

The Wedding at Cana

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[0 : 00] This morning, we're going to look at how Jesus helps these people in this passage that we've read. And in doing so, we're going to think about what it reveals about who he is, what he came to do, and how he changes lives.

Weddings are fantastic occasions. We love to get together with family and friends and celebrate the new beginning of a relationship or a new stage in that relationship as a new family is created. And could there be a more appropriate backdrop for Jesus' revealing of himself to the world as he comes to reveal a new stage of God's dealing with us?

As he comes to show that God has a different way of dealing with people and a better way in him? In John 1 verse 14, we read, The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. God became man in Jesus Christ. And then in this passage, he comes and brings that glory into the ordinary events of life.

[1 : 05] He shows us that God is concerned about the ordinary events, about our lives and the things that are going on. He goes to a simple wedding and he reveals through his actions who he is.

And there is a new beginning for those who will believe in him. Now, the Jews, even more than us today, attached a huge amount of importance and significance to weddings and high moments of life like that.

This was a community experience when everyone would gather together and celebrate, probably for as long as a week, the new marriage that had taken place. But as we know, weddings don't always go entirely to plan.

Some of you will remember my own wedding where my wife arrived 30 minutes late because of a problem with the cars and people were sitting waiting to see what would happen.

Weddings do not always go according to plan. And in this wedding, something doesn't quite work. They run out of wine. But that's more than just a social embarrassment or a kind of a small matter.

[2 : 07] For a culture like this, a shame culture, that was a hugely important thing. And it has quite a lot of symbolic meaning as well for the people at the time.

To run out of wine, the people would have considered a kind of bad omen that maybe this marriage wasn't meant to reach its full potential. Maybe joy wasn't meant for this couple. And the lack of wine in this passage also has a symbolic meaning for all of us.

Because it points to the fact that we all lack something as well. That we all have a problem. Now thankfully, there's someone at this wedding that can make a real difference.

That can actually change the situation. Because we see that Jesus is there. And he provides a solution to the immediate problem in this passage. And he also provides a solution to the problem that all of us have as well, as we'll see.

So I want to just look at this passage briefly under two headings. First of all, what is the problem? And second of all, what is the solution? So let's start with the problem.

[3 : 09] As we said, a wedding can last as long as a week's celebration in this time. And the financial responsibility for the wedding lay entirely with the groom. He was meant to be able to show that he could provide for his wife by putting on this wedding celebration.

Now today, the average cost of a wedding is £24,000 for a single day. Imagine if you had to pay something of that kind of region for a week.

There was a huge commitment on the part of the groom. He was meant to have overflowing wine and overflowing food for people. So you can imagine how people would start to talk about him if he wasn't able to provide the wine.

You can imagine being the groom at a wedding today and you are being just anyone involved in the wedding today and trying to provide for your guests. And if you didn't have the money, if you didn't have the resources, all you can provide for them is an empty plate.

You can see the image that people would start to talk about and start to say, oh, they didn't have much to give us. They didn't have much generosity there. And that's even worse in this shame culture in Jesus's time.

[4 : 17] People would start to say, if the groom cannot even provide wine for the wedding, how can he possibly provide for his future with his wife? And to the Jewish mind, wine symbolized joy.

There was a rabbi at the time of Jesus who would say, without wine, there is no joy. It's a precious time this wedding. They should have all the joy. And yet to run out of wine suggests that the joy has run out.

And you could actually take Mary's words in this passage. She says to Jesus in verse 3, they have no more wine. And translate them as, you have no more joy.

So this is a serious issue for this couple. It's creating a lot of social embarrassment. People are starting to gossip about them. You can see where the problems are coming. But like this couple, this lack of joy or this way in which joy can run out is a universal experience of all of us.

There always comes a time for each of us when we think we have endless joy and then something happens. And that just destroys our joy.

[5 : 27] We have all experienced going through life where things are going well for a period and then suddenly something changes. Maybe you get a piece of bad news and it just changes everything.

No matter who you are, no matter what you go through, no matter how much you have, you will not always experience joy in this life. For some people that will come sooner and for other people that will come later.

Often it seems that when life is at its very best, suddenly the wine or the joy runs out. We can be full of health. We can have money increases. We can have the career going the way we want it to. We can have friends around us.

We can have lots to eat, lots to drink, a warm place to sleep. Everything can be going really well and then the unexpected happens. Perhaps health troubles or the loss of a job or the betrayal of a friend or the death of a loved one.

And suddenly we find ourselves questioning what was it all about. What was the point of having all this stuff that we had before, all this good stuff happening, if this is where we are now? Sometimes we can even find ourselves questioning why God would ever allow this to happen.

[6 : 31] Why he would allow us to be in this situation we're in now. Sometimes, of course, there can be no discernible reason for the lack of joy. Sometimes we can simply find that things don't seem to be as good as they were.

Perhaps we suffer from depression or we suffer from something else that happens, but there's no reason in our lives for why this happens. But we just suddenly find that life loses its sparkle and the joy doesn't seem to be there anymore.

If we focus on the joys and the exhilarations of life, eventually failure is inevitable. Because we know we cannot always have things the way we want them to be.

Young people have a motto at the moment, which you may have heard of, YOLO. You only live once. But what happens when that one life you've got doesn't work out the way you expect?

I recently, through the wonders of Facebook, read an article that a friend of mine from school had written. Someone that I hadn't seen in years. And she'd written what is essentially a letter to her younger self, where she'd basically set out what's happened in her life up to this point and given advice to her younger self.

[7 : 44] Now, she tried to follow the same kind of path as I did. She went to university to study law, having worked very hard at school and she got very good grades. But at university, she found that she wasn't doing as well as everyone else.

That suddenly she was surrounded with people who, and she just couldn't compete. So she didn't get as good a degree as she wanted. And then the recession happened. So she went out into the workplace, or tried to go out into the workplace, having got her law degree, and she couldn't get a job, because the jobs just weren't there.

Now, following on from that, she felt the upset of not being able to practice what she'd trained for five years to do. She felt that kind of deep pressure on her. And that led to her suffering from depression and ultimately going through quite a dark time in her life. But she ends the letter by saying that now things are on the way up. Now things have got better. She recently got married, and she's got a job, and things are going well. And so she ends with this great hope that everything's going to be okay now. But the saddest thing is, she actually has no basis for saying that.

[8 : 53] There's no basis for saying that there won't be something else that comes along in her life and brings her right back down. We even know that success doesn't always satisfy as well.

Madonna, the pop star that most people would agree has had success in her life, said this. There were many years when I thought fame, fortune, and public approval would bring me happiness. But one day you wake up and realize they don't. I still felt that something was missing. I wanted to know the meaning of true and lasting happiness and how I could go about finding it. And we know from reading newspapers, from seeing BBC News, the number of times that the successful, the rich, and the famous have ended their lives in emptiness and despair. Whether through suicide or drug overdose, it just goes on and on. People reach the top only to realize there's nothing there. That they're still not satisfied. They still have something that they are lacking.

[9 : 55] Now you might be thinking that I'm only speaking today to non-Christians, to people who don't know Jesus, because of course things are always better for us who are Christians. But that's nonsense, isn't it?

We know that Christians are also affected by these things happening in our lives. We know that bad things do happen to Christians, and we have to deal with that as well. And we also know that Christians, often, we can place our confidence in the wrong things.

We can take our joy and our satisfaction from the comforts of life just as much as anyone else. We can often ignore Jesus in our day-to-day lives. We can come along to church on a Sunday and sing about it and talk about it.

But when it comes to the day-to-day, there can be times when we know our true confidence is in something else. This was my own experience as I started my career as a lawyer.

I spent five years working. Things were going well. I had my own plans, my own ideas of what I was going to do, how I was going to increase in money and get a better house and get all these plans that I had made.

[10 : 56] But they weren't God's plan because he had a different idea. And I started to realize that I needed more than an easy life. I couldn't just rely on my own comfort.

I had to actually live for my God. And that made a difference in what I did and how I then left that in order to start to look about ministry. So you might be in one of these positions today.

You might find that things have started to go wrong in your life, that you don't have the joy that you had. Or maybe at the moment you find that your life is actually going great. But maybe you know that that won't last forever.

You could be climbing the ladder of success or you could be at the lowest of the low today. But the amazing thing about the gospel, the amazing thing about the passage that we're reading, is that it has something to say to all of us.

No matter what situation you're in today, no matter what you're going through, and what this passage actually reveals to us is that there is someone who can make a difference.

[11 : 59] Someone who made a difference in this passage at this wedding, but someone who also can make a difference in our lives. That's what Mary thought when she comes to Jesus with the problem.

Verse 3, she comes to Jesus and says, When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, They have no more wine. And Jesus is able to deal with this problem, of course.

Mary knows that somehow. She carries within her the mystery of his birth. She knows that there is something unique about Jesus. Now, she doesn't fully understand it, as we know, but she does know that Jesus is somehow able to help.

In verse 4, though, Jesus seems to rebuke his mother. He says, Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come. Now, in actual fact, that word dear there is just inserted by this translation that we're reading, because they're trying to kind of make it not sound so shocking,

actually, to modern ears, when he says, Woman, why do you involve me?

Because it can sound a bit kind of callous, or not like he doesn't really care for his mother. But that's completely not the point, because the same word, woman, is used by Jesus in John 19, verse 26.

[13:17] When he's dying on the cross, and when he makes provision for his mother to be looked after by one of his friends after he has gone. So Jesus cares deeply about his mother.

But there is an important point of principle, really, that Jesus is getting at here by saying, Woman. Jesus is moving out from the authority of his mother.

He's about to start his public ministry, a new stage of his life, and that means things will be different. That means she can no longer relate to him as other mothers do to their sons. That means that he must move out from her authority, under the authority and submission to his heavenly father's will. Now, that must have been extremely difficult for Mary. She'd born him, she'd nursed him, she'd looked after him, she'd taught him, she'd watched him grow up. And probably she'd even come to rely on Jesus as a family provider, since Joseph seems to be gone now.

But now that the purpose of Jesus coming into the world is starting to happen, now that he's starting to reveal who he is, everything, even his family ties, have to go below that divine mission.

[14:22] Now, it's not callousness, because we know that Jesus does make provision for his mother, he does look after her. But it's a recognition, actually, that Mary, just like everyone else, has to approach Jesus and God in the same way.

She has to come to Jesus, not as her son, but as the promised Messiah who will take away the sins of the world. She has to come to Jesus, recognizing that he is the one who can deal with her problem, rather than her looking after him as her son.

And there is a really important point of principle here, because some of us were brought up in the church. We had all the privileges and all the great things that that meant in our lives, as we grew up learning about Christianity, learning about who God is, and learning about Jesus.

But we still have to come to God ourselves. We still have to come and put our faith and trust in God. Just because we were brought up in the church, just because we had all of that, doesn't make you a Christian.

You need to come and place your faith in God yourself. And some of us had no upbringing in the Christian church at all. Some of us didn't know anything about Christianity until maybe you were invited to church, or you came along to church for some reason, and you started to learn about Christianity.

[15:36] You might think that you have no claim or no right to be a Christian, because that wasn't your upbringing. But actually, in Luke 8, verse 21, we learn something quite important.

Jesus' mother and brothers come to Jesus and try to see him, and he says, My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice. So whether you were raised in the church or not, you and I all have to approach God and approach Jesus in the same way.

We all have to come and make that personal commitment to Jesus. Don Carson, the Bible teacher, puts it this way. He says that Mary approached Jesus as his mother and was rebuked.

However, she responds as a believer, and her faith is honored. And that's what happens in verse 5. She doesn't know what Jesus is going to do. She doesn't know how he can solve the problem, but she trusts that he can.

And so she says to the servants, Do whatever he tells you. That statement of humble faith and trust in Jesus. She tells the servants, Do whatever he tells you.

[16:41] And I think sometimes, actually, this is the example that we need to follow in our own lives as we come to God in prayer. Sometimes we have this tendency, I think, to come to God with our own solutions to our problems already worked out.

That we know what we want God to do, and we hope that he'll just grant our wishes like some kind of genie. But that's not who God is. He knows much better than we do. He has a much better plan than we do.

And so we need to come to God sometimes and humbly just say, Lord, I don't know what your plan is in this. I don't know how you can help with this problem, but I trust that you can, just like Mary does.

So we've seen the problem, and we've seen that Mary thinks that Jesus is the solution. And we can be so used to reading what happens next that we forget just how significant this is.

Jesus instructs the servants to fill up the jars of water, and when they pour it out, it has transformed miraculously into wine. But not just any wine, the very best of wine.

[17 : 41] And not just a small amount of wine, but a huge quantity of wine. In fact, some have suggested that the amount of wine here is well over a thousand bottles of wine.

Way more than would be needed for this feast. So Jesus provides the finest of wine and a huge quantity of wine. Why? Why so much?

Why such great wine? Well, in John's gospel, the miracles of Jesus are often called, as we see in verse 11, signs. They're called signs because they're meant to not just be naked displays of power or some kind of magic trick, but they're meant to actually point people to a deeper reality of who Jesus is and what he does.

Because the best wine and a huge quantity of wine teach us something very important about Jesus. They teach us that he is the God of abundant, overflowing grace.

That he doesn't just give a little. He gives way more than we can ever expect or imagine or ask for. But there's also an important detail in the middle of all this that's easy to miss.

[18 : 49] Because what was used to get the wine? If you read in verse 6, nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from 20 to 30 gallons.

Now these water jars are used by the Jews for ceremonial washing. Essentially, they would be used when people came to the wedding to wash their hands, to show that they were being made clean in some sense, in order to ritually clean come to this wedding.

Now, much as these water jars could wash their hands and could take away the outward appearance of mess, they could never deal with the inner problem that people had. The inner mess, the inner heart problem that people had.

But these jars were ceremonial. They were symbolic. They were used as part of the Old Testament law and rituals to represent being made clean. Now, the ritual itself in the Old Testament could never make you clean.

But what it could do is point to your needs to be made clean and point to your need for God to make you clean. So these jars, in some way, actually represent the whole of the Old Testament rituals and laws that were meant to somehow make you clean, or at least symbolize being made clean, but could never completely make you clean.

[20 : 08] Now that hints at something quite important. That that problem we thought about with the lack of joy, the lack of satisfaction in life, is actually part of a much bigger problem that we all have.

What the Bible calls sin. The fact that we disobey and rebel against God constantly. Every time we go our own way, rather than doing what God has desired us to do, we place ourselves in rebellion against our King.

And the Bible's clear that one day God will judge that sin problem in our lives. And actually, I also think the Bible's clear that the lack of joy, the lack of satisfaction in our lives, is an effect of sin in the world.

That this world is not the way it's meant to be. Jesus, when his friend dies, weeps, because the world is not the way it's meant to be. So this lack of joy, lack of satisfaction, has an ultimate cause, and it's sin in our lives.

It's our rebellion against God, and that's our biggest problem. Now, the Old Testament rituals were meant to symbolize this washing away of that problem. But they also exposed the fact that they could never change the person's heart.

[21 : 15] They could never make the person right with God. But they were meant to point forward to the ultimate way in which God was going to deal with this sin problem in their lives. And that solution wasn't to be found in more religious practices, more rituals.

It was to be found in a person. The Messiah, the promised one of God, Jesus. He was coming himself to deal with the problem, because we couldn't.

So the person who actually deals with the immediate problem in this passage of the lack of wine is the same person who comes to deal with our biggest problem. And in fact, we start to see that in this passage, even hinted at.

In verse 4, Jesus says to his mother, My time has not yet come. What's the time that he's talking about? Well, throughout John's gospel, the time or the hour that he is moving to is the hour of his death, and then his resurrection and glorification.

Everything that Jesus did in his life is moving towards that moment. And that's where the ultimate problem is dealt with. Because the Bible is also clear that the punishment we deserve ultimately for our sin is death.

[22 : 33] We have disobeyed God, we have went against his ways, and we will be judged for that. But Jesus knew we couldn't bear that punishment ourselves. So what did he do?

He took it on himself. He went to the cross on our behalf and was raised from the dead to show us that God had accepted that sacrifice, that death is not the end of the story, and that we too can be raised.

John 1, verse 12, actually starts to show us the significance of all of this, which isn't on the screen, but that's fine. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

So what's amazing about Jesus, just like we thought about with the wine and the overflowing abundance and the gifts that Jesus gives abundantly, Jesus doesn't just deal with the punishment and the penalty for our sin.

He doesn't just forgive us. What this verse reveals is that he actually gives abundantly to us. He shares his inheritance with us. So God doesn't just want to forgive us.

[23 : 40] He wants to have a completely new relationship with us, where we become children of God and share in the very inheritance of Jesus. He invites us to freely come and to eat and to drink.

He wants us to have this new relationship with him, an ongoing relationship where the relationship and Jesus becomes the true source of joy in our lives. So that even when things are going bad, even when things aren't going the way we want them to, we can turn to him as the source of joy.

The Bible teacher Leon Morris says that Jesus changes the water of Judaism into the wine of Christianity. What was difficult, what was hard, what couldn't fully deal with the problem in the Old Testament suddenly comes to fruition as we see Jesus coming onto the scene.

And so the wonderful message of John's gospel, the message of the whole Bible, in fact, is that while our condition is awful, while we are far from God, Jesus himself offers us hope.

He offers us joy and he came for us. The Bible invites thirsty sinners to come to Jesus for salvation and satisfaction. John 4, verse 13 and 14, Jesus says, Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst.

[24 : 54] Indeed, the water I give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. This is the work of Jesus in our lives that he gives beyond what we could imagine.

And also, another interesting thing in this passage is that the master of the banquet takes the wine and he says, you've saved the best wine to last, which goes against what people normally do at a banquet.

Now, with us, the best normally comes first. We try to make the best first impression we can with people. We try to hide the kind of problems in our lives when we meet people.

Or we invite someone over to the house and we put all the mess into the cupboard or into the back room so that the room that they're going to be in looks really tidy and really nice. With us, we try to put the best stuff first.

Not so with Jesus. In fact, if we move to the end of the Bible, in Revelation 19, verse 6 to 9, we see that Jesus is actually going to invite us to a much greater wedding than this wedding in Cana.

[25 : 59] We learn that the bridegroom of this wedding will be Jesus, the Lamb who is Jesus himself. And the bride will be the church, God's people, throughout the ages.

Revelation 19, 6 to 9, Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like a roar of rushing waters, like loud peals of thunder, shouting, Hallelujah, for our Lord God Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.

Then the angel said to me, Right, blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. And he added, these are the true words of God. So there's a far greater wedding than the wedding in Cana in the future.

So as I say, Jesus, the best comes at the end. But there's a challenge in this passage. Because at the end it says, Blessed are those who are, Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

[27 : 09] At the end of time, when this happens, not all will be invited. Now Jesus does have an invitation now for all of us, but at the end of time, when all is done and dusted, not all will be invited.

Because some people will have rejected Jesus' invitation in life. Some people will not have trusted him in life. In fact, some people just completely misunderstand Jesus. In our own passage, the Master misunderstood the source of the joy, the source of the wine.

He thought it must be the bridegroom himself that's provided this great wine. But the servants knew. The service knew. But the servants knew where the wine had come from.

They knew where they had got it from. They knew that Jesus was behind it. And more importantly, the disciples believed because of this miracle. This is the first of the miraculous signs Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee.

He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him. So the challenge for all of us is, are we going to be like the Master and ignore the real source of joy in this world?

[28 : 17] Or are we going to be like the disciples and place our trust in Jesus? If you're not yet a Christian, are you going to ignore the source of true joy? Are you going to keep trying on your own strength to sort out your life and to make joy in your life?

Joy that you know cannot last forever because we all grow old and die. And if you're a Christian here this morning, there's a challenge for us as well. Are we in danger of sometimes being like the Master, where we don't attribute the good things in our lives to God, where we forget that he is the one who provides these things for us?

We have to be more like Mary, who comes to Jesus with that humble submission, asking that he would just help. It's only he knows how to. We need to be more like the servants who simply do the work that Jesus asks them to do.

And more like the disciples, trusting and having our faith in him constantly. Now, life will not always be easy for us, whether we're Christians or not Christians.

But if you're a Christian here today, when things go tough, when things are not the way you want them to be, when that joy seems to have run out, you have the future hope of that marriage feast of the Lamb.

[29 : 28] You have the future promise that you will be with God for all eternity, that he will give you every good thing and that you will be with him for all eternity. So when things are tough this coming week or this coming month or year, when things don't go the way you would want them to go, come to your God, come to Jesus and ask him to be the solution and the help and the source of joy in your life.

He promised at the Great Commission that he would be with you always to the end of the age. No matter what you face, no matter what you go through, he promised to be there. So put your trust in him.

Let's pray. Father God,