

Sign 1: Water into wine

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 September 2021

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] his glory, and his disciples believed in him. Amen. Imagine, for a moment, a world without signs. The next time you head to the supermarket, you are left bewildered. How much does it cost? You go to an electronics store, and you want to compare gadgets, but you don't know what they do. You are on a journey, perhaps on holiday, and you come to an unfamiliar roundabout, and the question becomes, where do I go? We probably don't think about it, but once we do, we realize how important signs are for our lives. They are vital to give us both information and to point us towards the right destination. So, as we begin to explore these seven signs that we find in John's gospel, we're going to be looking for information in which we're going to see that these signs point to Jesus as God's appointed messenger, that he is revealing God's glory, and they also point us towards our destination, the destination God would have each one of us go to. And we find it here in verse 11, like the disciples, that we would see the signs and believe in Jesus.

John actually tells us at the very end of his book the purpose of these signs. John 20 at verse 30, Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

So, he's carefully choosing these seven. These 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.

So, that's what the signs are going to be about. We're going to see the glory of Jesus on display with a purpose that you and I might believe in him. We're going to see the signs begin at a wedding, and the last will take place at a funeral. We'll see his signs helping both rich and poor, meeting the needs of the hungry and the helpless. And in all of these, we're going to see the glory of Jesus break in very publicly into our world. And for some, it leads to faith. And that's the goal for all of us as we spend this time thinking about who is Jesus. Today's sign, and this is borrowing from a chap in the States called Anthony Salvagio, which seems quite ordinary in many ways. Here is Jesus helping out at a small community wedding, is actually a sign that in Jesus, a new world order has begun.

[2 : 53] Some of us are old enough to remember 1989. I remember as a 10-year-old switching on the breakfast news and seeing these images of the Berlin Wall coming down. And with the coming down of the Berlin Wall was the collapse of communism and the Cold War, that a new world order had begun. Very dramatic signs. Well, we need to understand that here at this wedding is another sign of another collapse of an old order. It's the old order of Judaism, which was relying on laws and rituals and ceremonies, here is this new era as God's King comes, as God's Kingdom comes, with Jesus and His message of salvation by grace, which is always the message of salvation. So, what we're going to do today is we're going to look at this sign, and this sign is a miracle. Not all the signs are miracles, but this one is. We're going to look at it from the standpoint of some of the main characters to help us to see different aspects of the glory of Jesus together so that we might, in turn, believe in Him.

So, let's begin with Mary, the mother of Jesus. And what do we learn from Mary? We learn that faith looks to Jesus. First five verses is where we find Mary featuring prominently. So, the scene is set in the first three verses. We discover there's a wedding in Cana. Weddings in those days would be large affairs. The whole community would be their extended family, friends, neighbors among the guests, Mary, Jesus, the disciples. And for some reason that we're not told, Mary has access, as it were, to the kitchen. So, she discovers the problem. Verse three, when the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, they have no more wine. Jesus is told that by Mary. Now, the response of Mary when she says that is really to say, Jesus, will you do something? Jesus, will you fix this problem? Information being passed so that Jesus might act. When we got married up in Dingwall, just as the meal was getting served, there was a lengthy pause, and we were wondering what was happening.

And the message came to us from the kitchen, the dishes. So, it was a carvery, and all the dishes containing all the beef where the light bulbs had overheated and smashed. There was glass in all the beef. And so, they needed to bring out some substitutes. Now, when that message came to me, they weren't expecting me to do anything. It was information, but they weren't expecting me to intervene. But that's not the case with Mary and Jesus.

But the question is, why does Mary tell Jesus? After all, Jesus isn't wealthy, and he doesn't have the resources to go and purchase vast amounts of wine. He's not a wine merchant with stores available.

So, why tell Jesus? Well, it must be because of realities about Jesus that Mary already knows. Let's go back to that familiar reality that we discover and we celebrate every Christmas. Luke chapter 1. Here are just some of the truths about Jesus that Mary knows. The angel came to Mary.

Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David. The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God.

[6 : 55] Mary heard those words and knew that experience personally. She was there when the shepherds came and worshipped. She was there when the wise men came and brought their gifts. And so, Mary's faith leads her to look to Jesus as the Son of God, as the one who can help.

Jesus' reply is interesting, though, isn't it? Verse 4, "Women, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come." And when Jesus calls his mother woman, that's not being disrespectful, that's not being disrespectful. But it's a way of Jesus to create a respectful distance. Mary needs to understand that the one directing Jesus' ministry will not be Mary. It will be his Father in heaven. And Mary needs to understand that while Jesus will act and he will reveal something of his glory at this wedding, his full glory will not be revealed until his hour. And the hour, of course, is one of those themes that we see repeating in John's gospel, where Jesus is looking ahead, even at this early stage, towards his suffering and death, towards his resurrection, and towards his return to glory in heaven. That's when we'll see glory fully revealed. And Mary needs to understand that. But we see Mary's faith again in verse 5, when she said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." That's wonderful wisdom. That's wonderful wisdom for this particular situation. But it's wonderful wisdom for every situation, to be guided by

God's Word, to live in obedience to Jesus. Our King is the way of wisdom. Mary had her faith in the right place. Jesus would act to save the day. And so, we can learn from Mary that for us, to see that faith trusts in Jesus, it's important for us to see that we don't need to know everything about Jesus to have faith in him. Mary didn't know everything. This was really early in Jesus' ministry. She didn't know about the cross and the resurrection yet, but faith acts on what we know. And Mary had come to know that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior for sinners, and so faith looks to Jesus. Significant, and I imagine this will be true for many of us in our own stories, our own lives, that faith trusts in Jesus in a moment of crisis. Sometimes it's trouble that causes faith to be faith to be activated. We can tend towards self-reliance until we come to a situation of desperate need for ourselves or for someone else, and then faith kicks in and looks to Jesus.

And it's important as we look to Jesus that we recognize who he is. Our faith rests in his person, that he is none other than the Son of God. Faith rests in the work that he has come to do. to be Savior for the world. And so, in this action of Jesus, in this miracle, in this sign, he's going to show his glory to strengthen the faith of Mary and also the disciples.

[10 : 27] And so, we discover that faith looks to Jesus. Well, let's move from Mary to the servants, and the servants are central to the story in verses 6 to 10. That's where we see the sign itself. So, Mary says, do whatever he tells you. What does Jesus tell them to do? He says, go and fill up some large pots with water. Fill them to the brim. Draw some of that water out. Take it to the master of the banquet. And as they do so, the water becomes wine. The master tastes it, and he's never tasted anything like it. The water becomes wine. It becomes lots of wine, about 600 liters or so. It becomes the very best of wine so that the celebration, so that the joy might continue. Now, a brief pause at this stage to ask ourselves the question that many people ask, is this really a miracle? Do miracles really happen? So, some have tried to explain away the supernatural in this story. So, they'll suggest, well, maybe those pots had some dregs of wine in the bottom, and as the water got filled up, you kind of had a diluted, whiny kind of a substance. Why do people do that? What's the issue?

Well, think of someone like David Hume. Statues all around Edinburgh. David Hume, speaking of miracles, said a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature. A miracle simply cannot happen, David Hume says, because laws of nature are all there are. The universe is a closed system. Natural processes rule all. There is no creator. There is no higher power. There are, therefore, no miracles. That was David Hume's understanding. Now, perhaps that's the understanding of many today, to not recognize the supernatural. Of course, what we all need to understand is that in itself is a faith assumption, because there are other scientists and philosophers and scholars that will recognize what's sometimes known as the fine-tuning of the universe, what's sometimes known as the Goldilocks principle behind the universe. Remember that nursery at Ryan Fairytale where there is the chair, the porridge, the bed that's just right? Well, there's an understanding as people study science that the universe is just right. The conditions are just right for human life to survive, for life on this earth to flourish. If you change those conditions even a little way, the distance that the earth is from the sun, the angle of rotation, the elements within the atmosphere, and life as we know it would fail to exist. So, there's a faith assumption to imagine all these processes come together without a creator. And then we add in all the beauty that we see, all the order that we see, the complexity that we appreciate with our telescope, with our microscope, and we understand that it takes faith to say there's no such thing as God and no such thing as miracles. For John, the gospel writer, an eyewitness to the life of Jesus, here is how he begins to introduce Jesus. Chapter 1 of John, speaking of Jesus, in the beginning was the Word, the Word of Revelation, the Word was with God, and the Word was God. So, Jesus is God. Verse 3, through Him all things were made. Without Him nothing was made that has been made. So, He is God. He is the agent of creation. Then 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. So, in Jesus, we see the glory of God. So, if we understand that here is Jesus and He is God and He's entered into creation, the miracles are no problem to us.

If we trust God's Word and if we trust who Jesus is, then we appreciate the miracles become another signpost towards Jesus' identity. Now, back to water becoming wine. That's an important image because wine in the Bible. So, you go to Old Testament, Psalm 104, we discover wine is one of those gifts that God gives to gladden the heart. That's what the Psalmist said. Jesus, in Luke chapter 5, had some interesting things to say to some of His opponents who questioned why He spent so much time eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners. He said, He is like the bridegroom. Jesus said, I'm the bridegroom, and when the bridegroom is around, it's a time of celebration. And then Jesus said, you need to have new wineskins for new wine. And Jesus uses that image to say that in His coming, there is the dawning of joy, there is the coming of the King, the coming of His kingdom, that new era has arrived. And the evidence that this new era, the dawning of the king has come, is in the jars. Verse 6, nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing. So, the previous use for those jars, ceremonial washing. So, even as the people were coming, all the guests were coming to the wedding to celebrate with this newly married couple. There was that reminder, you are not clean before God, and you need to be washed.

And of course, those who were sensitive to God's Word would understand that water could never do that. Water can never deal with the deep stain of sin. It can never deal with the problem of the human heart.

[16 : 34] But what the water could not do, Jesus has come to do. It is Jesus, the King, on His mission. Jesus, the King, who knows He's coming for His hour, that time of His suffering, His death, His sacrifice.

And in His mission, in His dying for us, there is for us a cause for a deep, lasting, eternal joy. We could say that John in chapter 2, Jesus in chapter 2, is preparing us for the Lord's Supper. That He wants us to connect this wine and this hour, Jesus shedding His blood on the cross as the basis for our joy, our salvation, our celebration. Because it's in Jesus' sacrifice that we are able to know and to enjoy God and to have peace with God for ourselves. Now, why is this good news? It's good news because we're all on the pursuit of happiness. We're all wired to seek after our own happiness.

[17 : 58] But what we find, we look around, look at our own lives, often we imagine that we find happiness by consuming more. Look at our society, we are the greatest consumers that have ever lived.

We are encouraged to create and recreate new identities for ourselves, both in person and online. We are living in a time of unlimited possibilities, greater freedom than we've ever had.

But at the same time, we are not happier than previous generations. Our lives seem more fragile than previous generations. And so the question is, why is that?

And it's not because we're pursuing our happiness. The problem is that our desire for joy isn't too big. It's that we're settling for something that's far less than deep and lasting joy.

Our pursuit of happiness without pursuing Jesus is too small. We settle for something so much less than God would have for us, which is eternal life in Jesus.

[19 : 07] Jesus would give us eternal joy. He would give us eternal happiness. He is the only one who can fill that God-shaped hole within our lives.

There is real joy, deep joy in knowing Jesus the King. Now, let's move from the servants and let's focus for a moment or two on our bridegroom.

And when we think about what happens to the bridegroom, we recognize that Jesus covers over shame. Let me read again, 9 and 10.

Now, I don't know if this will meet with universal agreement, but I reckon that wise weddings, wise wedding planning gives the guy the least amount of things to do.

Okay, we have some nods of agreement. First century Israel, the groom had one thing to do, one task, only one task, and it was this.

[20 : 31] Make sure there is enough wine for the wedding. Make sure there is enough wine to show good hospitality to your guests. Hospitality was a really big deal in the first century.

There is evidence that lawsuits were brought against people who failed to practice good hospitality. So, it was a big deal to be a good host. So, when we read in verse 3, they have no more wine. This is not some small social mix-up. This is a shocking and shameful disaster. This is the worst possible way to start married life.

This is shame on the couple, shame on the extended family. It's an awful beginning. Maybe you went to one of those schools where as soon as you did something embarrassing, you found yourself labeled with a nickname and that nickname stuck.

Well, that's nothing compared to what would happen to this couple as the shame would spread, as the news would spread of this couple who failed to provide wine for their wedding.

[21 : 44] And Jesus comes. And thanks to Jesus, shame is turned to public honor.

The master of the banquet says, wow, you've saved the best to last. The removal of shame is a beautiful image, a beautiful hope. Psalm 34, verse 5, those who look to God are radiant.

Their faces are never covered with shame. Doesn't that speak to one of the deep longings in our hearts? That we could stand before others and not be rejected.

That we could live in community and not feel unworthy. That we could be confident that we will not be spoken badly about or spoken against. How much more to know that we can stand in the presence of God and not be rejected and not feel unclean and not be cast aside.

And that's the pointer that we get from the bridegroom's transformation. This is what Jesus can do for all those who trust in him. He can remove our shame and give us honor before our God.

[23 : 05] Jesus said, I'm the true bridegroom. And we get wonderful glimpses of his love in the gospel. He is the one who identifies with us.

He is the one who has come to be God with us. In his birth, in his virgin birth, in the incarnation. He is the one who, on the cross, bears our shame.

Bears our sin. And through his victory at the resurrection, he secures our honor. Promising that he will one day return and bring us to eternal honor.

In the new heavens and the new earth. So, faith in Jesus promises one of those things our heart needs and wants most.

Security. Knowing we have the approval of the one who matters most, God himself. That leads us then to the disciples.

[24 : 16] Now, the last group that we will focus on. What do we learn about the disciples? They see his glory and they believe. Verse 11, what Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him.

So, the thing about signs, when we think about how important signs are, the thing about signs is they need to have information and point you to the right direction, but you need to be able to read them.

I don't know if any of us have been to Moscow, been to the metro. I can imagine arriving and feeling quite bewildered, unless you know the language. Perhaps, word of caution, if you have just arrived in Scotland and you haven't driven in the highlands, our government has made sure that we all learn to appreciate the Gaelic language.

So, on the road signs, you will find that the Gaelic place names come above the English ones. So, it can be quite confusing for folks trying to find the appropriate place where they're heading and the name on the map doesn't match up to the name on the sign.

Signs need to be able to be read. So, what's John's gospel revealing? It's revealing that the signs of Jesus aren't done in a corner, they're displayed publicly, but only some read them correctly.

[25 : 39] We will see that very quickly, opposition and rejection begins to happen. But that's not the case with the disciples. They see the glory of Jesus, and they believe there is a response, and we always need to make response.

If we see the glory of Jesus, and we see what He has done, then there needs to be that response of faith. What's the information they discover from this sign?

That Jesus comes with the glory of God, with the power of God, that He is from God, He's the Son of God, and so they believe. That's their destination. That's where Jesus would have them to be, believing in Him and following Him because of who He is and what He has come to do.

So, for them, for the next three years, they're going to see more of Jesus' glory, which will climax in the hour of Jesus, as He is lifted up on the cross, as He is then raised from the dead, as He returns to heaven.

They will see all that. But even at this stage, they see His glory, and they believe. They believe that Jesus has come to bring joy and bring salvation.

[26 : 51] Now, as we close, I want to stick with this marriage feast picture and take us to a couple of places in the Bible, one we've read, one we haven't read yet. In Isaiah chapter 25, remember those words at the beginning?

We have that promise that the Lord Almighty, Jesus, who is God, He is the one who brings entry into eternal glory, into the eternal feast.

By faith in Jesus, we live with the hope and the promise that sorrow and shame and death will one day be no more for the people of God.

And then we go towards the end of the Bible. We'll go to Revelation 19, in verses 6 and 7. We have these wonderful words. Hallelujah. There's joy.

For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come. The return of Jesus brings in the wedding, the feast, the joy.

[28 : 01] Jesus and His people together forever. And then it goes on to say, blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. Friends, that invitation is extended to us today.

To believe in Jesus today is to know that we will enter into that feast when Jesus comes back again. That means we need to read this sign to see the glory of Jesus, to see that He is God's Savior.

And we need to respond like the disciples, with faith and with joy and with worship and trust. May we all come to that greater understanding of who Jesus is.

And like the disciples, may we believe in Him. Let's pray together. Lord, our God, thank You that You sent Your Son Jesus, and thank You for the signs that He performed in order to show us so clearly that He is sent by You, that He is Your appointed messenger, bringing salvation, bringing Your kingdom.

Lord, we thank You that in Jesus there is that deep joy that we long for. There is honor instead of shame that we would love to know.

[29 : 21] There is the promise of eternal life, of an eternal feast in the future. And so may each one of us, like the disciples, see the glory of Jesus and believe.

Amen. Now we're going to close with a hymn that brings us to the idea of feasting.

We will feast in the house of Zion, and we'll again stand to sing together. Amen. We will feast in the house of Zion, We will sing with our hearts restored, He has done great things, we will say together, We will feast and weep no more.

We will not be burned by the fire, He is the Lord our God, We are not consumed by the flood, We will feast upheld, We will feast in the house of Zion, We will feast in the house of Zion, We will sing with our hearts restored, He has done great things, We will sing together, We will feast and weep no more.

in the dark of night before the dawn, my soul be not afraid for the promised morning, O how long, O God of Jacob, be my strength, We will feast in the house of Zion, We will sing with our hearts restored, He has done great things, We will sing together, We will feast and weep no more.

[32 : 26] every vow we've broken and betrayed, You are the faithful one, from the garden and from the garden to the grave, Bind us together, bring shalom, We will feast in the house of Zion, We will sing with our hearts restored, We will sing and weep no more.

He has done great things, We will sing together, We will feast and weep no more. We will feast and weep no more.

We will feast and weep no more. Our benediction comes from Revelation chapter 1 verses 4 and 5. Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the sevenfold spirit before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Amen. Will unveil the and the ■■■■yblaze animal, and from the sevenfold drift hour where theirven when his throne's into the earth.