

Water Into Wine

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[0 : 01] Welcome to another online church service here at Becclew. It's always a pleasure to welcome our church family and then to know that there's family and friends from different places joining with us so we hope we'll all hear God together from his word as we spend some time singing, praying, reading the Bible, hearing how the Bible speaks to our lives.

I want to begin with some verses from the Old Testament, from the book of Isaiah, a promise that we'll come back to actually as we think about John's Gospel.

On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats and the finest of wines.

On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations. He will swallow up death forever. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces.

He will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. Wonderful promises of hope as we begin our time together.

[1 : 18] Now we're going to read in our Bibles. We're moving from the Gospel of Matthew to the Gospel of John. We're beginning a series looking at the signs that Jesus performs, that John records.

There are seven signs recorded in his Gospel. And we come to the first of them here in John chapter 2. And we're going to read from verse 1 to verse 11.

And the words will come on the screen. On the third day, a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. And Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

When the wine was gone and Jesus' mother said to him, They have no more wine. Woman, why do you involve me? Jesus replied. My hour has not yet come.

His mother said to the servants, Do whatever he tells you. Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from 80 to 120 litres.

[2 : 28] Jesus said to the servants, Fill the jars with water. So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.

They did so. And the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realise where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew.

Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, Everyone brings out the choice wine first, and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink. But you have saved the best till now.

What Jesus did here in Cana in Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

So there's the first sign that Jesus is recorded as doing by John's gospel as he turns water into wine.

[3 : 31] Our wedding meal, a good number of years ago now, started with a bang. Quite literally, we were having some beef, and just before it was served, the glass covering over the beef to keep it warm, it smashed, sending shards into all those fine cuts.

And so we were unaware of this. We got served first, and so we had 15 minutes of, I can't, oh God, what's going on? Before the kitchen staff saved the day and everything was absolutely fine.

The last time that I had the chance to speak on John chapter 2, it was at a wedding. Kellen, our music maestro, and Sarah, it was their wedding last summer.

That was a time of great joy and celebration for friends and family of the church, a time of feasting, all those things that we associate with a wedding.

Well, here, what have we just read? Here is a wedding party that threatens to go out, not with a bang, but to go out with a whimper. And Jesus, an invited guest, shows his glory.

[4 : 50] John has introduced Jesus as the word who comes revealing glory already. In John chapter 1 and verse 14, the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son who came from the father, full of grace and truth. And here, Jesus shows his glory in this, the first of his signs.

He shows that he is the true Lord of the feast who brings joy. We see in verse 11 of what we just read that John likes to use the language of signs.

In the other gospels, there's a great focus on miracles. John talks about signs. And in fact, he says that his gospel has a focus on his signs and the purpose for them.

So towards the end, in John chapter 20, we read Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these, so the ones that we have, are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

[6 : 06] John has recorded what happened at this wedding so that we might believe Jesus is the Messiah, that we would see he's the Son of God and that by believing in him, we would have eternal life.

So we need to think about signs. When John talks about signs, what is he talking about? He's thinking of a sign as a mark of authenticity.

Just like the Old Testament prophets, here is a sign that shows that Jesus is from God, that he is revealing God in his words, in his actions.

These are called signs because they are also pointers, symbols towards deeper eternal realities. And we'll see that each week as we study. So they are signposts speaking to us of the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and his authority and his mission to be Messiah, to be Saviour.

So when we see Jesus, the guest, putting this wedding feast right, saving the day, it's going to be a sign for us of how he will put everything right.

[7 : 20] So to help us to see what this sign reveals in a little more detail, we're going to go backwards, as it were, and we're going to look at three sets of people to help us with that.

So first of all, let's think about the experience of the bridegroom. And we'll see that Jesus, by his generosity, turns shame to honour.

Now, weddings are a big deal in our day and maybe we know people who are concerned because of the virus, whether their wedding can happen. Now, weddings in Jesus' day, they were massive.

Massive to the couple, biggest day of their life. Massive to the whole extended family and community. So there would be typically a feast lasting anything up to a week.

And so we read that Mary is here, the mother of Jesus. Jesus is here. His disciples are there. Here is Jesus, the eternal Son of God, who's just begun his public ministry and he's at a wedding.

[8 : 23] It's the beginning of his public ministry and he's going to help out this bridegroom. Now, the bridegroom's job, weddings in Jesus' day, presumably same as ours, to kind of stay out of the way, largely.

But also, it was his job to provide the wine. You've got one job, bridegroom, make sure there's plenty of wine. So what happens in verse three, when Mary, Jesus' mother says, they have no more wine, this is a total disaster.

In an honour, shame culture, this couple, they are never going to live this down. Their marriage, in a sense, is going to be tainted from day one because of this disaster.

But in steps Jesus. Notice, when Jesus speaks to his mother and says, why do you involve me? He's, in a sense, saying, I don't need to get involved.

And that highlights the fact that Jesus is choosing to get involved in this man's problem, in his crisis. And how does Jesus meet the need?

[9 : 34] Well, first of all, we're told in verse six onwards that Jesus provides generously. There was those huge stone water jars holding around about a hundred litres.

Six of them get filled to the brim and then are turned to wine. So that's about 600 bottles of wine that Jesus produces in his lavish generosity.

And in verse 10, we discover he provides the very best. You have saved the best till now. So the master of the feast, who has presumably tasted the good wine at the beginning, he's like, whoa, you've saved the best till now.

So this wedding, it's not going to go down in shame, not going to be marked by embarrassment and dishonour. It's going to continue with joy and celebration and this bridegroom is going to be honoured.

Now, what's the deeper reality of this sign? What can we say at this stage? Well, it becomes clear in Jesus' ministry that he comes to bring in the kingdom of God.

[10 : 46] He comes to bring in the new age. And what's that like? Well, it's marked by God's generous provision, God's grace, a love and a kindness that we do not deserve.

It's marked by the bringing of deep joy. Jesus enables celebration, true celebration. celebration, just ask this bridegroom.

His shame, his failure to provide, has been generously covered by Jesus. So now this bridegroom is being honoured. He's totally unaware of what Jesus has done, but he's being honoured and so he can share the joy and his guests also get to share in joy.

His experience is a picture of what Jesus came to do. that shame, that guilt, that stuff we want to hide. Those things in our life that we know are wrong and that we deserve judgment for, Jesus came to remove that from us, to clothe us with honour so that we can have joy.

We read in Isaiah 25 of what the Lord Almighty would do. He would prepare a rich feast. Jesus is Lord of the feast. He provides the feast.

[12 : 09] He has come to end death and sorrow. He has come to bring in a kingdom of eternal glory and joy. You think of it the best wedding or the best feast you've ever been at and we know there'll be friends, there'll be family, there'll be laughter, there'll be joy, there'll be celebration, there'll be love and that's all there in what Jesus wants to provide.

This wedding feast in a sense is a little window into heaven because Jesus came to establish the kingdom of God, to establish in the fullness of time when he returns the world we all want.

A world where sorrow and death is gone, a world where love and joy are complete and never ending and Jesus promised he's come to do that and that sounds amazing, doesn't it?

But how will he do that? How can he do that? And that takes us to the servants in verses 5 to 9 and what happens in the conversation between Jesus and the servants is we see Jesus replaces the old with the new.

Now before we even get there, there's that really interesting dialogue between Mary and Jesus and we'll touch on it very briefly. When Jesus is approached by his mother and she says the wine, they have no more wine, Mary clearly appreciates Jesus is able to help.

[13 : 43] Jesus is the one to turn to when we need help and that's a wonderful reality that I hope we all come to recognise. and then Jesus says, woman, why do you involve me?

And his mother said to the servants, do whatever he tells you. And that's great advice. That's great advice for the life of discipleship. We are called to follow Jesus, our master, to do what he tells us, to do what we find in his word and it's also a sign of her faith and Jesus responds to her faith and begins a conversation with the servants.

So what are the servants to do? There are those six stone jars and what those stone jars were for was for ceremonial washing. Jewish ritual, Jewish law was very aware of uncleanness as a symbol of spiritual uncleanness.

So there had to be washing for public events and we have become very aware of cleanness and hand washing recently, haven't we? There's a reminder for all the guests for the bridegroom include, even at the wedding, they come as a people who are unclean before God, a people who need washing.

Now what does Jesus do with those stone jars? He says fill them and they fill them to the brim and then he says draw some of the water out and take it to the master of the feasting and it becomes wine.

[15 : 13] By a miracle Jesus changes this water used for washing, uncleanness, and turns it to wine which is a great symbol of joy.

What's the deeper significance of what's going on here? Well what the water and what the law could never do, it could never truly cleanse from guilt and cleanse from sin because the problem isn't on the surface, as the problem lies in our hearts.

Jesus has come to perform that washing. And this miracle reminds us that by making people clean, by providing that deep washing, making us right before God, he will then at the same time provide deep joy.

The joy of knowing and being known and loved by God. You listen to psychologists or you listen to health professionals and they will at times speak about the crippling effects of personal guilt on emotional and mental well-being.

King David, who wrote many of the Psalms in Psalm 32, talked about a time in his life when he was silent before God, he wasn't confessing his sin.

[16 : 44] And he uses really vivid language, he talks about his bones wasting away, he talks about groaning, he talks about his strength being sapped until he confessed, until he knew the joy of being forgiven.

Now we don't need an expert, do we, to tell us that there is guilt in our lives. We know this, we know that there are things in our lives that at times, maybe even right now, stop us from sleeping because we feel awful.

We can think about relationships that have broken down because of problems that we have created in our words or in our behaviour.

We can think about love that we have failed to show to others and when we're honest we know that we have not loved God as he deserves. We also, I'm sure, know that it's painful to look inside ourselves.

It's painful to have that sense of exposure, to be honest about the fact that we are not half as good as we think we are or how we try and project to others.

[18 : 01] It's a lot easier to distract ourselves with entertainment. It's a lot easier to try and minimise the problem or to compare ourselves with others so that we can feel good about ourselves again.

But here's the truth as we find it from Jesus. When we make that honest look to expose our need, to expose our guilt and sin, to show us that we cannot be good enough for God, that honesty is then the pathway to joy when it leads us to look to Jesus as our saviour, to trust him, to ask him to remove our sin and to give us the joy of salvation.

Now let's return to Jesus' mother and let's think about Jesus' hour and Jesus' wine. Again, Mary provides an example for us to follow when she brings the needs of others to Jesus.

That's one of the things we do with prayer. We pray for ourselves because we know we need it but we also pray for our family, we pray for our colleagues, for our neighbours, we pray for our nation. notice how Jesus answers, woman, why do you involve me?

My hour has not yet come. Now when Jesus calls his mother woman, he's not being disrespectful but there is a sense of distancing and the question is why?

[19 : 43] And in a sense it's hard to pin down exactly why but perhaps it's helpful to think in these terms.

Remember Jesus has just begun his public ministry. Perhaps this is a message to Mary that now that my public ministry has begun I must be about my father's business and I need freedom to follow God's timetable.

But notice he says my hour has not yet come. And that's a theme in John's gospel, the hour of Jesus.

He talks about it often and it becomes clear as the gospel progresses that he's talking about his suffering and death and then his resurrection and return to glory beyond.

But this much we can say from the beginning of his public ministry Jesus is aware of its end. Jesus begins his ministry knowing it will climax at the cross.

[20 : 53] His public ministry will end in the cross and then three days later the resurrection. Now I want us to think about the hour and the wine and think about how this wedding reveals Jesus' glory.

Now the new age that was promised in the Bible pictured as a time of joy. Think back to Isaiah, a feast of the best of wines. Central to that hope is that God and his people would be united together forever.

one of the images that God himself uses is that he is the bridegroom and his people is the bride and Jesus uses that in his stories also.

So central to future hope is the picture of a wedding and a wedding feast. And so here we find Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry and he's at a wedding.

And what do we find? We find that he is looking ahead. He's looking ahead to that great future hope but he's very aware of the great cost to him.

[22 : 16] For the joy of that wedding Jesus must provide the wine. And for that wedding the wine won't be produced by a miracle.

It will be produced by Jesus dying on the cross. The Lord's Supper that we share as a church when we're able to meet together is a visible reminder that we can feast in the presence of Jesus.

that we can know him. He is the Lord of that feast but we can know him and enjoy him only because he died for us. Only because he was willing to sacrifice himself to pay the price for our sin to take the judgment of God to set us free.

So in this sign we're being reminded actually that Jesus is the true bridegroom who wants to provide for our joy. And how will he do it?

He will do it by covering our shame, covering our sin, covering our rebellion and rejection of God so that by that act of love and grace we receive honour.

[23 : 38] That knowing him, being bound and united to him brings eternal joy. joy. This sign says to us, Jesus will bring joy but only by losing his.

And Jesus knew that from the start. He knew there would come a point where he would feel forsaken as he took and went under the judgment of God so that we might be welcomed, we deserve judgment, but instead through faith in Jesus we can be welcomed into God's kingdom.

So the wine, the wine of this wedding, the wine at the wedding of Canaan, in a sense it was a means to an end because it led to joy continuing, it led to celebration continuing.

For Jesus, the cross stands as a means to an end. and what it means for us, the cross is the means to your eternal joy, to my eternal salvation.

If I trust that Jesus went to the cross to pay for my sin and my shame, that he died for me and then rose again to give me new life, if we believe that then the cross is the means to an end for your eternal joy.

[25 : 10] joy. So here is Jesus sitting in the middle of a picture of joy, a wedding feast, but he is anticipating suffering so that you and I can cope with our present suffering, and I know some of us are suffering in really extreme ways, but we can sit in our suffering anticipating future joy.

Because of what Jesus promises here at this wedding feast, Jesus is the bridegroom. Christian, look at the cross, see how much he loves you, see how much he delights in you, see the price he paid that he might be united with you eternally.

And if you're not a Christian, let me ask, does the removal of shame and guilt sound like good news? does that sound like an invitation to joy?

Is the prospect of eternal joy in the presence of God rather than eternal judgment separated from God, does that sound like something that's good news and something you want?

Well, if so, come to him. He is your king. Trust in him and receive this gift of love.

[26 : 50] May all of us come to Jesus as the wonderful Lord of the feast.