

***John 2:1-12 Water into wine: Jesus' first sign, by Chris Faith,
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Our world changed one decade ago today. The twin towers fell, the Pentagon attacked, while further disaster was averted by the courageous men and women on Flight 93. So we remember the hundreds of victims and honor the heroes who risked and sacrificed their lives to spare others. We pray for their family and friends and ask the Lord to preserve our land from similar aggressions.

Although nothing world shaping happened that day in Blacksburg, we've had our days. Things have changed here too. But perhaps the biggest change most people have experienced is a shift in our view of life, our outlook on the world. Things aren't as safe as we once believed.

This morning we look into the Bible and consider another pivotal day. ☺ We've just heard in John chapter 2 an eyewitness account of an event, even more world shaping than what happened on 9/11. John tells us the first time God's Son, Jesus, demonstrated His power and what He came to do. And my prayer is that even more than the shift that happened as a result of the **curse of 9/11**, we will be reshaped by the **blessing** that happened in Cana of Galilee.

Continuing our series on the Gospel of John we will ponder four elements of that celebration. We will look at first the **MOMENT**, Second: the **MOTHER**, Third: the **MESSAGE**, and Fourth: the **MANIFESTATION OF JESUS' GLORY**.

- ***The moment***
- ***The mother***
- ***The message***
- ***The manifestation of Jesus' glory***

John begins identifying **THE MOMENT**. In John 2 verse 1, he tells us that wedding in Cana occurred on the third day. Looking back over chapter 1 we realize John's been counting days since Jesus appeared after his temptation in the wilderness. Adding up those days its clear the wedding feast occurred on the seventh day.

From the beginning of this gospel, John parallels **Jesus** with **God** in the Genesis text. In Genesis we read "In the beginning God. In John we read "In the beginning the **WORD**." In Genesis God blessed the seventh day as the Sabbath, reserved it for rest and communion. In John Jesus blessed the seventh day by participating in a wedding feast and offered a special gift to promote the celebration and make it holy.

In Genesis humanity begins with the wedding of Adam and Eve, God presiding over the ceremony. In the book of Revelation the next chapter of humanity begins when God gives us to be the bride of Christ, and He presides over the ceremony; how fitting then that Jesus began to demonstrate His glory on the seventh day at a wedding feast. This is good news. ☺ Jesus, the Lamb of God, didn't come to give us a burden to bear, but to free us from sin and invite us to a wedding feast. This is the essence of the Christian life. So John reminds us of the **MOMENT** of this miracle to help us see that the Man Jesus is also the Creator of heaven and earth.

The second element we notice in this marvelous wedding feast is **THE MOTHER**.

Many scholars suspect that Mary still may have been living with John at the time of this writing so the evangelist may have avoided using her name to preserve her from undue complications. And curiously, Jesus identifies her respectfully, addressing her simply as “woman.” He thereby placed her in exactly the category she belongs when standing before the Creator of the universe. Jesus spoke to her kindly as a part of creation, but without any inside favors.

Consider Mary’s response to Jesus’ words. She boldly said, “Whatever He says to you, DO IT.” Now, that’s one good take away from today’s message. Please, let’s heed Mary. “Whatever He says to you, DO IT.” That’s unbeatable counsel from a person who knew Jesus like very few others. Let’s apply those words ☺ need to be applied.

The third element in this beautiful narrative, we consider THE MESSAGE OF this miracle. By turning water into wine, Jesus gives us a picture of the very nature of reality. John wants us to know that the CREATOR of the Universe, the Word that became flesh, did not come to make a new law, but to fulfill it. He came to invite us into a celebration, to welcome us to a relationship of love and intimacy and devotion. This is the message of Jesus’ first miracle, the first of seven signs that John records.

So why would the eternal Son of God begin to display His glory by such a frivolous miracle as turning water into wine? Why not start with a big bang? Why not raise the dead, or feed thousands of hungry people with one boy’s bag lunch?

I’m convinced Jesus began by turning water into wine because He wanted to make clear from the very beginning the nature of God’s New Covenant, the reason the Son of God became the Son of Man. He came to reconcile us to God, to usher in a whole new way of intimacy with God.

Jesus wanted us to know He came to start a new chapter in man’s relationship to God. The reality is we can’t measure up to God’s holiness. Water pots for washing don’t bring us into God’s holiness. But Jesus’ death on our behalf truly does.

Hebrews 7:18-19 says it this way:

“The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.”

You see, Jesus’ message was that with His coming, a whole new age of intimacy with God is now possible. Here is what the prophet Hosea had to say about this New Covenant, in Hosea 2:14-16

Hosea 2:14-16 "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, Bring her into the wilderness, And speak kindly to her. Then I will give her vineyards from there, and the valley of Achor as a door of hope. And she will sing there as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. And it will come about in that day," declares the LORD, "That you will call Me HUSBAND and will no longer call Me MASTER."

With this sign at a beautiful wedding feast, Jesus points out that He had come to change the very nature of the way men relate to God. This is the marvel of the New Covenant.

It helps to understand that Christianity is radically different from all other religions. Sadly, all of us tend to relate to God on the basis of religion rather than

focusing on our relationship with God. To get some clarity, let me contrast the message of the gospel with the nature of religion.

<u>Religion (Law) WATER</u>	<u>Gospel (Relationship) WINE</u>
God accepts me based on my good deeds	God accepts me based on Jesus' good deed: The Cross
I fear God lest I don't measure up	I love God who first loved me
When life gets hard I blame myself, others or God	When life gets hard I look to Jesus for comfort and protection
My prayer is stiff, mostly petition to get God to do my will and meet my needs	My prayer flows from love and is filled w/ worship and thanksgiving
I tend to be either proud or self condemning	I think little of self because I'm caught up in the wonder of God's greatness: His love for this sinner
I choose to help others b/c it's right, to look good or to earn points with God	I want to serve others out of gratitude for God's infinite kindness
I am judgmental b/c I try hard to measure up	I am gracious/kind because I recognize my sin and failings
I want God's approval	I want God's friendship
Life is a burden	His burden is light
Life is "plain"	Life is filled with joy

Now, please don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that every day with Christ is like a big party. That's not the message of this miracle, but rather that when we are connected with Christ, shall we say... the flavor of our life changes.

One of my prayers for us as we walk through the gospel of John is that we would in a deeper, more profound way, come to believe the love of God for us. One noteworthy detail of this gospel is that John never names himself. Rather, he refers to himself as "the disciple that Jesus loved." Now, do you think John suspected that Jesus had favorites? Do you suppose John thought God was a respecter of persons?

Not likely. But rather, John simply had the audacity to really believe that Jesus loved **him**. He had the audacity to trust that God really is LOVE therefore he understood that Jesus was wild about him. So he snuggled into Jesus' chest and leaned on his shoulder.

Dear ones, I am asking God to give me that audacity. I am asking Him to give that to you too. O that we have the audacity to really believe that we are the disciples that Jesus loves.

This is why Jesus turned water into wine. The Old way was characterized by sacrifice and ceremonial washings. Those large stone pots at the wedding feast existed for that purpose. But Jesus took what was made for ceremonial cleansing and transformed it into a vessel to hold a symbol of the New Way, a picture of joy and celebration, and a picture of Jesus' blood spilt for us. Rather than having us scrub to stand before God, Jesus invites us into Communion, and He has provided the wine. This is the work of God: overcoming the works of the evil one, to restore right relationships with God and one another. When we love Him and one another, God is glorified.

That's why I Corinthians tells us if you raise the dead, give all your money to the poor, move mountains with your prayer, but fail to love you've done nothing. The work of the gospel is to establish healthy relationships first between God and man, then between man and man. And with clear vision, Jesus demonstrated His blessing of relationships in the context of a wedding.

With this miracle, Jesus strikes at the very heart of one of the most insidious cultural shifts going on today. And as our nation woke up the threat of radical Islam on 9/11, we need to wake up to this destructive force.

God wants to promote deep, lasting relationships with Himself and others. He blesses the family. Meanwhile, American educators are promoting the idea that **society** should be responsible for the next generation. Many are quite comfortable when marriages come unglued, because that gives more power to the nanny state. But Jesus blessed the institution of marriage. God knows when family dynamics are strong: health improves; children are more secure, and generally become law abiding citizens, the elderly receive care, and society as a whole simply works better.

Jesus came to challenge the status quo, then and now. There are two sides of today's culture war and the battle is raging so we need to wake up. Sadly many of us are drifting along with the tide of our culture's shift without even knowing. But Jesus blessed a wedding to begin to wake people up.

Hollywood makes money selling the lie that adultery and homosexuality are acceptable lifestyles. They want people to think hooking up or same sex unions are all fine and good. And the media is changing the way Americans see the very nature of family. Gallup reported in May that for the first time **ever** a majority (53 to 45%) of Americans said that same sex couples should have the same marriage rights as "straight" couples, while as recently as in 1996 the majority leaned 68% to 27% the other way.

God declares Marriage is to be held in honor among all. He established marriage as the union of one husband and one wife to live in faithful love for a lifetime. Promoting anything else strikes at the fundamental building block of every healthy society.

While our society wants to promote "alternative lifestyles" studies demonstrate that healthy kids need both a man and a woman as parents. A recent study published in the *Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science* indicates kids whose fathers live with them, and are actively engaged in their lives, have higher IQs and fewer behavioral problems than those in single-parent homes headed by moms.

Jesus began His ministry blessing a wedding while in our society the marriage is in melt down mode. "The National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia points

to a widening “Marriage gap.” (quote) *“Traditional family values are enjoying a revival among better educated Americans, but are fraying in the lower middle class and have collapsed among the poor.” “Family instability is on the rise for American children as a whole. This is mainly because more couples are having children in cohabiting unions, which are very unstable. This report also indicates that children in cohabiting households are more likely to suffer from a range of emotional and social problems—drug use, depression, and dropping out of high school—compared to children in intact, married families.”*

Columnist Marybeth Hicks of the Washington Times commented on Aug 23 that some 40% of the American population believes that marriage as an institution is obsolete. She says, *“The reality is that traditional families - those formed around a husband and wife who remain married for life, and that include their biological children - are increasingly on the decline.”*

So how are we to respond to the message of Jesus’ first sign? The Lord wants us to let Him fill our hearts and change us like water into wine. He wants us to receive Him, like those wedding guests enjoyed that fine wine. When our lives reflect His presence and power and love, they will want to know what we’ve been drinking ☺

As the hymn writer said: (SLIDE)

Thy mighty love, O God, constraineth me, as some strong tide it presses on its way, seeking a channel in my self-bound soul, yearning to sweep all barriers away.

Shall I not yield to that constraining power? Shall I not say, O tide of Love, flow in? My God, Thy gentleness hath conquered me. Life cannot be as it hath hither been.

Break through my nature, mighty, heavenly Love. Clear every avenue of thought and brain. Flood my affections, purify my will. Let nothing but Thine own pure life remain.

Jesus, by turning water into wine, made a bold declaration about the Christian life. He calls you to enter into His love and celebrate, then share His love with others. We can be agents of that transformation. God wants the reality of that miracle to shape our culture as much as 9/11 has.

Now, don’t get me wrong. Just because Jesus turned water into wine, doesn’t mean we don’t have periods of deep gloom. Jesus Himself was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Even the best of relationships aren’t what we long for. Death and sin still plague us. And so often our attitudes and actions don’t please God or those around us. None of us love very well. We also suffer with the failures of others to love us. But, dear ones, God wants to use that healthy discontentment to draw you deeper into your relationship with Him.

Jesus blessed the wedding of Cana in Galilee because He wants you to enjoy being His Bride. He longs to bless you and your relationships: be that family, your friendships, or your work dynamics. The gospel is about Joy and peace and love.

Lastly, let’s consider the fourth element of Jesus’ first sign. (slide) The MANIFESTATION OF JESUS’ GLORY. John 2:11 says, *This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.*

With this miracle Jesus began to show His stuff. John records for us seven signs of Jesus’ glory and reminds us of seven times that Jesus speaks of Himself as “I AM.” So

one good thread for you to watch as we study John's gospel is to stay on the lookout for The Seven Signs and Seven I AM's. Briefly let me overview Jesus' seven signs. The Seven Signs are as follows:

SEVEN SIGNS:

JESUS IS LORD OVER:

Water into wine	2:1-11	Quality
Healing nobleman's son	4:46-54	Distance
Healing of lame man	5:1-9	Time
Feeding five thousand	6:1-14	Quantity
Walking on water	6:16-21	Natural law
Healing of blind man	9:1-1	Misfortune
Raising of Lazarus	11:1-46	Death

John tells us Jesus manifested His glory. We can take that to mean, "flexed His muscles," or "showed His stuff." Jesus is glorious because Jesus is God. He is the eternal Son, the Creator of all things. In order to become man Jesus laid His glory aside, but the brilliant light of divinity still broke through the veil of His humanity. This act demonstrated His true nature.

Also notice, it was the disciples who believed in Him. O, you ask, didn't the disciples already believe? And the answer is yes and no. The same is true for us today. Do we believe in Christ? Well, we may answer, yes and no.

Believers need the gospel as much as non-believers. We need our faith strengthened, or hearts warmed daily. Jonny Miller used to say, "I need the gospel every day!" And so do we. Paul unpacked the gospel in his letter to the Romans and sent it to believers.

But at Jesus' miracle the disciples were amazed, just as you would have been. They watched the servants scurrying back and forth to fill six large jugs with water. You can be sure they were baffled. They were clueless. They didn't know Jesus very well at the time, and I'd bet not one expected Jesus to make a fine wine that fast. No one else had done anything like that. ☺

And that is the point. Only Jesus turns water into wine. And because He did, the disciples believed. In a new, fresh way, in a deeper, sweeter way, the disciples believed Jesus is the Savior and the Lord of the universe. And only Jesus can change the flavor of your life.

Dear ones, Jesus' manifested His glory by turning water into wine so that you, today might believe. O perhaps you have believed for a long time. Great, but today, will you in a fresh way, look to Jesus and enjoy Him, praise Him, love Him?

Perhaps you have not yet believed, not in any profound way, trusted in Jesus. Today is a fine day to do that. Believe involves trust. It involves putting the weight of your life into Jesus' hands. It involves letting Him cleanse you from sin, and in return you receive Him as your Lord and Lover.

Jesus came because the only way to peace with God is not by our efforts to cleanse ourselves, but by the cleansing that He made available on the cross. Just as He miraculously transformed water into wine, He offers to miraculously cleanse you from sin and guilt and shame. Only Jesus can do that.