

Better Wine

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening. My name is Aaron, if you haven't met me before. I'd love to meet you if you're new. So the wedding at Cana, we've heard it read, and many of you probably know it very, very well.

And you could be forgiven for thinking, right, I know what this one's about. You know, Ezekiel, I didn't know what was going on, but this story, I know what this is about. This is about how Jesus can do miracles, and that's great. Or, because there's lots of options, right? Or this is about the New Testament's authentication of marriage. Like marriage is just like number one, you know, it's like it's a big deal, we should do it. And this is the New Testament sort of saying that marriage is fantastic. Or this is about wine should be drunk or something.

Okay, so would you just press pause on all of your ideas about what you think this passage is about. And let's start from the beginning with some very simple ideas, and then build from there.

[1 : 02] So John is recording the life of Jesus. And this, it seems, is one of the first things Jesus does. I mean, it's certainly his first miracle. I mean, it says that in verse 11.

This is the first sign. That first word there, it's the same word as beginning at the start. And so, and that word beginning is not just, it can mean chronological first, or it can mean primary.

So straight away, we figure there's something a bit special going on here. That this is perhaps a primary sign. This is perhaps a primary event which all others fall into line under.

Later on in the gospel, John says, I saw lots of stuff. I saw lots of amazing stuff. This is a paraphrase, obviously. I saw lots of amazing stuff.

But I didn't write them all down. I'll read the scripture later on. But he said, I didn't write them down. There's too many. I included seven. Now that being the case, we have a really interesting question here.

[2 : 06] If John only includes seven signs, seven miracles of all of the things he saw, why include this story? And why give it such a prominent place in the overall story?

I mean, it's the first thing up, right? There's got to be more going on here than Jesus can do amazing things. Or Jesus likes marriage. Or Jesus approves of you drinking wine.

So let's get into the story and have a look. But I'll show my hand straight away, and I'll say this. I think there are four big things going on here. Number one, there are mother issues.

I'll come to that. Number two, it's about glory. Number three, it's about transformation. Number four, it's about abundance. So Jesus and his disciples and his mom go to a wedding.

And we don't know who got married. It's likely it was a relative. Mary, the mother of God, was sort of involved in talking to the host somehow.

[3 : 12] So it could be that it was a relative. As an aside, I think it's very interesting to see that Jesus, the son of God, had a social life.

Isn't that interesting? Jesus had a social life. He wasn't an ascetic like John the Baptist. And as we go through the gospel, you see that Jesus was very comfortable at meals and banquets.

But anyway, put that aside. That is just really an aside. So back in the days, weddings would be long affairs, and the ceremony would happen in an afternoon, but the party lasted days. The groom was responsible for paying for him. So we get to verse three here.

The wine ran out, and the mother of Jesus said to him, they have no wine. So we're at a wedding. There's a catering crisis, and no wine left. At my wedding, there was a catering crisis. What happened is we had like a two-tiered cake, which was our dessert.

And so my in-laws drove a car to the wedding, and the cake was in the trunk. When they opened up the trunk, the top layer had just slid off, like a little bit, now in the back of the trunk.

[4 : 17] Apparently they just looked at it for a couple of minutes, just like, oh. Oh. Anyway, this is not a major drama. Nothing compared to this. Nothing compared to the shame and embarrassment to the groom in our story, who was also the host, because this is a culture that, you know, hospitality was king.

So this was a disaster. So get to my first point, mother issues. So Mary says to Jesus, they have no wine.

Now, I'm convinced there is something behind those words. She wants to get the groom some help. She has an understanding of who Jesus is.

We don't know, you know, how much, but she has somewhat of an understanding. Enough for her to think that Jesus can sort this out anyway. So she looks at Jesus, and she says, they have no wine. It's like in a marriage, when a spouse says, the baby has a poopy diaper.

Right? Just so you hear it, hear it. Baby's got a poopy diaper. No. It's not just, that person is probably not just saying that for your interest.

[5 : 30] Right? You may be interested to know. The baby has soiled itself. It has a poopy diaper. People say that when they want you to do something about it.

I have never heard those words, of course. Because I'm pretty much the primary caregiver. That's not true, is it? So this interaction between Jesus and Mary is very interesting, and people have lots of different opinions on it.

They sort of go, is she just this kind of cliché, kind of meddling mother here? Or is she a model to follow? You know, she brings this need to Jesus, and it's like really faithful and stuff. I don't think that's the case.

I think she's implicitly saying something like this. Come on, Jesus. Let's get something happening here, eh? Let's sort this out. You might think I'm reading too much into it, but that's the only way, to me, that makes sense of Christ's response.

Her response is this. Verse 4. Woman, what does this have to do with me? My time has not yet come. Now, two important things are tied up. Two important things are tied up in that interaction.

[6 : 39] First thing, the relationship of Christ to his mother, and secondly, Christ's plan for revealing who he is. Verse 4. What does this have to do with me? What does this have to do with me?

It's a much softer version than the Greek, which is, there's multiple ways of interpreting it, but one of the ways that makes sense, I think, is this. What, to me, are you, woman? The translation, I think, makes it sound like it's saying, what has this problem got to do with you?

But it really could be, who are you with regards to me? Either way, it's a rebuke. It's a measured rebuke, but it is a rebuke. It's a firm word.

So what does Jesus see as the problem with what Mary is saying? Well, I think the issue is this. She wants him to fix the wine problem. She's coming to him as his mother. There's no wine. Come on. Do something, would you?

And his response is, I'm not your magic boy. As we go on and join, you'll see Jesus, a number of places, has to distance himself from people because they have a wrong idea about who he is.

[7 : 46] Mary Magdalene in the tomb, she tries to grab hold of him, and Jesus says, don't touch me. A number of other places, we see Jesus saying no to somebody who asks sort of a reasonable thing, you would think.

He says no initially and then does more than they ask for later on. And in doing that, he draws faith from them.

I think what's happening here is Jesus just has to redefine the relationship he has with his mother at this point. You know, she must come to him like everybody else. She must come to Jesus like everyone else, a sinner needing forgiveness.

There's no inside track just because you're Christ's mother. The relationship has changed. He is now much more the son of God than he is the son of Mary.

So that's the first issue, I think. There's a mother issue there. The second issue relates to Christ's plan for revealing himself, and this is where I want to talk about glory.

[8 : 51] So remember, she says there's no wine. Fix this. He says, who are you to tell me what to do here? And then there's this famous line, my hour has not yet come. So Jesus is saying, if I did my big public outing of myself, you know, as the saviour and miracle guy, like my mum wants, I'd be known as this Jesus, the guy who can save you from embarrassing social faux pas.

I mean, that's not his message, is it? That's not why he came. His message is not, watch me do amazing things. His big message we find out in the second half of John is, watch me die. That's what the, my hour has not yet come line is about. Whenever John's gospel uses the phrase, my hour or hour, it's talking about the cross. So do you see what Jesus is trying to get across here? I'm not going to reveal myself completely to everyone here. They'll misunderstand what I'm about. It will happen at some point. My glory will be revealed most completely on the cross, not yet. Now at this point, you could sort of stop the sermon and we could go straight to application and we could say things like, do we see Jesus as he's revealed in scripture? Or have we shrunken him to a utility, a spiritual utility for us?

[10:11] A miracle man when we just get in trouble. But let's just keep going. Interestingly here, despite the rebuff, as I've said, Jesus actually goes ahead and solves the no wine problem anyway.

Because he wants to draw faith out from Mary. And we see that she goes, she says to the servants, go do exactly as he says. And even though, though, people aren't going to get a complete picture of who he is, he wants to tell them something about what's going on, about what he has planned, about what he's going to do, which leads to the next point, transformation.

At the heart of the story is miraculous transformation. Jesus turns water into wine. I mean, that's pretty great. Just as it is, as a thing, right?

Just as an event. But here's the thing about miracles in the Bible. Christ's miracles are never just naked displays of power. They're never just tricks to impress people.

They always point beyond themselves. And it's why this passage calls this not a miracle. It calls it a sign. Verse 11, it says this is the first sign.

[11:23] What does a sign do? I mean, it's, you know, a sign points to things. That's why it's calling it a sign. It's saying this is pointing to something. So back to the passage. The miracle at the wedding in Cana is a sign.

It's trying to tell us something. Now, the clue to what these signs are trying to, or what these things try to tell us is often in the details. Have a look at verse 6 there. Now, there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding 20 or 30 gallons.

Now, if the big problem, if Jesus was just there to solve a wine problem, if he wanted to just help this guy out because, you know, he's a friend of the family or he's like a third cousin, and it's kind of, you know, I can do this, I'll do my thing.

If it was just that, why not just do like Hogwarts where wine falls from the sky? Or why not click his fingers and wine just appears on the table?

What's Jesus communicating by changing something? Why bother with the water at all? So there are six vestibules, hundreds of liters of water.

[12:31] They were there for the washing at the wedding, but it wasn't the only place you found really, really large jars like this of water. Back in the ancient Near East Jews, before they could enter a temple, would ceremonially wash using water from massive jars, jars like these jars, these jars here, the jars mentioned in the story.

And they would do that as a reminder that they needed to be made clean before coming into the presence of a holy God. So the washing was just a symbol. It didn't change people's hearts, but it was more pointing to the need for change.

So when Jesus uses these jars for this miracle at this wedding, it's a big nod to that ceremonial washing of the temple. And the Jewish readers would have understood that.

They would have seen that straight away. So again, the question is, stay with me here, why this miracle? Why does God use these jars? Why does he want us to think about ceremonial washing in this miracle?

Because he is saying this. He's saying, all the old temple rites and customs and ceremonies and sacrifices, those were symbols, helpful symbols, but just symbols.

[13:36] They pointed to a great need for an ultimate sacrifice. They pointed to a great need for us to be made pure and holy as a people. However, Jesus is saying, what they pointed to, I can bring that.

I can deliver on that. I can bring real cleansing. I can bring real transformation in your hearts. So all of those old customs, they couldn't change your heart. I can change your heart.

I can do that. What I did with water, a complete change. I'm going to do that with you. I can do that with you. And it won't be a small change.

It will be a change characterized by, next point, abundance. Have a look at verse 9. When the master of the feast tasted the water, now become wine, and did not know where it came from. The master of the feast, that's like the emcee. He would have been like a semi-professional kind of guy that did this for a job. The master of the feast called the bridegroom, called the guy, and he said, you cheeky monkey.

[14:43] Look what you're doing there. Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, they're in the poor wine. But you've kept the good wine until now. This is a miracle about change and transformation, but it's a miracle of abundance.

These jars were full, and it was really, really good wine. We're talking like New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc here, just to slip that one in. And if you did the numbers, it's about 700 bottles of wine. In the Old Testament, it says that, you know, wine makes glad the heart. This is a lot of gladness. Now, of course, you know that the Bible teaches we shouldn't get drunk, and there's great gifts from God we ruin, but I think that goes without saying sometimes.

Okay, so it's a miracle of abundance. God wants to bring abundant change to your life. God wants to put abundant life into your life. Do you hear that word abundant?

It's like the feeding of the 5,000. More than enough. More than, more than, more than enough. In summary, this is a sign of the abundant transformation he will bring through, through his hour, through his death.

[16:03] Because through Christ's death, his power is made available to us. Now, some of you are thinking, come on, mate. Come on, mate. You are reading a lot into this.

Surely, can't this just be like a simple, like, can't this just be like, Jesus does a good thing for a guy, and let's just move on? Well, maybe. Except that this is not the first time the Bible uses an image of lots of wine to get a message across.

Let me tell you something really interesting about the Old Testament. So, many times in their history, the Jewish people were enslaved, and during those times, God would speak to them through specific individuals. They were called prophets, and these prophets would say stuff to them, that God would speak to the prophets, the prophets would speak to the people, and the prophets would talk about a day in the future when God would bring his people out of captivity, out of slavery, would restore them.

It would be a time when God's people would live with his people, say, with God, and the land would be filled with peace and joy. And in those prophetic words, one of the significant marks of that day, according to Amos and Jeremiah and Isaiah, is an abundance of really high-quality wine.

Again, through this miracle, Jesus is saying, this time has come. The time that the prophets talked about has come. He's using this wedding, Simon's wedding miracle to make an announcement.

He's saying the time the prophets talked about, that time has come.

[17:31] The kingdom of God has broken into the world. I've come so you'll know me. And you'll know restoration. And you'll know abundant life in your life. All that ceremonial washing stuff you've been doing for a thousand years.

All that, what that's pointing to, I can deliver on that. I can do that. And it will cost me my life. But I'm going to do it. Let's finish up.

We see in the passage that the byproduct of this sign is that the disciples believed in Jesus. verse 11. This, the first of the signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee and manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him.

That's verse 11. The implication for the disciples was believing in Jesus. Literally, it's believing, the word there is into, believing into Jesus. It's like, it has a sense of like really trusting in Jesus.

It's throwing your lot in with Jesus. And I think, this is the application for us. It's believing in Jesus. So my question is, as we finish up here, what is it about Jesus we are trusting in?

[18:40] That's a good question. You should ask yourself that. Let me speak to two things. Two things we should trust Jesus for.

First, first, I think it's a great temptation to trust Jesus for our salvation, but not so much what he promises in this passage. God sent Jesus to recreate the world, to recreate us.

I'm sure you believe that. But do you believe that Christ can glorify himself in the everyday points of need in your life?

Like this bridegroom. Ran out of wine on Sunday afternoon. What are the points in your life where you need to trust? Where you need to trust him? The embarrassments, the pains, the fears, guilts.

What are those points of need? These are things Jesus wants us to tell him about. These are things we should ask Jesus to intervene in. Now the intervention is going to look very different per occasion.

[19 : 57] Now for some people it will look like miraculous change in circumstances. That's wonderful. For others, Christ's intervention, Christ's transformation in your heart, that inner work that he does, it will look like a quiet work in your heart that allows you to persevere in faith whilst remaining in great distress.

Can you trust Jesus? Can you trust Jesus for those things? The second thing the passage asks us to trust in is this. That Jesus is about a change. He is about a reversal. He is about a change in the natural order of things. So Christ intervenes at a wedding, right? The best wine is served last.

That's not the normal order. That's not how it works, apparently. We can infer from the passage that the host would start with a few bottles of the good stuff and then when the taste buds are kind of dulled, he'd bring out the Trader Joe's two dollar special.

What's it? My wife calls it two buck chuck. I think two buck chuck, right? From what I understand. See that's the normal order, right? That's the normal order. That's the order of nature is decline.

[21 : 17] Things run out. Our bodies run out. Our resources run out. But Christ reverses it. He reverses it at this wedding and his intention is to reverse it in your life.

He's pointing to something he wants to do with the whole of our existence, with all of creation. Let me explain. A secularist would look at the world and say, okay, normally we move from life to death. Do you want the order of Christianity? The order of that in Christianity in John 5, 24. Let me read it to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.

He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life. That's the order in Christianity is death to life.

Normally, we go from life to death. Things wind down. But when Christ is invited into our life, he reverses things. He says, folks, the best is yet to come.

[22 : 34] The best is yet to come. And what a wonderful message for people who feel ripped off by life. The best is yet to come.

You might not experience in this life but the best is definitely yet to come. What a wonderful message for those who live in the past thinking, all my best years are behind me.

Folks, Jesus says the best is yet to come. He reverses the natural order for those facing death. What a comforting message. The best is yet to come. Can you trust Jesus when he shows us the best is ahead of us?

That he will return and do a massive reversal of all creation. That in the future we will know complete transformation.

Just utter abundance beyond what we can imagine. The passage says we can trust Jesus for that. Amen. Thank you.

[23 : 37] Amen. Amen. Thank you. Amen. Thank you. Thank you.

Amen. Amen. Amen.