

AM John 2:1-12 Water into wine

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[0 : 0 0] The Bible, God's Word, the Old Testament section, Psalm, or not Psalm anything, Isaiah 25. And we're going to read the whole chapter and you'll find that on page 708.

Isaiah 25, we read the whole chapter. O Lord, you are my God, I will exalt you, I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.

For you have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin. The foreigner's palace is a city no more, it will never be rebuilt. Therefore strong people will glorify you, cities of ruthless nations will fear you.

For you have been a stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm against a wall, like heat in a dry place.

You subdue the noise of the foreigners as heat by the shade of a cloud. So the song of the ruthless is put down. On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.

[1 : 4 4] And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces.

And the reproach of his people will be taken away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, Behold, this is our God.

We have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord. We have waited for him. Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain, and Moab will be trampled down in his place.

A straw is trampled down on a dunghill. And he will spread out his hands in the midst of it, as a swimmer spreads his hands out to swim.

But the Lord will lay low his pompous pride together with the skill of his hands. And the high fortifications of his walls he will bring down, lay low and cast to the ground, to the dust.

[2 : 5 3] Amen. Now we're going to read again from the Bible, God's Word. This time in the New Testament section.

We're going to read from John chapter 2. And we're going to read the first 12 verses. It's on page 1069.

It's John 2, 1 to 12, page 1069. Amen. Now let's pray before we come to God's Word and ask his help to hear it properly.

Let's pray for a moment. Lord, we thank you that you are good and upright. And because that is your character, you are the God who instructs sinners in your way.

And you lead the humble in what is right. And you teach the humble your way. So Lord, we come to you acknowledging that without the help of your Holy Spirit, we cannot understand your Word.

[4 : 17] We cannot make sense of it. We cannot obey it to your glory and praise. But we thank you that you have given us your Spirit. And we pray that he might teach us your ways and reveal Jesus to us in your Word.

We pray this in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Now it's John chapter 2 and verse 1.

On the third day there was a wedding in 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 jars, water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding 20 or 30 gallons.

[5 : 29] 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 some out 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 serve the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine.

But you have kept the good wine, or the best 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.

After this, he went down to Capernaum with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days. Amen. Amen.

Now, one afternoon, I was standing outside the church that I served in Belfast, and a mother and her daughter walked past.

[6 : 55] They were heading home from school, and we got chatting about the weather and school and all sorts of things that were going on in our community at the time.

The little girl, I reckon, was probably five or six, because she still had her original front teeth in. They hadn't fallen out. So she was maybe the age of some people here.

And we were talking away, and she sort of gave me a nudge, as five and six-year-olds do, to get my attention. And she pointed to the church building, and she said, what goes on in there?

I thought that was a good question, and a particularly good question from somebody who was five or six. What would you say, what would your answer be to her?

What happens if you were standing outside the door there in George Street, and some six-year-old said to you, what goes on in there? What answer would you give? Sounds of brains ticking over time here.

[8 : 06] There. Well, here's the answer I gave to her that day. I said to her, in that building, people learn who Jesus is, and how to follow Jesus.

Now, we did other things in that building in Belfast, but we certainly learned about who Jesus is, and how we could follow Jesus. And John had a similar, was thinking along those lines when, towards the last decades of the first century AD, he put pen to paper, and wrote his account of Jesus' life, that we call John's Gospel.

He tells us in John 20, verse 31, what the aim of his writing was. He says, these things are written, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, so we understand who Jesus is, and that by believing, how we respond, to who Jesus is, you might have life in his name.

And one of the ways in which John helps us to understand who Jesus is, and how we are to follow him, is by recording seven miracles Jesus performed.

Only he doesn't call them miracles. The word he uses there, if you look at verse 11, is signs.

[9 : 48] He calls them signs. Now imagine that you are on an unfamiliar road, and Google Maps has no signal on your phone, and there are no road signs.

You would get lost, I think. And maybe some of you would get lost more quickly than you normally get lost on a road.

But anyway, because signs are important. And they're important because they point away from themselves, and direct us to something much more important.

And by referring to these seven miracles as signs, John wants us to grasp that they're going to point us away from themselves, and they're going to tell us about who Jesus is, who he is, and what he wants from us.

They're going to focus our attention on Jesus. And the first of these seven signs, which we read there in John 2, 1 to 12, I'm going to think about this morning, certainly does that.

[11 : 03] It tells us what happened at a wedding in the Galilean village of Cana. And probably the storyline is pretty familiar to many of us here today.

There was a wedding, Jesus' mother, and Jesus and some of his disciples were invited to it, and everything went really well. The ceremony was fine.

And then the wedding reception was going well. And then disaster struck. The wine ran out. That would have been huge social embarrassment for the groom and the groom's family.

In those days, it was the groom who footed the bill for wedding receptions. It would have been huge social embarrassment for them. And Jesus, if you like, saved the day because he turns water that was stored in these six large water jars into top-notch wine.

We're familiar with that story. But why does John include it in his account of Jesus' life? Why does he tell us it's a sign? Well, it's so that we might learn about who Jesus is.

[12 : 22] So let's think first of all about what Jesus was saying about himself when he performed this miraculous sign. John tells us at the end in verse 11 that he, when he did this, by performing this miraculous sign, he revealed his glory.

Or he manifested his glory. He displayed his glory. This sign was like a light shining on who Jesus is. And it tells us a number of things about Jesus.

It tells us, first of all, that Jesus was human. What could be more human than being at a wedding? What could be more real life than enjoying good food and good wine and the company of family and friends?

And I'm sure that, I don't know if they have this expression in Scotland, but they certainly have it in Northern Ireland. I'm sure that day the crack and the banter was mighty.

And everybody, you know what it's like, all the old stories were wheeled out once more. And everyone laughed at them, even though they'd heard them about a hundred times.

[13 : 35] And everybody was having a good time. And there was Jesus, sitting in the corner, with a scowl on his face and his arms folded.

I don't think so. I think Jesus was right in the middle of it. He was laughing and having a great time. It's so human. Now, don't step over this, because that's the first thing that this miraculous sign tells us about Jesus, that he was a real human being.

But the second thing that this miraculous sign tells us about Jesus, is that he was God. He might have been a human, but he was more than a human.

Water does not change into wine, unless someone suspends natural laws and operates beyond them. And the only person who can do that is someone who is God.

And yet here at the wedding reception, Jesus turns water into wine by suspending natural laws and operating beyond them. Jesus is doing something that only God can do.

[14 : 53] So the logical deduction is, Jesus is God. This miraculous sign is certainly taking us in that direction.

It's telling us that while he's definitely human, he's also definitely God. But it tells us another thing about Jesus.

It tells us that Jesus is the Savior. The Old Testament had predicted the arrival of the Messiah, the promised Savior, and that that time would be marked by a profusion of the best wine.

Here's a couple of examples. Joel 3 verse 18. In that day the mountains will drip new wine. Or Amos 9 verse 13.

New wine will flow from the hills. Or Isaiah 25 verse 6 that we read earlier on in the service. On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples.

[16 : 01] A banquet of aged wine. The best of meats and the finest wines. And the quantity of the wine that Jesus produced was huge.

If you do the sums, between 120 and 180 gallons worth. Now you're probably like me, and you buy your milk in four pint plastic containers.

And that means it's between 240 and 360 such containers.

And even if I put the back seat down in my car, I still couldn't get that amount of four pint plastic container into it. It was a huge amount.

And it was also high end quality. Do you remember how the head waiter, the man in charge of the smooth running of the wedding banquet, expressed the surprise at what was going on in verse 10?

[17 : 11] He said, Everyone I know begins with their finest wines, and after the guests are a little sloshed, and their taste buds the worst for wear, then he brings out the cheap stuff.

But you've saved the best to the end. And by doing what he did in terms of quantity and quality of wine, Jesus is fulfilling what the Old Testament said would happen when the Messiah arrived.

He's clearly setting out his stall to be the promise to Savior. And right back at the beginning of history, with his Genesis 3.15 promise, God had said he would send the Messiah to rescue his people from their sin.

And here with this miraculous sign, Jesus is saying the waiting is over. With his arrival on the stage of history, God had kept his promise to send such a Savior.

But there's more to this idea of Jesus being a Savior, because this miraculous sign also highlights what kind of a Savior Jesus is.

[18 : 26] Now, in verse 6, our attention is drawn to the fact that these six stone jars were not some internal water feature by a first century interior designer, but we're told that they are the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing.

Now, that's not a throwaway line, but it's actually an invitation to us by John to contrast the salvation that Jesus is offering with the religion of Judaism that the six stone jars represented.

And the contrast there, when we think about this contrast, Jesus is telling us that he really does cleanse us from sin.

Now, according to the rules and regulations of Judaism, before you ate, you had to wash your hands and your arms up to your elbows. And I know that, girls and boys, that you're always told to wash your hands before your dinner, or your tea, or you've had food, and sometimes you do, and sometimes you don't, but you're always told to do it.

But this has nothing to do with food hygiene, or anything like that there. This was a symbol that we needed to be cleansed from our sin.

[19 : 53] Our sins need to be washed away, as the water washed away any dirt. But the fact that this ceremonial purification washing had to be repeated again, and again, and again, and again, and again, was a reminder that the religion of Judaism couldn't really deal with sin.

But by turning this ceremonial purification water into wine, Jesus is saying that when he saves us, he really does cleanse us from our sin.

Our sins leave us dirty, but Jesus washes it away, and makes it clean. And the contrast also shows that Jesus deals with us on the principle of grace.

Now, on Saturday the 10th of September 2022, my daughter, who lives in Aberdeen, and has our three grandsons, who at that stage were almost 10, 8, and nearly 4, she sent me a picture of them, watching the television, of the official proclamation, of that King Charles was the new king.

The queen had died two days before, and this was the official proclamation, the Saturday morning, and she sent me a picture of them, sitting in front of the television, watching it, and the caption at the bottom of it was, does this remind you of anything?

[21 : 37] And it reminded me of a Friday, it was actually Friday the 9th of November, 1989, and it was the day that the Berlin Wall came down, some of you remember that, some of you won't, but it was the day the Berlin Wall came down, and I was, Rosie, my oldest girl, and my son were, they were, what age were they, I'm trying to work out here, six and five, they were watching Blue Peter on the TV, and I made them turn over, to watch BBC Two, because it was a picture of the Berlin Wall, and they kept saying to me, oh dad, and I said, no, this is history, you'll remember it, and so she did, 34 years later, and she made her children do it.

Both events marked the end, of an epoch, and the start of a new one. September 2022, the 10th of September 2022, the end of Queen Elizabeth's long reign, and the start of King Charles's, new reign.

The Berlin Wall, marked the end of communism, and maybe, at the end of the Cold War, perhaps even the end of the Second World War, and the new era.

The old order, the old era was gone, the new era, had come. And by changing water into wine, Jesus was saying that something even more momentous was happening.

A momentous change was taking place. The old order of performance-based religion, you know, do this, do that, don't do this, don't do that.

[23 : 26] That was on the way out, and it was to be replaced by God's kingdom, where Jesus ruled as the king, and this new setup was based on grace.

That God did not give us the judgment we deserved, but instead gave us the salvation we didn't deserve.

So by performing this miraculous sign, of turning water into wine, at the wedding reception in Cana of Galilee, Jesus revealed his glory.

He showed us who he was. That he's God in a real humanity, who has come to be the savior, who cleanses from sin, and who deals with us, on the principle of grace.

But John records this sign, not just to, that we learn about who Jesus is, but we also learn about what it means to, to follow Jesus.

[24 : 28] And we learn this from the various responses, and reactions to people, to what was going on that day. We learn from Mary's initial response, that following Jesus means, that we do not demand things of Jesus.

That we do not demand things of Jesus. An interesting conversation takes place between Jesus and his mother, in verses 3 and 5. Mary tells Jesus, they have no more wine.

We think that's a simple statement, on the face of it. You know, they've run out of drink. However, the way Jesus reacts to it, there's more to that statement.

Jesus sees that statement, as a demand on him, by his mother. It's basically something like this. Jesus, the wine is run out. Do something about it.

Sort it. Now, behind his mother's comments, Jesus detected faith. faith. But it was a demanding type of faith.

[25 : 45] It was a faith that wants to tell Jesus what to do. So Jesus turns to Mary and says, woman or dear woman, why do you involve me?

My hour has not yet come. And he's gently, but very firmly, reminding his mother, that she cannot make demands of him.

And each phrase in Jesus' reply does that. Jesus calls Mary, dear woman. And while that was certainly a polite way, of addressing an older lady in Jesus' culture, it was hardly a term of endearment.

It's not the way a son would speak to his mother. Don Carson, in his commentary on John, suggests that dear woman has got the words the wrong way around.

Don Carson's father was from Northern Ireland. And he thinks that what Jesus said should be translated in the Ulster expression, woman, dear.

[26 : 53] Not dear woman, but woman, dear. Now, in Northern Ireland, let me tell you that when someone uses that expression or its male equivalent, man, dear, they're about to chide the person to whom they're speaking.

You know, as in, man, dear, stop being such an idiot and wise up. So by using that combination, if you like, of politeness, woman, dear woman, and rebuke, woman, dear, Jesus, in a sense, is distancing himself from Mary.

He's reminding Mary that even she can't make demands of him. And then Jesus goes on to say, why do you involve me? Or literally says, what to you and to me?

That was a common expression in Jesus' time when a person wanted to distance himself from someone. and Jesus is telling Mary that she cannot dictate to him how he should react and what he should do and when he should do it.

And then finally, Jesus informs Mary, my hour has not yet come. And in John's Gospel, my hour refers to the moment when Jesus will show exactly who he is by dying on the cross and rising from the dead.

[28 : 14] It's almost a technical term in John's Gospel for Jesus' death and resurrection. And that time would be on the cross when he died and rose again.

His glory would be fully revealed. That time was decided by his father and not by Mary. And Jesus is pointing out to his mother that he's under his father's authority and not hers.

She does not set the agenda for his life. She cannot tell him what to do. Now, it's clear what Jesus is saying to his mother there. And we mustn't be too hard on Mary because if we're honest with ourselves, we do the same things, don't we?

We make demands of Jesus. And you know when we discover how we make demands of Jesus, we discover it especially when we pray. because when we pray for something and I hope I'm not judging you by me, but when we pray for something, don't we also have a clear picture in our minds as to when and how God is going to answer that request.

and we are in effect saying to Jesus, Jesus, I want you to do this for me and I want you to do it at this time and in this way.

[29 : 48] While we certainly have faith in God, we believe he can do something, it's a bit of a demanding faith. we're telling him how and when he should act.

And God usually says no to that kind of praying so that we might learn that following Jesus means not demanding things of him.

He says no so that we might learn to submit to Jesus' authority, his way of doing things, his way of answering prayers, and his timing of when he answers our prayers.

And do you know what happens when we stop making demands of God when we pray, when we stop, when we say to God, please do this, and we leave it to him how he answers that prayer and when he answers that prayer.

Do you know what happens when we do that and don't demand? We discover something really wonderful, that God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.

[31 : 04] So from Mary's initial response, we see that following Jesus involves not making demands on Jesus. But Mary, that wasn't Mary's final response to Jesus, she makes a response, and we also learn from the servant's action as well, that following Jesus means doing what Jesus says.

The penny dropped, and Mary realized what she'd been doing, so she turns to the servants in verse 5 and says, do whatever he tells you to do. And that's exactly what they did.

Jesus said to the servants, fill the jars with water, so they filled them to the brim. And then he told them, now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet. They did so.

And John is underlining the servant's obedience to what Jesus says, because he wants to stress that that is what goes with the territory when it comes to following Jesus.

That we listen to what Jesus wants us to do as he reveals it to us in his word, and then we obey that. No matter how inconvenient it might be, and no matter how much it goes against the received wisdom of our culture, we do what Jesus tells us to do.

[32 : 22] So from Mary's final response and the servant's action, we see that following Jesus is doing what he says. And then a third response was the disciples' response, and we learn from that that following Jesus means keeping on, trusting in Jesus.

If you look at verse 11, it says there this, the first of his signs Jesus did at Cana and Galilee, and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

Now, if you remember what went on in John 1, we didn't have time to look at it or read it even, we're going to say hold on a minute.

isn't John 1 all about how Peter and Andrew and Philip and Nathaniel and John became followers of Jesus? And the answer is yes, it is.

So we say, well then, what's all this about them putting their faith in Jesus? Hadn't they already done that? Yes, they had. But folks, this is here to remind us that faith is not something static.

[33 : 44] It's dynamic. Faith is something we exercise every day, and not just the day that we started to follow Jesus.

We're not simply to trust in Jesus and just park it there for the rest of our lives. But faith is something that we do day after day after day.

We keep on trusting in Jesus. And as we keep on trusting in Jesus, so our faith in him deepens.

And that's what's going on here. It's as the disciples witnessed this miraculous sign, their already existing faith was deepened. You see, Jesus is interested in the the quantity of our faith that we keep on trusting in him.

And he's also interested in the quality of our faith that it deepens. And how does our faith in Jesus deepen?

[34 : 55] Well, it deepens in exactly the same way as these five men's trust in Jesus deepened. it's by seeing Jesus' glory. By understanding who Jesus is.

And where do we see Jesus' glory? Where do we understand today who Jesus is? We understand who Jesus is.

And Jesus reveals his glory to us in the written down scriptures scriptures that the Holy Spirit has given to us to show us who Jesus is.

So as we understand the Bible, as we grow in our understanding, as we grow in our obedience to the Bible, so our trust in Jesus becomes deeper and deeper.

And so from the disciples' reaction, we see that following Jesus involves keeping on trusting in him. The head waiter cuts a sad figure, doesn't he?

[36 : 05] He was the first to taste the water that had been turned into wine. He was the one who recognized that it was an excellent vintage. But as verse 9 points out, he didn't realize where it had come from.

I've never been on this road from where I came to Dunfrees today.

What would you think if you saw me in front of a sign post to Dunfrees? On my mobile phone, talking to Joan and telling her about this sign.

You know, you really should see this sign. It's really lovely and green. The people around here keep their signs so clean. It's very nice writing.

And extolling the virtue of the sign. Well, if you saw me doing that, I think your suspicions about me would be confirmed that I'm a sandwich short of a picnic or something like that there.

[37 : 15] You would say to me, man dear, you would say it's where the sign is pointing. That's important. Not the sign itself.

And that's what's so tragic about the head waiter. He enjoyed the water that had been turned into wine, the miraculous sign itself. But he missed out on Jesus and putting his faith in Jesus and so experiencing Jesus' cleansing and grace, the thing to which the miraculous sign was pointing.

Please don't be like him. This miraculous sign points us to how Jesus is God in a real humanity who has come to be the saviour to cleanse us from our sin and flood our lives with his lavish grace.

go to where the sign is pointing. Go to Jesus. I don't know any of you.

But for some of you that might mean putting your trust in Jesus for the first time. You're here this morning, you're not a Christian. But it might mean to you putting your trust in Jesus.

[38 : 42] That he might cleanse you from your sin and he might flood your life with his grace. For some of you it might mean, and you are a Christian, it might mean submitting afresh to Jesus' authority over your life by repenting of the way you have made demands on Jesus and insist he does things in your way and in your time.

I've met too many Christians who they've fallen out with God, they've fallen out with Jesus, they're huffing with him because they've made a demand and said, Jesus I want you to do this and I want you to do it now.

and God has said, no, no, no, faith is not making demands on me. My way and my time and you'll discover I'm able to do abundantly more than you can ask or imagine but they're huffing with God.

Maybe some of you are like that. You need to repent of that and submit afresh to Jesus' authority to do things in your life when he wants to do them and how he wants to do them.

For some of you it might mean starting to obey God's word in an area of your life in which you know you're not obeying him and you know what I'm talking about.

[40 : 15] You need to repent and begin to obey God no matter how inconvenient it is, no matter how it makes you go against the culture of our society.

And maybe for some of you it will mean trusting in Jesus even though you can't see anything positive in what is going on in your life at the present time.

You just can't make head nor tail of it. But Jesus comes to you and says keep on trusting in me. Keep on reading the Bible. Keep on resting in my promises and in my time and in my way.

I'll work things out. Folks, no matter where you are in your relationship with Jesus, make sure you go where this miraculous sign of Jesus turning water into wine is taking you, to Jesus himself and to submissive, obedient and continuing trust in him.

May you see his glory and may you put your faith in him. Let's pray for a moment. Lord Jesus, as we encounter you in your word and as you graciously reveal your glory to us in the record of this miraculous sign, help us to respond positively to you.

[41 : 39] May we grasp afresh who you are. May we not only see what it means to follow you, but actually put our faith in you and continue to put our faith and trust in you.

And we ask this in your name and for your sake. Amen.