16:25: *An hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly about the Father."*

16:32: *An hour is coming – indeed has already come – when you will be scattered each on his own.*

(b) 12:23: *The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified"* – at Jerusalem. Before this the Sanhedrin has laid plans to kill him (11:53); he has been anointed by Mary with perfume for the day of his embalming (12:7); and Gentiles have asked to see him (12:21).

12:27: Jesus does not ask his Father to save him from this hour, for he has come to this hour with a definite purpose.

13:1: The Last Supper opens with Jesus *aware that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father.*

17:1: *Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son."*³

I. THE TIME AND SCENE (vv. 1-2). The marriage took place in Cana, the home of Nathanael (cf. 1:44-50). Mary, the mother of Jesus, was evidently a close friend of the family and was already at the house when Jesus and His disciples arrived. Note, "In St. John alone," writes B. F. Westcott, "the name of the *mother of Jesus* is not mentioned, even when Joseph is named (6:42)."⁴

II. THE OCCASION (vv. 3-5). A marriage feast could last more than one day. The bridegroom and his family were responsible for that affair - and it seems they were not that well-off, since they had not made sufficient provision. According to Jewish custom of the day this could result in more than social embarrassment. It could also involve heavy pecuniary liability. Legal action could be taken against the family for failing to provide the appropriate arrangements."⁵ This sheds some light on Mary's intercession. She knew the family, and she also knew something about the pain of being the subject of social embarrassment, being whispered about by people who drew their own conclusions about the birth of her first child.

A. Jesus' Response: Above the Will of His Mother. The English translation (KJV) gives the impression of a stern rebuke. The ESV also conveys this as well. The NIV, "Dear Woman," is preferred. Jesus addressed His mother with the same word "Woman" from the cross (John 19:26). The thought is very much like that heard in the South, "Ma'am."⁶ The point Jesus makes is this: Jesus has embarked on His ministry, and He is to be free from any

kind of human advice, agenda, or manipulation, even His closest relation. As the Swiss commentator F. Godet has aptly said, "His motto henceforth is; My Father and I."⁷

B. Jesus' Response: In the Will of His Father; My Hour. This expression always has reference to Christ's death (cf. John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). How does that thought fit in this context? There is a threefold possibility:

1. Symbolism. "In studying the miracle at Cana one must," writes Edmund Clowney, "be sensitive to the symbolism of water, wine, and the wedding feast. Moses' turning of the water into blood must be recalled. The connection of the ministry of John with the water of purification, and Jesus' presence as the bridegroom (John 3:25 - 30) helps us to understand the force of Jesus' statement to his mother that his hour was not yet come."⁸
2. Anticipation. All things in the Gospels move toward the cross, towards Jesus' glorification. The individual elements in the Gospel narratives *anticipated* the glorification of Jesus on the cross "in much the same way that Jesus' healing miracles in the Synoptic Gospels are said to anticipate the cross (Matthew 8:16 - 17)."⁹
3. Connection. The miracle at Cana is not recorded in the other three gospels. It is possible that John intends us to see a connection between 2:1-11 and 3:27 -30, where Jesus is emphatically called the messianic bridegroom. If so, then when His hour comes, Jesus will supply for the last feast the best wine (Isaiah 25:6-8). "His hour was His own time, as the Father determined it, for acting or suffering by the occasion and in His own mind, in opposition to the hour which was marked out for Him by the approval of men. Therefore this reference to His hour was a consolatory assurance to His mother that He was certain of the right moment for the right result. Hence also Mary could intimate to the servants, who knew that the wine was running short, and in their position would be most of all uneasy, that they had only to do whatever Jesus told them. This language by no means implied the promise of a miracle, of which she herself knew nothing yet, but the tranquilizing power of an unshaken confidence, which expected that at the right time He would certainly obviate the difficulty as a trustworthy adviser and helper."¹⁰

III. **THE MANNER: HIS SOVEREIGN PROVISION.** The manner of working the miracle is now described, but not the method nor even a statement on how the miracle occurred. As J. C. Ryle has observed, "To Him who created the vine, and made it bear grapes at the first, the change was perfectly easy. He who could create matter out of nothing, could much more easily change one kind of matter into another."¹¹

IV. **THE RESULT: THE BEST FOR LAST.** The master of the banquet (NIV and the ESV) could best be described as the master of ceremonies. He is not aware of what has happened - only that *this* wine is better than the other. Some have drawn the erroneous conclusion from his remarks that the guests were so drunk by now that they could not tell good wine from bad. That is not the meaning. "We may be quite sure," says R. C. Trench, "there was no such excess here; for to this the Lord would as little have given allowance by His presence, as He would have helped it forward by a special wonder - work of His own. *The ruler of the feast* does not refer to a common practice, and at the same time notice the motive, namely, that

the fineness of men's palates after a while is blunted, and their power of discerning between good and bad is abated; and thus an inferior wine passes with them then, such as would not have passed with them at an earlier hour."¹²

- V. ***THE EFFECT: THE FIRST RAY OF THE LORD'S GLORY.*** There is a twofold effect of this miracle. First, the manifestation of Christ's glory to His disciples. The servants saw the miracle but not the glory. The glory was not visible to all. Second, as a result the disciples "believed in Him."¹³

CONCLUSION: Spurgeon highlights the text emphasis on how the miracle manifested Christ's glory. "Observe that *he manifested forth his glory.* Truly, he glorified the Father, for that was his great end and aim; but yet he manifested forth his own glory in that very act. Notice that it was his own glory which was manifested. This was never said of any prophet or saint. Moses, Samuel, David, Elias – none of these ever manifested their own glory; indeed, they had no glory to manifest. Here is one greater than a prophet; here is one greater than the holiest of men. He manifested his own glory; it could not be otherwise. I feel that I must adore my Lord Jesus while I read these words. Jesus revealed his own glory as God and man. During all those former years it had been veiled. He had been a boy obedient at home, a young man industrious as a carpenter at Nazareth; then his glory was a spring shut up, a fountain sealed; but now it began to flow forth in the ruddy stream of this great miracle. If you will think of it, you will see more clearly what glory it was. He was a man like other men, and yet at will he turned water into wine. He was a man with a mother: his mother was there as if to remind us that he was born of woman. He was a man with a mother, and yet he was so truly *God over all* that he created, by his will, an abundance of wine. He was but one among many wedding guests, with his six humble followers; but yet he acted the Creator's part. He sat not arrayed in high priest's garments, nor did he wear the Pharisee's phylacteries, nor any other form of ornament betokening ecclesiastical office or profession; yet he did greater wonders than they could attempt. He was simply a man among men, and yet he was God among men. His wish was law in the world of matter, so that water received the qualities of wine. Adore him, brethren! Adore him, reverently! Bow low before him who was a man, a real man, and yet wrought as only Jehovah himself can work! Worship him who counts it not robbery to be equal with God, and yet is found among the guests at a lowly marriage, manifesting his glory even there."¹⁴ When we examine the miracle recorded in the N. T. we discover that while the Apostles healed the sick and even raised the dead, they never turned water into wine. This miracle, declared to be Jesus first miraculous sign, showed that Jesus was more than a prophet. It showed Him to be truly Divine, and none other than God manifested in the flesh. "St. John is most explicit in his assertion that the *beginning of miracles* at Cana was intended to manifest the glory of the Word made flesh, Himself the revelation of the Father, full of grace and truth."¹⁵ Finally, listen to the words of Doug Kelly, one of my former professors: "John shows that Christ's glory is supremely revealed when he was lifted up on the cross: *And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified* (John 12:23); *Therefore when [Judas] was gone out [from the Last Supper], Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him* (John 13:31-32). But after the crucifixion and burial of the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8), Paul tells us that *Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father* (Rom. 6:4). Thus Christ's high priestly prayer was beginning to be fulfilled, so that his people might behold the glory he had with the Father before the world existed (cf. John 17:24)."¹⁶

ENDNOTES

¹ *Guide to Latin in International Law* (Oxford University Press, First Edition, 2009).

² Herman Ridderbos, *the Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1997), p. 105.

³ R. E. Brown, *the Gospel According to John I-XII*, The Anchor Bible (Doubleday, 1966), p. 517.

⁴ B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes* (rpt. Baker, 1980), p. 81.

⁵ Cf. Leon Morris, *the Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1977), p. 177.

⁶ This is how D. A. Carson understands the term, cf. *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1991), p. 170. Westcott points out the word “woman” (*gunai*) stands last in the response. In John 19:26 it is not last. Here the contrast comes first, then the personality. Op. cit., p. 82.

⁷ F. Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* (rpt. Zondervan, 1959), p. 187.

⁸ E. P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), p. 116.

⁹ J. P. Lange, *The Life of The Lord Jesus Christ II* (rpt. Zondervan, 1958), p. 20.

¹⁰ D. A. Carson, op. cit., p. 172.

¹¹ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts On the Gospel*, IV (rpt. Zondervan, 1948), p. 100.

¹² R. C. Trench, *Notes on the Miracles and the Parables of Our Lord* (Revell, 1953), pp/ 117-118.

¹³ This phrase (*episteusan eis auton*), is peculiarly characteristic of John. The idea which it conveys is that of absolute transference of trust from oneself to another. Cf. Westcott, op. cit., p. 87.

¹⁴ *A Treasury of Spurgeon on The Life and Work of Our Lord IV* (rpt. Baker), p. 139.

¹⁵ John Laidlaw, *The Miracles of Our Lord: Expository and Homiletic* (rpt. Baker, 1953), p. 17.

¹⁶ D. F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology II* (Mentor, 2014), p. 156.