

Jesus Turns Water to Wine: John 2:1-11
 Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church
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Do you like going to weddings? Your answer to that question may depend on various factors. Who's getting married? Who else will be there? Where's it going to be? Are they serving dinner? What's on the menu?

I really enjoy weddings. As a pastor, I have the privilege of being closely involved in weddings. Stacy and I have fun getting to know couples as they're preparing for marriage, talking with them about marriage. And then we love being able to be part of the wedding celebration.

A wedding is a time for family and friends to gather together and rejoice in the love of this new husband and wife. It's a monumental event in the life of the bride and the groom and the parents of the bride and groom, and the siblings, and for close friends. Weddings are very memorable events, and they mark such an important covenant that a man and a woman are making to one another before God.

Well, in our passage for this morning's sermon, we find Jesus at a wedding celebration. His public ministry is beginning, and this is the first miracle, the first sign, that John records in this Gospel. Jesus turning water to wine at the wedding in Cana.

We'll see in this account that Jesus celebrates, Jesus begins His public ministry, Jesus reveals His glory, Jesus provides, and we'll see that Jesus is worthy of our trust.

Jesus Celebrates

Verse 2 tells us that Jesus was invited to attend this wedding celebration along with His disciples. So far there have been 5 disciples mentioned, in chapter 1, verses 35 and following. There's Andrew and the unnamed disciple of John the Baptist (whom we assume is John the Evangelist). Then there's Andrew's brother, Simon Peter. And then Philip and Nathanael.

So here we have Jesus and these 5 disciples coming to participate in the festivities of a wedding. And these were celebrations that could go on for a few days. It was a big deal. We're not told what the connection is with the wedding, if it was a relative of Mary's, or a relative of one of the disciples. We do know that Nathanael was from this small town, Cana in Galilee (we're told that in John 21:2, that this was Nathanael's hometown). We also know that Mary was in attendance at this wedding, and may have been somewhat involved in the details of hosting the wedding. After all, she was the one who realized the wine was out, and came to tell Jesus.

However Jesus ended up on the invitation list . . . it's irrelevant, really . . . what's interesting to see is that He went, He wanted to be there, He wanted to participate in this great celebration.

It's important for us to see this about our Savior. Some Christians don't seem to have any place in their lives for celebration, for laughter and joyous time together with friends and family, for the enjoyment of a banquet like this. Jesus was very much part of the party. He was there having a good time. Not doing anything sinful. But He was happy to be there in the midst of a great time of celebration.

This really shouldn't surprise us at all. This is the type of celebration we look forward to in heaven—a celebration that will last forever, a celebration where the wine will never run out, the food will never run out. And more importantly than any of that, the host will never disappoint, will never become boring, will never cease to enthrall us with the glory of who He is.

I love that passage in Isaiah 55 which we read earlier in the service. What an invitation it is to celebrate. To come to the feast of the Lord and enjoy Him. And, of course, it's an invitation that requires nothing of the guests. You don't have to pay to get into this party. Just respond to the invitation. Just show up.

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.” (Isaiah 55:1–2, ESV)

Our Lord has a banquet for us to enjoy. And the best thing is that we get to be part of that celebration with Him. That's the invitation to come to God and to delight in the free offer of knowing Him, of belonging to Him.

And one day, when Jesus returns, there will be a wedding feast like none other.

“Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure’—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” And he said

to me, *“These are the true words of God.”*” (Revelation 19:6–9, ESV)

Oh, Jesus loves to celebrate. And there will be much to celebrate for all eternity. The marriage supper of the Lamb will be a celebration of the greatest of weddings—the marriage that all other marriages are a faint reflection of, the marriage of Jesus Christ, the bridegroom, and His bride, the church.

And that’s another thing we should reflect on as we consider this passage in John 2. We should notice what this particular celebration is about. It’s the celebration of a new marriage. Oftentimes pastors will mention this passage from John 2 at wedding ceremonies, and appropriately so. Jesus loves to celebrate. And Jesus loves to celebrate marriage. Here He is in Cana making a statement about marriage, simply by being there, as well as through His miraculous provision which greatly added to the joy and celebration of this event.

Jesus loves marriage. It is, by God’s design, a symbol throughout the world, of something infinitely precious. Human marriage points beyond itself to something that is far more beautiful than even the very best of human marriages. Human marriage, from the start, has been one of God’s blessings upon humanity for the good of humanity in a great many ways, and as a way of telling the story of Christ and the church. Marriage is meant by God to be a picture for us of what Jesus’ relationship to the church is like.

Of course, we mess up that picture so often. But the ideal we’re called to is something very beautiful, indeed. As Ephesians 5 describes for us . . . husbands loving their wives sacrificially, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . . wives graciously submitting to their husbands, as the church submits to Christ. That’s the picture. That’s the life-giving model for us in our marriages. And it’s what every believer (married or single) can celebrate, that we have a sacrificial leader—our Lord Jesus Christ—who is coming back someday to usher us into that eternal wedding feast.

What I’m about to say should go without saying. But it can no longer go without saying. This biblical vision of marriage—God’s design for marriage—very clearly implies one man and one woman entering into this covenant with one another. The notion of “same-sex marriage” is a misnomer. That’s a contradiction in terms. It’s like referring to a “married bachelor” or a triangle with four sides.

I don’t say this to be harsh or hateful. Quite to the contrary, I say this out of love for a culture that is very confused

about love and sex and marriage. Jesus, the Bridegroom, and the One who loves to celebrate weddings, He is greatly saddened by the many ways that this glorious institution is being attacked. He's not surprised, for He knows all things. But He does grieve the ways that our fallen world distorts and destroys the good things He has given us.

These are uncertain times for us in this country. We're watching as fundamental values are eroding away so rapidly. What we can be certain of is the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, the One who celebrates marriage and all it signifies, namely, His relationship to the church.

Jesus Begins His Public Ministry

Now let's get into some of the details of this account. Here Jesus is beginning His public ministry. Notice the tight chronology of events John is laying out for us. What we have in John 1-2 is the first week of Jesus' ministry. After the prologue of 1:1-18, we then have the account of John the Baptist interacting with a delegation of Jews who were asking, "Who are you?" We'll say that's day #1. Verse 29 of chapter 1 says, "The next day [John] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God . . .'" We'll call that day #2. Verse 35, "the next day." Day #3, when Andrew and the other disciple leave John the Baptist to follow Jesus, and then Day #4 Andrew gets his brother Simon Peter. Verse 43. "The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee." Day #5, when Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael.

And now 2:1 opens in this way: "On the third day," which we should take as the third day from the previous account. That is, the third day following Jesus' call of Philip and Nathanael. We would probably say, "2 days after . . ." So if Jesus called Philip and Nathanael on day #5, this is now day #7. John has recounted the events of week 1 in Jesus' public ministry, starting with John the Baptist's announcements about the Lamb of God, and now Jesus taking center stage, especially here at the wedding.

Notice in verse 11 John refers to this miracle as the first of Jesus' signs. John in this Gospel is very focused on communicating who Jesus is. And each of the miracles recorded here convey something about Jesus' identity. John wants his readers to know that Jesus is the Christ. I've been quoting those verses from the end of John 20 to ingrain in our minds what this Gospel is all about, what the purpose is.

"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:30-31, ESV)

John is not attempting to give us an account of everything Jesus ever did. As John says in the very last verse of the book, *“Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”* (John 21:25, ESV)

We’re getting snapshots here. We’re getting a selection of events, carefully chosen, carefully written, not-to-mention inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that we are reading things that will be most helpful to us in understanding the identify of Jesus as the Messiah.

And John chooses 7 signs to tell us about. Chapters 2-12 contain 7 of these amazing miracles / signs, which capture the significance of who Jesus is. Chapters 2-12 tell us of Jesus’ public ministry, and we read in these chapters of 7 unique signs.

The first is this, the turning of water to wine at the wedding in Cana. The second is the healing of an official’s son in chapter 4. Then the healing of a disabled man at a pool in chapter 5. Then the feeding of the 5,000 in chapter 6, and Jesus walking on the water also in chapter 6. Then He heals a man who was born blind in chapter 9. And finally He raises Lazarus from the dead in chapter 11.

Another interesting feature of John’s Gospel are the 7 “I am” statements that are included. This, too, fits with John’s purpose to convince us of Jesus’ identity as the Messiah. Jesus’ ministry, in miraculous signs and in authoritative words, is immensely persuasive as to His identity. In deeds and in statements, Jesus reveals Himself. Jesus says of Himself . . .

“I am the bread of life . . .” 6:35

“I am the light of the world . . .” 8:12

“I am the door of the sheep.” 10:7

“I am the good shepherd.” 10:11

“I am the resurrection and the life.” 11:25

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” 14:6

“I am the true vine . . .” 15:1

We’ll be looking at each of those statements in the weeks and months to come in our ongoing study through this book. Marvel at this, friends, that Jesus has graciously chosen to let us know who He is. Jesus came into this world, and He said who He is, and He demonstrated who He is. In mighty words and in mighty works, He showed Himself to be the one and only Savior. Many harden their hearts and refuse to believe. But there is plenty of evidence here, recorded so carefully and preserved for us through the centuries. This is our Savior, and He is our only hope.

This is the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry, and there is much more amazing stuff to come.

Jesus Reveals His Glory

Verse 11 says, “This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory.” It’s really interesting to watch how this all plays out. Jesus performs this miracle somewhat discreetly, and it may seem even reluctantly. First of all, the wine runs out, which would be a tremendous embarrassment to the hosts, specifically to the bridegroom. It would indicate poor planning, or a lack of resources, or both. And if there’s anything the bridegroom would want the family to be assured of, it’s that he’s going to be able to provide for their daughter. This situation would be annoying and disappointing to all the guests. It would be extremely uncomfortable for the groom, who in that culture was the one responsible for the wedding feast. We see that in verses 9-10 where the master of the feast calls the bridegroom and questions why he saved the best wine for last. What Jesus does here is take a situation that could really be a trial for this groom and turns it into a situation that just increases the groom’s happiness and enjoyment of this special event.

When Mary tells Jesus that the wine is gone, Jesus has this curious response. “Woman, what does this have to do with me?” Calling his mother “woman” might sound rude, in our ears. I don’t think it would have come across that way to Mary or those who were listening in. The same word is used in recording that poignant moment when Jesus was hanging on the cross and saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, and He said to His mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” (19:26).

This was not derogatory or disrespectful. What does seem to be happening, though, is Jesus putting a bit of distance between Himself and His mother, at least to show that the benefits of His power are not limited to or focused on family connections. Do you remember that awkward moment in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) where Jesus’ mother and brothers come looking for Him. “*And he was told, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you.” But he answered them, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”*” (Luke 8:20–21, ESV)

Jesus doesn’t show preferential treatment toward anyone based on their family connections. It’s the spiritual family of those who are united to Him by faith, that’s what matters most, what matters eternally.

So it seems that Jesus wants to show Mary, wants to show the disciples and others who are looking on, and wants to show us, that He’s not going to do something special for Mary just because she’s His mother. Interestingly enough, He does go on to do something spectacular, and I’m sure this was beyond anything Mary could have imagined. But still, He first wants to make clear

that He's not doing it as a special favor for an earthly family member.

And, by the way, this text should never be used as a reason to pray to Mary, reasoning that Mary has some special access to Jesus. That wouldn't make sense, from this passage or anywhere else in Scripture. Don't pray to Mary. If you are in Christ, you have access directly to Him. He will hear you. You don't have to go through a priest or Mary or anyone else.

Jesus calls her woman instead of mother, putting a bit of distance between them. And then He makes this statement which is translated in the ESV, "what does this have to do with me?" In the Greek, very literally, He's saying, "What to me and to you?" Meaning, what is there here that concerns both me and you?

You see, as Jesus is beginning His public ministry, He has to put some distance between Himself and the family He grew up in. Lest there be any confusion about His identity and mission, He has to set out on His own, separating Himself, at least to some degree, even from His own mother.

Don Carson makes this insightful comment, "This must have been extremely difficult for Mary. She had borne him, nursed him, taught his baby fingers elementary skills, watched him fall over as he learned to walk; apparently she had also come to rely on him as the family provider. But now that he had entered into the purpose of his coming, everything, even family ties, had to be subordinated to his divine mission. She could no longer view him as other mothers viewed their sons; she must no longer be allowed the prerogatives of motherhood."¹

There is this distance now between Jesus and His mother. His next statement in response to her is, "My hour has not yet come." He's voicing some reluctance about displaying His power because the time for his death and resurrection is yet to come. It's not time yet.

It's not clear exactly what Mary was expecting. She wasn't necessarily asking for a miracle. She may have simply been looking to Jesus to help out in some way, given the predicament of the hosts. Joseph had probably passed away by this time—he's not mentioned after the story of Jesus in the temple, when Jesus was 12. So Mary had probably become accustomed to asking for Jesus' help in many different ways. After all, He's Jesus! I'm sure He would have been extremely helpful in any and every situation that came up. And she's looking for His help again now.

But Jesus knows that performing a miracle would begin to set things in motion. He would be going public to let the world know His identity. And He knows that will ultimately result in

¹ D. A. Carson, John, page 171.

Him hanging on a cross. That hour has not yet come. But apparently the time for Him to begin that journey toward the cross has come. And so He proceeds with a somewhat discreet, but still utterly amazing, miracle.

Mary doesn't argue with Him, even though it sounds like He's refusing her request. She trusts that Jesus will do whatever is best. She does still seem to be expecting that He will do something. For she says to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Which, by the way, is a great exhortation to anyone who desires to be a servant, a disciple, of Jesus. Do whatever He tells you. And if you do, you're bound to see some really great things.

There were these jars for the Jewish rites of purification. They were very large stone water jars, and there were 6 of them. Each one could hold 20 to 30 gallons. We're talking about a lot of water here, and then a lot of wine. The miracle, itself, happens without notice. There's not a lighting bolt from the sky that strikes the stone pots and all of a sudden the water becomes wine. Jesus doesn't dip His hand in the water or pray over the water. It just happens, at some point between the jars being filled with water and the master of the feast tasting it, it has miraculously turned from water to wine.

This isn't interpreted for us in the text, but it seems there is some symbolism in the water coming from water jars that were for the Jewish rites of purification, and Jesus turns it into something new, something wonderful, this very good wine. In the OT, wine symbolizes the arrival of the Messianic age (see Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13-14; Jer 31:12).

In John 1 we remember those words near the end of the Prologue, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (1:17). It may be that this first sign is giving a vivid portrayal of that reality. The rituals of the old covenant are coming to an end, and being changed / transformed into something so much better, something joyous. A new day has dawned, and that is something to celebrate.

Jesus Provides

Two final points, each will be brief. I simply want us to realize Jesus' lavish provision in this miracle. We don't know how many people were at this wedding. We don't know how much wine had already been consumed. We don't know how much longer the festivities would continue. But whatever the circumstances, the amount of wine Jesus created was far more than enough. He was extravagant in His blessings upon this wedding. He didn't just fix the problem. He made this a moment to remember for all eternity.

He made a whole lot of wine. And He made really, really good wine. He does something similar in feeding the 5,000. Do you remember what happened after everyone had eaten? The disciples filled 12 baskets with the leftovers.

Our God is a provider. He has no lack. Which means there's nothing we can do to help Him out or shore up some weakness or deficiency of His. He has no weakness, no deficiency. He is all-sufficient, and we see that in these miracles.

Our Savior is not someone who needs us to pay up, and then maybe He'll do something to help us. No, He is full to the brim, like those stone pots. He is full to overflowing with blessings for His children.

Jesus is Worthy of Our Trust

And therefore, lastly, our response to Him should be to believe in Him. That was the disciples' response. It should be ours as well. The disciples realized what had happened. Even though there wasn't lightning from the sky or anything obvious that would call attention to the fact that a miracle had occurred. They put 2 and 2 together very quickly. It was water that was put into the jars. And now the master of the feast, and now the rest of us, are tasting it and realizing it's the best wine we've ever had. Jesus has done a miracle.

These guys had just met Jesus a few days ago. They've listened to Him and learned some amazing things from Him already. Nathanael has experienced Jesus' extensive, divine knowledge. These disciples have begun to recognize Jesus for who He is. And now they're standing in complete amazement at the fact that He not only speaks with such authority, He has a command over creation. He can turn water to wine. And they believed.

I pray that each of us here this morning will believe as well. We've seen this morning that Jesus loves to celebrate. And He celebrates the wonderful institution of marriage, which is between a man and a woman. We've talked about the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. We've seen that Jesus reveals His glory. And Jesus provides. And Jesus is worthy of our trust.