

PM John 2:1-12 & Hebrews 9:1-10 Water into Wine

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[0 : 00] chapter 2 and we'll read verses 1 to 12. On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee and the mother of Jesus was there.

Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. When the wine ran out the mother of Jesus said to him, they have no wine. And Jesus said to her, woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come. His mother said to the servants, do whatever he tells you. Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding 20 or 30 gallons. Jesus said to the servants, fill the jars with water.

And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, now draw and take it to the master of the feast. So they took it. When the master of the feast tasted the water, now become wine and did not know where it came from. Though the servants who had drawn the water knew. The master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, everyone serves the good wine first.

And when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now. This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee and manifested his glory.

And his disciples believed in him. Just reading to there. May God bless to us this reading. The letter to the Hebrews chapter 9. And we'll read verses 1 to 10.

[2 : 07] Hebrews chapter 9 from verse 1. Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness.

For a tent was prepared, the first section in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the presence. It is called the holy place.

Behind the second curtain was a second section called the most holy place. Having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold.

In which was a golden urn holding the manna and Aaron's staff that budded and the tablets of the covenant. Above it were the cherubim of glory, overshadowing the mercy seat.

Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties.

[3 : 20] But into the second, only the high priest goes. And he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.

By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened, as long as the first section is still standing, which is symbolic for the present age.

According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body, imposed until the time of reformation.

May God bless to us this reading too. Now we're going to look at John chapter 2 and the story of the wedding at Cana, verses 1 to 11.

Now the basic outline of this story is quite simple. When they run out of wine at a wedding, Jesus uses his power to change water into wine.

[4 : 41] But really, it is a kind of strange story. You might have thought that it's that it's low on Jesus' agenda to do a thing like this.

How does it compare with healings, with the raising of the dead? It does seem a wee bit low-key in comparison to these. And we might well ask, why is it in the scriptures?

What's the purpose of it? What is it meant to teach us? And that's what we're going to look at. Now I think the key to this really is what is said in verse 11.

This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee and manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him. This was a sign.

It was a sign that showed the greatness of Jesus. It was a sign that was meant to produce faith in those that understood it. A sign.

[5 : 49] It gives information. Post office. Dumfries Free Church. Bus station. Signs like that are simple signs that give information.

This is a sign that gives us information about Jesus. About who he is. Or a sign. It's also used in the sense of a signpost.

Stranrar. Curlile. Telling you where to go. Pointing you in a certain direction. This is a pointer to the future. It's saying, look at this and it points you in a certain direction.

In that way too, this is telling us about Jesus. What he's going to do. How things are going to be in the course of his ministry.

A sign. A sign that displays his glory. A sign, a sign that is designed to make us trust. So let's look at this as a sign and hope and pray that this will bring us to a fuller confidence in the Lord.

[7 : 05] Now there are three simple things that this is a sign of. On the face of it, there are three simple things that this is a sign of. Jesus' support for marriage.

Jesus' sympathy with the distressed. And Jesus' power over nature. Now there's much more to it than that. But on the face of it, that's what this is pointing to.

Jesus supports marriage. Some ministers make quite a lot of this at marriage ceremonies. Jesus graced this wedding with his presence. He supports the institution of marriage.

The forming of the bond between a man and a woman is not a casual thing, but a formal thing. Not a private matter, but a public act of commitment.

Sealed by the presence of others. By his presence here, as a participant in the festivities, Jesus expresses his support for marriage.

[8 : 11] It's a pointer forward to things that he was going to say in the course of his ministry. It's a certain point. The matter of divorce is brought to his attention, for example, and he brings out the words of Genesis.

For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and these two shall become flesh. This is a pointer to what Jesus was going to say about marriage.

And he's saying the same thing today. We live in a society where relationships are becoming increasingly informal and temporary. And it's good to remind ourselves that Jesus gave countenance to marriage as a formal, public commitment.

He did so by taking part in the festivities in Cana. Jesus supports marriage. This is a sign of Jesus' sympathy with the distressed.

In our days, it would be it would matter for comment if food or drink ran out at a wedding and we would wonder what had gone wrong with the organisation in the hotel, whatever.

[9 : 25] In those days, it was the bridegroom that was responsible. And if the wine ran out, it was a great disgrace. And so, when this man is open to an embarrassing situation that would expose him to disgrace, when he's up against this distressing situation, Jesus takes him, shows mercy to him by getting him out of his difficulty in this way.

And that's just a faint point, a very faint pointer to the sort of person that Jesus was in the course of his ministry. He saw a coffin, a beard rather, being carried for burial.

the only son of a widowed mother. He stops the procession and he restores the boy to life and gives him back to his mother. He sees a paralysed man and he says, Son, your sins are forgiven you.

Take up your mat and go home. He sees the woman with a hemorrhage. It has been getting worse despite medical attention throughout the years. And he encourages her and says, Daughter, your faith has saved you.

Remain free from this scourge. He sees people that are burdened by trying to keep the law, striving and striving to win righteousness from God by strict obedience to the law as it was interpreted then.

[10 : 51] And he says, Come to me and I'll give you rest. He sees the dying thief and he says to him, Today you'll be with me in paradise.

That's Jesus. We've got a wee picture of it here that's a pointer to the great compassion and sympathy that he was going to show. And that's Jesus still.

He says to all those that are burdened with any type of burden, Come to me and I'll give you rest.

This is the sign of Jesus' sympathy with the distressed.

And thirdly, this is a sign of Jesus' power over nature. Now this is in some ways a strange miracle and we'll deal maybe with that a wee bit later.

But, you know, I think of this as what we might say a natural miracle. Now what I mean by that is this. This is done normally in the normal course of nature.

[11:51] Only Jesus does it in a moment. But, vines need a lot of water and the roots drink up the water and they're assimilated into the plant and in the natural process that goes on there they're made into wine juice which is squeezed out and it becomes wine.

Water is changed into wine in the normal process of nature. That's why I call it a natural miracle. But it's a miracle because what takes weeks, months in the normal course of events is done in a moment here.

And it's a startling expression of Jesus' power over nature. He speeds up the process and does in a moment which takes nature quite a while to do.

And that's him. That's a pointer to who he is. He's in control of nature. He's over nature. He makes it do his bidding. The most obvious event that this points to is his controlling the storm.

He stands and he says peace, be still and the waters are turned into a calm. That's him. Storms arise in a course of time.

[13:07] Storms diminish. But he does it in a moment by an act of speaking. The storm is changed into a calm at his command and will as we were singing.

And he's still the same. He's got everything in his hand. He's got nature under his control. The whole world belongs to him. And he tells us that all things work together for good to those that love God.

His power to do great things is there as well as his sympathy. And that's the way we can see him still. He's still at work today in that way.

And these things make us see these things that lie on the surface of this story make us see is that the way we see his glory. Do we recognize the glory of one who is not only able to save but willing to save?

Who is not only compassionate but all powerful? It's not one thing that he's got or the other it's both together. And that is of course a remarkable display of his glory.

[14:12] is one of the wonders of Christ that is displayed here. That's what we should believe in today. And we should go to him in all our problems and our sinfulness trusting in his compassion.

He'll help us. That's the sort of God he is. He's able to do so. That's the sort of God he is. That's the sort of thing that can come to us if you look at this story at that level.

Now that doesn't satisfy me as a complete picture of what's in mind here.

And there's two reasons for that. The first is the nature of this miracle. Surely, surely the changing of water into wine was not high on Jesus' agenda.

And although I've said it's an expression of his sympathy to the distressed, most other people that he helped were an awful lot more distressed than this man was.

[15:16] You know, and it's that low-key nature of this miracle that makes me ask, is there not more to it than that? And the other thing that makes me ask this is that there's certain things in this story that just haven't been dealt with if we take it at that level.

And we'll look at them in a moment. There's details here that could well be left out if that's all that this story was meant to be teaching us. But these details are there.

They're woven into the story. They're part of it. And if all that we can say is a sign of this, that, or the other, as we've done, if that's all that we can say, then we're missing out part of what the scriptures are teaching us.

So let's look at these bits of the story that we haven't yet dealt with, that we're disregarding, if all that we're seeing is that this is a story of these things that we've mentioned.

Okay. And there are two particular things that seem to have a place in the story here that could well have been left out if that's all that we've got in this story, these three signs that we've mentioned.

[16:27] Now, the first of these things is his reference to his mother. And the second of these things is the place that the water pots play in this story. So let's look at this bit first of all, Jesus and his mother.

When he ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to him, they've no wine. And Jesus said to her, woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.

Come. what's this doing in the story? What does it add to the story? It's not apparent what Jesus' mother expected him to do.

She doesn't say, turn water into wine, would you? Or something of that nature. She just brings it to his attention. salvation. And we've got to gather from Jesus' reply the sort of thing that she had in mind.

And I think the sort of thing that she had in mind was this. It's about time that you showed who you really were. After all, Mary knows that Jesus is somebody special.

[17:39] She was told this before he was conceived. She knew it before birth. And the wise men and the shepherds and the angelic chorus, they all add to the specialness of Jesus.

And many other things too must have convinced her. My boy isn't an ordinary boy. And yet he's going around, he's just a carp, just a joiner, just a joiner.

And I think from the reply that Jesus makes, this is the sort of thing that Jesus' mother was trying to get at. Look, you're somebody special.

Can't you show it on this occasion? Because Jesus says, my hour has not yet come. And what he's saying to her is this. Yes, I am somebody special.

But this isn't the time for me to show it. My day hasn't arrived yet. The time for showing what I've really come to do, the big moment in my life is not yet here.

[18:51] And then he goes on and he makes water into wine. And what he's really been saying is, okay, I'll do this miracle. I'll show myself to be kind and compassionate and powerful.

powerful. But it's not the big thing. Don't you be thinking that this is my day. We would say day rather than hour, but it means the same thing. Don't you be thinking that this is my day.

Because my day hasn't yet come. So he's pointing beyond this. Yes, he's powerful. Yes, he's compassionate and so on. But there's something more that isn't demonstrated here.

There's a day coming when he's going to show himself for who he really is. And that's the big moment that he's looking forward to. My hour has not yet come. And you see, that rings a bell with us because this is the way that he speaks a few times in the course of his ministry.

Especially when he was up against the prospect of violence. And he was in danger of losing his life. He speaks about this, his hour.

[19:58] So they were seeking to arrest him. But no one laid a hand on him because his hour had not yet come. There was a time when he was going to be arrested.

But it hadn't come yet. He's still looking forward to the coming of his hour. The big day for him was yet in the future. Later on in the gospel similarly, no man laid hands on him for his hour was not yet come.

He's looking forward to the coming of his big day. And then it does come. He's thinking about his death. And we quoted this this morning in another connection.

Now is my soul troubled and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Here his hour is approaching.

The big day is coming. And what is it consisting of? It consists of his death. It consists of his resurrection. Later still, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father.

[21:07] That's what his hour was. To depart out of this world to his Father. Not just the death on the cross but his departure from the world to the Father. His resurrection, his ascension.

That was the big thing that this was pointing forward to. So, when Jesus says here, my hour has not yet come. He's telling Mary, he's telling his disciples, he's telling us, don't think that this was the big thing for which I came into this world to make water into wine.

The big day for me is the day when I give myself on the cross. The big day for me is when I'm raised from the dead. The big day for me is when I'm taken up to heaven.

That's my hour. That's the big thing in my life. The centre of my ministry. And although this may point forward to certain things that are important and are connected with that, he's still keen to make sure that we know the cross is central.

The resurrection from the dead is the big thing that matters. So, this helps us get these things in perspective. However, he might be taken up in changing water into wine, in helping people in distress and showing his power.

[22:20] the climax of it all, the big moment of it all, is the death and resurrection of our Lord. And this helps us to get the whole matter of his ministry into perspective.

And that's the way that we should look at things too. People may be impressed by his miracles, people may say what a wonderful teacher, people may say what kindness and love, and that's right and correct, but unless it's related to the big thing in life, namely his death and resurrection, there's

a loss of focus, a loss of perspective that distorts the meaning of these things.

And I think that's the thing that this is teaching us at that point. So that's Jesus and his mother. But then you see there's Jesus and these water pots. And you know they enter into the story, but if you just see signs of what we've talked about, they really might as well have been left out of the story. So at what point is there in these water pots here? Well they're introduced right from the start, verse 6 or more or less from the start. Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding 20 or 30 gallons.

So this tells us how many jars there were. There were six of them. It tells how big they were, 20 or 30 gallons. Now I don't know, I couldn't think of anything just precisely to see how big 20 or 30 gallons is.

[23 : 56] But you know most cars don't have, a tank that holds 10 gallons and this was two or three times that size. So we're talking something quite big.

And then you see there are six of them. So we're talking really about a massive amount of water.

And then he tells us why the water is there. And this is important.

I think this isn't for the domestic supply for the kitchen. This is for the rites of purification of the Jewish people. Now briefly, of course, I think you know that the Jews were very keen at this stage on washing with water.

There were all sorts of laws in the Old Testament where a person would become unclean. If you ate certain food, you would become unclean. If you touched the bodies of these animals that were unclean, then you became unclean.

If you had a bleeding, you became unclean. If you had leprosy, you were unclean. And the general way in which you were to get rid of this uncleanness was to wash the body with water.

[25 : 12] And the people that were particularly strict about this, therefore, were always washing themselves with water. you might go to the market. Who knows what you touched there? People crowded around you.

Perhaps they were unclean. Perhaps they were bleeding. Perhaps they brushed against you and they were carrying something that was unclean. You never know what had happened to you in the marketplace. So when you came home, you'd best wash.

And that's what this water is for. It's particularly for the rites of purification of the Jewish people. Laid down in the Old Testament, perhaps elaborated and made more important than they really were, but nevertheless an essential part of the religion of many people at that stage.

So that's what this water is for. And then he tells them what they've to do. Fill the jars with water.

So they draw water from the well, presumably, and they fill these jars with water. And they fill them right up to the brim, so that these water jars for purification are completely full.

[26 : 21] Now it's not entirely clear what happens next. I meant to double check this, but if I recall rightly, and I read it this way, it doesn't say draw some out and take it.

It says draw and take it. And where is he to draw from? And it doesn't necessarily imply that he draws from the water jars.

And some people say that this word only refers to drawing from the well. And the picture then is you fill up these jars with water, then you go to the well again, and you get something out of there that changes into wine.

Now, what's the importance of all this? And really, we do have to ask that question, because it's such an integral part of the story.

If we don't deal with this, we've left an element of the story out of account. And I'm a bit reluctant to do this, because for years and years I didn't see it this way.

[27 : 25] But I do think we've got to make something of this, and this is what I think it means. This is a sign. It's symbolic.

It's, if you like, an acted parable. Now, we know that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. So, an acted parable is an earthly act with a heavenly meaning.

And what he's doing here is filling up the water pots that speak of purification and drawing water that becomes wine.

And the water pots stand for the Old Testament way of doing things. wine stands for the New Testament outlook about things. And what he's doing therefore, it's not changing the water into wine.

He's changing an Old Testament outlook that was concerned with outward rites of purification into a New Testament experience that is characterized by the joy of a wedding feast.

[28 : 35] So, he's setting aside one way of looking at religion and bringing in another way of looking at religion. Now, you might think that this is a bit far-fetched, but it's certainly the story of the scriptures.

The Old Testament way of doing things was outward, washing with water, external regulations, as we read in Hebrews chapter 9, external regulations applying until the time of reformation.

And the time of reformation has come. That's what Jesus is saying. And we know how these were outward regulations, washing the body. What good does that do for your sin?

Can you wash away your sin by washing your body? These are outward and they don't touch the reality. And even the animals that were killed and the blood that was shed and applied to the altar, what do they do in themselves?

They don't accomplish anything. they may be pictures of what does accomplish something, but they don't accomplish anything in themselves. We know that because they're constantly repeated. If something worked, you'd only have to do it once.

[29 : 48] But you have to make the same offering day after day, evening after evening. Every time you sin, you bring your offering. And that means that the offering doesn't cleanse you from sin, because if it did, you wouldn't have to keep on doing it.

So these are outward regulations. The whole ceremonies, all these ceremonies that there are in the Old Testament, they're all outward regulations. And they're here until the time of Reformation.

And this implies to me that the time of Reformation has come. The water pots are now full. There's nothing else to do with them.

The time for them has been fulfilled, if you like. And there's something new here, which is depicted symbolically in the wine of a wedding feast. And you see that idea of things too does find its counterpart in other things that Jesus said in the course of his ministry.

You know, this idea of a wedding and so on is really quite important in Jesus' ministry. See how often it's mentioned.

[31 : 02] they're asked why they don't fast, why his disciples don't fast the way John's disciples do. And Jesus says to them, can the wedding guest born as long as the bridegroom is with them?

The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them and then they will fast. Now, what is Jesus saying? I'm with my disciples. And what does it feel like?

It feels like the bridegroom is there at the wedding festivities. that's what that saying is based on. Jesus is like a bridegroom that brings happiness and gives a festive spirit to affairs.

And that fits in with what he's doing here. This wine that he makes out of water is a symbol of the festive spirit that characterizes folks that have come to know Christ as the bridegroom.

And then there's other things as well that fit along the same lines. The five wise and the five foolish girls, they were waiting for the bridegroom. Who was the bridegroom?

[32 : 08] It was Jesus. That's the way he's depicted in terms of a marriage festivity we might say. The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.

The same picture. That's the way that Jesus describes himself. That's the way that he describes the state of affairs when people come to know him and rejoice in him.

It's like being at a wedding typified by this wine that he has made out of water. So as I say he's setting aside an old way of looking at things.

The outward way of washing the body and outward ceremonies. And he's saying that's fulfilled. That's outdated now. There's something fresh here. I'm here.

And the thing that matters is to know me as the bridegroom that brings happiness and joy to a person's life. There's a verse in Romans that I think it's very much more prosaic language but it gets the basic idea of what we're trying to say here.

[33 : 12] The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. And that's what Jesus is saying by the symbolic action of filling up the water jars and then drawing out fresh water that becomes wine.

That's what Jesus is saying. It's not a matter of outward things like eating and drinking or washing the body with water and things like that. That's not what the kingdom of God consists of.

It consists of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. And that's all together in keeping with the sort of imagery that we've got here in this story.

And that fits in with other things too in the New Testament. Think of the prodigal son that came home. Here's the returning sinner. And how is he greeted? There's joy in heaven over one sinner that repents.

And that's depicted in the great feast that they made. And there was music and dancing and a calf that was killed for eating. So on. The same festive attitude that's the idea in mind.

[34 : 17] Now notice that it's joy in the Holy Spirit that we're talking about here. We're not talking about worldly joy. It's not a matter of if we get together we'll just have a nice chat and we'll joke and laugh and be happy together.

That's not the thing that we're talking about. Although it might be something that goes on at weddings. It is something that goes on at weddings. But it's not what we're talking about. It's joy in the Holy Spirit that we're talking about.

It's the joy that comes from knowing that our sins were forgiven. It's the joy that comes from knowing that the Holy Spirit brought us to that experience and is resident in our hearts. It's the joy that comes from knowing that we're secure because we're in his hands and no one can pluck us out of the Father's grasp.

That's the sort of joy. A spiritual joy. A spiritually based joy that springs from the knowledge of sins forgiven. And so that's I think is the big message of this story.

Jesus is saying, is introducing a new age here symbolically. And he's saying the old religion that consists of outward washings and that sort of thing is past and a new experience has begun like being at a wedding feast.

[35 : 26] When you have the joy of the Spirit in your hearts and the knowledge of forgiveness there, then you'll be filled with this joy that is characteristic of a wedding festivity because Jesus himself is the bridegroom we might add.

That's the sort of thing. So you see, this shows his glory. This shows his glory. Indeed it does. It shows his glory in this. That he's fulfilled the old way of doing things.

And he's brought something radically new into being. And there's nothing much more glorious than that. And he's shown his glory because here he's got the power to transform religious experience and to make it new.

That's glorious. And we can really see this is a sign that this place is glory. glory. And this is a sign that this place is glory. And it's something that encourages us to trust in him.

Surely, surely when we see this we learn to trust in him. Now the problem of course is that we tend to lose the reality of this. joy. And we forget what it was like when we first knew the Lord.

[36 : 50] And we do need to make real efforts to rekindle that joy and keep it as fresh as we can. God. But this something is surely that encourages us to do so.

Let us trust in him as the great restorer, as the one that accomplished this great reformation when the external regulations came to an end and then their experience of forgiveness took their place. And that's what this is teaching us. Trust in him to do that for us. and ask that day by day that experience might be kept fresh. And that our trust in him would always be deepened.

May God bless to us his word. We're going to sing in prayer.