

Wedding At Cana

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[0 : 00] I will head off on the subject of John chapter 2.

Having done chapter 3 last week, I found out that I didn't have to speak yesterday at Faith in the Marketplace downtown, so I'm going to go back and do chapter 2 today, which is John 2, 1-11, which is the miracle of changing the water into wine, and it's John chapter 2, verses 1-11. I'll read it to you just so, you know, as though you had never heard it before, and you no doubt have heard it hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of times in your life.

But the nature of the Scriptures is that it may very well be that you have never heard it before, because you and I come under that proscription which Christ laid on his disciples and laid on many of the people whom he taught, and that was that seeing they didn't see and hearing they didn't hear.

So that we have a blind spot. We have a, you know, the very fact of familiarity can block from our minds something which is so familiar as to be almost negligible.

[1 : 44] So I would just pray as I read that we might hear it again afresh and anew, and that as we think about it and work through it in our lives, that it will have the effect on us of, you know, by reading about the miracle there, that a miracle will happen in our lives.

Now you may think that that's a slightly pious aspiration, with which you particularly, you don't find yourself drawn to that, or even consider the possibility it could happen, but it could happen. What's more, it could happen and you wouldn't even know it, for reasons that I will show you as we go through the story today. All right, here's the story.

On the third day, there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee. And tomorrow evening at six o'clock, there's a marriage at St. John's Shaughnessy.

So it's not something that hasn't happened before. The mother of Jesus was there, a person that everybody knows about and not very many people, I suppose, understand.

[3 : 09] Jesus also was invited to the marriage with his disciples. And it's thought that he was a kind of last-minute guest who was included in the wedding, and so rather swelled the numbers of those who were coming to the reception.

When the wine gave out by reason of this influx of unexpected guests, who do you suppose recognized the problem first?

The mother of Jesus. She said to him, They have no wine. Jesus said to her, And this, I am told, is with great respect.

Everybody, when they come to this, think what an ungrateful and disrespectful son he was. But with great respect, the commentators tell us, he said to her, O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come. His mother, who seemed to respect him and understand what he was saying, said to the servant, Do whatever he tells you.

[4 : 30] She apparently understood him. Now, six stone jars were standing there for the Jewish rite of purification, each holding 20 or 30 gallons.

You know what a 45-gallon drum looks like, don't you? So, I mean, that's a... You see them on construction sites. Well, this is about better than half that size.

20 or 30 gallons. Jesus said to them, Fill the jars with water. And they fill them up to the brim. So that if you do a little multiplication between six stone jars carrying 20 to 30 gallons, and you fill them all to the brim, how much do you have?

Well, I'll leave you to work that out with a pencil and a piece of paper sometime. They fill them up to the brim, and Jesus said to them, Now, draw some out and take it to the steward of the feast, the master of ceremonies.

[5 : 45] And so, he was the one that was responsible and running the party. So they took it, and when the steward of the feast tasted the water, now become wine, and did not know where it came from.

And then this lovely parenthesis, which I think is a beautiful part of the story. Though the servants who had drawn the water knew, the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, Every man serves the good wine first.

You notice it's the bridegroom that's putting on the party. It's not the bride's father. I don't know whether where we've broken with that tradition, but we have.

Every man serves the good wine first, and when men 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.

[7 : 09] So you have these eleven verses. Let's pray for a minute as we look at them more closely. Our God and Father, we thank you for this lovely story, so familiar to us, and yet going so far beyond anything we have thought or imagined or our hearts conceived, leading us beyond anything we have ever heard or ever seen, leading us into unimagined realities, realities, which we can only glimpse.

We ask that as we, led by your Spirit and given understanding, may be enabled to experience afresh the wonder of this miracle.

We ask it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Well, I want to talk about this in terms of the miracle.

I've been trying hard to figure out what a miracle is and why nobody likes them to happen. The reason we don't like them to happen, this isn't the sun.

For the present purposes, this is a miracle. The reason nobody likes them to happen is because we are orderly, rational, systematized, institutionalized, organized people.

[8 : 57] miracle. And the one basic characteristic of miracles is that they don't fit. And we have created a world in which miracles don't fit.

You know, you can't go around changing water into wine or else you blow all the rules. You can't go around healing a lame man or giving sight to a blind man.

not because it isn't a good thing, but we have rules and regulations and elaborate processes by which this might be done and miracles seem to cut across them.

And if miracles happen, then we're suffering from some kind of malaise or disorder in the way things should happen.

But I would like to contend with you that it is probable in my mind and you may have to correct me on this, but I would like to that, in fact, miracles is the way everything happens.

[10 : 04] You know, if you were to take something which was the size of a BB from a BB gun, you know, put it right there in front of you and then beyond that going, traveling out millions upon millions of light years away into space and you were to see a countless number of stars and constellations and even universes that couldn't be numbered.

earth. And as you went over the whole of this with your radio telescope so that you looked at them all and you put up huge receivers to see if any of them were saying anything and you got nothing but eternal silence.

And yet on this BB sized planet earth you have a vast complex of human society which is enormously sophisticated and can send travelers hundreds of you know thousands and thousands of miles into the depths of space then it might be possible to say that compared to the whole structure of all it is this whole planet is a miracle.

Why should there be rational life on this planet when millions upon millions and millions upon millions of light years of space contain nothing else comparable to this BB sized planet and all that's going on here.

Why should that be? Well you know we assume that well we make all sorts of assumptions to fit that in but it really is. The other thing which I think is a miracle that you come up against fairly regularly and I tried to contend for this in the Courier article last week or the week before.

[12 : 18] The other miracle is you because you fit all the categories of a miracle. You are totally unique there is nobody else like you which you might say thank God or you might wish that there were hundreds like you I don't know but a human personality in terms of time and space and all the

complexities that go to make up an individual person seems to be completely unique.

You know that why does this happen? So that when you're dealing with personalities you can go to sociologists and psychologists and do all those things and you can rate all those people in statistical forms and say which would they try to do when you go into a hospital they try to reduce you to a statistic by saying what diseases did your mother suffer from?

What diseases did your father suffer from? How old are you? When were you born? What have you suffered in terms of childhood diseases? And what they're trying to do is reduce you to something they can identify on a chart so that they don't have to deal with you they can say that's who he is he's 437201 and this is the probability of what's going to happen to him unless we intervene that process goes on all the time in which we are being reduced to something less than the totally unique I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that system it's just that it cannot accommodate the total uniqueness individual and the most difficult part of being a patient in a hospital is the recognition that apart from a few gracious nurses and sometimes the floor cleaner nobody treats you as anything but a number and

I used to say to the nurse when I was lying in this bed here so to speak I said would you pull it out from the wall so that when the doctor comes in in the morning he can start talking here and talk all his way around the bed and go out the door without interrupting the flow of his progress you know you that was a slightly cynical approach but you see the you you get it's a costly thing to get to know an individual person so you can accommodate the uniqueness of who that person is and that's why I think people tend to be somewhat miraculous because they are unique there's nobody else like them so I think miracles are something which we need to pay more attention to in the

New Testament kind to understand them because it may be basically the way God works you know that old story about there's no two snowflakes the same well why shouldn't I mean why wouldn't it be much more economical to make all snowflakes the same who would it bother you could pick one of the more elaborate patterns if you want and make them all after that one but this difference it has to do with that at the heart of everything there is something totally unique and that's why the modern sophisticated materialistic secularized people go to the New Testament and eliminate all the miracles because of course they don't fit our way of thinking and so we can't cope with them so that it's a miracle in that kind of sense it's a miracle these are the kinds of miracles that it is and

[16 : 24] I want you to understand that I thought I might just do an illustration for you so you could as a kind of focus and that is that you could you know this is the 25 to 30 gallons and one of the great mysteries of this story is nobody knows whether that was water in there or wine all I knew was that when they poured it out it was wine what they poured in was water so you know it's that's that's what we're talking about six or seven of those so that you have you have in this the miracle at Cana in Galilee where there was a wedding probably probably the most famous wedding in the history of the world you know and famous in the sense that more people know about it than any other wedding that's ever taken place and we don't even know the name of the bride and groom that's but it's it's a very famous wedding it's called the miracle of changing water into wine and it's one of the lovely things about this miracle is that relatively speaking nobody saw it and everyone enjoyed it you know that the the the steward of the feast didn't see it the bridegroom didn't see it the mother of Mary the mother of Jesus didn't see it the people who did see it who were the servants didn't understand it they couldn't you know that they knew but they didn't know what to do with what they knew and so but everybody in the wedding feast had a fresh and ample supply of the best wine to enjoy so that everybody enjoyed it but nobody knew where it came from now this you may think this is slightly pretentious to me but

I like to think that that happens here on Sunday all the time you know because we go through a tradition there's a traditional wedding and a traditional kind of thing we'd go through it all the time and nobody sees where the miracle comes from but the miracle happens nevertheless and even the people who should know and understand don't know but the miracle happens and I think that that's one of the peculiarities of this miracle is that nobody saw it but everybody enjoyed it it was in a sense locked into tradition that we have a traditional service on Sunday morning we have a traditional liturgy we have the traditional reading of scripture we have traditional hymns we sing all of these are patterned things that we go through like weddings weddings are hopelessly traditional even when you try and break away from them they're still hopelessly traditional so that out of this traditional behavior

I should say into this traditional behavior a miracle breaks through and everybody can sit back and snort with contempt about not that hymn again I've been through this a hundred times I had to do this every day when I was a child and on and on they complain about the impact of traditions of worship on our lives but it's in the midst of the tradition that the miracle happens you know that that's that's one of the lovely parts of this story and so when you come to church you shouldn't be burdened with the traditional patterns of behavior you should be aware of the possibility of miracle so that was one of the characteristics it was a domestic miracle in that it happened you know that there was the necessity of providing hospitality there was Mary's concern about whether there was enough wine there was the bridegroom who hoped that he had provided adequately for his guests and must have been at least subliminally aware that the reserves of wine were going down and down and down and the wedding party wasn't nearly over and the wine was almost gone so those kind of domestic crises you know when you guests come to the house and you want to be extremely generous and extremely thoughtful and extremely kind and to have provided for everything that they would have anticipated and you find that you failed and you hope you can cover it up you know that it's a it's a it's a it's a very sort of ordinary garden variety miracle because it touches us

I remember in Peggy's wedding we ran out of stuffed a drink and I knew and fortunately I had a brother got in his car and whipped into town to help us out and get some more to keep the party going so it's a it's a wonderfully domestic kind of miracle that intervenes in in the kind of fabric of our of our home and family life it's it's also a peculiar miracle in that it's a luxury miracle you know everybody would give marks for giving sight to the blind or helping the lame walk or do things like that but but is it really appropriate to change water into wine you know there's a lot of fine Christian people who think that that was not really in order to do that you know that that was that was really quite unnecessary and quite troubling you know and and the turning water into grape juice isn't enough you know it's a that could have been done or turning it into ginger ale even but I turning water into wine seems unduly extravagant but that's what happened and not only wine but good wine well that curmudgeon

Malcolm Muggeridge you know who who dealt with these wine connoisseurs you know who sniff it and taste it and say ah yes yes yes that must be you know 1873 brand such and such and they tell you that you know how 007 used to do that in some of his movies or something but you know Malcolm Muggeridge would say it's just alcohol my boy that's he reduced all all wine to the same thing he didn't go in for these fine distinctions well I think Malcolm Muggeridge would even have been upset by the fact that there was something about this wine that was very special indeed well that's that's the other thing about it that it was it was a wonderful it was a wonderful miracle but it was a miracle that was lost in its own teaching and that is that that it it so fits in with the teaching of Christ that people think that the miracle was concocted in order to demonstrate the teaching you know and that it had no independent existence of its own because if you look at the miracle you see well saying that the best is kept to the last that's a great principle isn't it okay now you say well let's think of a story which would demonstrate that the best is kept to the last you know and then you make up the story of the of the changing of the water into wine and that's what the some of the critics say about this story that it's only made up to demonstrate a point but it's inconsistent with all the miracle stories in the New

[24 : 46] Testament because you can't you can't do that but this story is so wound up with what it teaches that a lot of you know that people lose lose the fact that it is a miracle because they get so caught up in the in the considerable content of what it teaches about the nature of life this principle that the best is kept to the last and so it's a it's a peculiar miracle in that way too it's it gets a little bit lost in its own teaching it's a it's a miracle which which you can understand in in in a peculiar way because if you look at the at the that what I that parenthesis that's in the story where it says but the servants knew though the servants who had drawn the water and filled the jars with water they knew that they had been filled with water they knew that when the wine was poured out that something miraculous had happened and so you get that that the miracle that that people didn't understand just let me repeat that the bridegroom didn't understand it the steward of the feast didn't understand it

Mary understood it in a way but only remotely the servants saw it happen but didn't understand it and the people most of the people who drank it didn't understand it you know that it was but but there were certain people who did understand it there were certain people who knew what was

going on and I think that I think that that's that's really in a sense the great thing about this story is that the servants knew and understood and I think that that's why when Christ says I didn't come to lead I came to be a servant you know and that he is the servant of the servants of God that it is in service that we come close to the awareness of the miracle it's when you try and serve someone else that you become aware of the miracle that's taking place lots of people who are in positions of leadership and positions of responsibility in those kinds of positions don't know what's happening but the person who is right there in touch with by being on the domestic staff so to speak they know the reality of the miracle they knew that something had taken place and that's why I think that that in in the whole church of Christ this is such a wonderful miracle because the people that get in there and teach

Sunday school or talk to this person or visit this person or take on this responsibility the people who see themselves as the servants of Jesus Christ see the miracle and the people who want position and prestige and standing and so on they may enjoy the miracle but they don't understand the miracle and that's why you know that what it means to be a Christian I think is to be in touch with the miracle that is happening the miracle that is Christian faith you see what it happens to people you know when that esteemed Dr.

Polkinghorne was here who was the president of Queen's College in Cambridge and he was trying to explain how how a physicist you know a particle physicist I think is what he's called how a particle physicist who is also an ordained Anglican clergyman understands miracles you know physicists in our society shouldn't understand miracles and he just told the story of a friend of his who contracted cancer went to the doctor and was told you have six months to live and he said his friend died almost six months to the day but he said his wife and and he was very close to this man and he knew the miracle that took place in that man's life during those six months anybody else would say well medicine said that's what would happen and that's what happened but living close to the man and being part of his prayer life and dealing with him during those six months

Dr. Polkinghorne said it was very evident to me that there was more than the process of disease going on there was a spiritual vitality there was a freedom from pain there was an understanding of faith in God which became extremely profound during those three months so that the prayers of his friends were answered and those close to him saw it and that's why very often if you hear about such and such a person contracting such and such a disease and you hear about it and you think oh how dreadful how appalling how terrible then if you go and see that person and get close to them very often you'll find that there are all sorts of dimensions to that dilemma which you don't know about from a distance because you don't get involved in it you don't want to go near people who are having problems like that but when you get near you sometimes get in touch with the miracle that's taking place in that person's life and that's why it's worth being really close to them

[31 : 03] I think it's why when parents have a child that they suddenly become surprised because they've known hundreds of children and as far as they're concerned they're all pretty much the same one and another it's just a lot of crying a lot of getting up at night a lot of changing diapers a lot of this a lot of that but when they personally know the child it's entirely different process there's an entirely different dimension and that's what I think this miracle teaches us that as we get close to the process of the grace of God at work when we seek to serve him then we become aware of the miracle that's happening so that's what I think was taking place in this story now the way the story ends is fascinating you see because in the last verse it says this first of his signs

Jesus did at Cana in Galilee and manifested forth his glory and his disciples believed in him do you remember last week I took you through the signs I don't know if you can remember them now I don't even know if I can remember them but the first of them is this changing of the water into wine the healing of the nobleman's son the blind man in John chapter 9 the man at the pool of Siloam who went down and we will come to him the raising of Lazarus the feeding of the five thousand and walking on the water there you are well done Dora so this is the first of these seven signs that are part of how the whole gospel is put together this is this one and the purpose of course is that Jesus has just in chapter 1 gathered his disciples together then he takes them to a wedding and at the wedding this thing happens this miracle happens so that they as brand new disciples come in touch with the reality of the miracle and you see what it says there this first of his signs in verse 11

Jesus did at Cana in Galilee and manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him now it looks as though that is that's how this first sign ends with disciples believing in him why did they believe in him they believed in him because he manifested forth his glory now I would really like you to think

about this word glory for a moment because it's a strange word you know that you know how people in the Old Testament said if I see God I will die because the glory of God would be so overwhelming that we wouldn't be able to see God we have to have some protection from seeing God we can't come face to face with God or else it will destroy us you know God is so infinitely greater who dwells in unapproachable light you remember that's a verse from Timothy that the brilliance of who God is as it's described in the New Testament and in the Old Testament is such that Moses remember that lovely story where he got hid in the cleft of the rock so that he could just see the backside of God he couldn't risk seeing him face to face because he would be immolated on the spot just by the radiance of the glory of God so that seeing God is something that people are very careful not to let happen to them in the Bible and you know because to see God that's the end as far as this life is concerned and so this miracle is a strange story because it says that they Jesus manifested his glory and what you get in the Gospels of the New Testament is what I would call glimpses of the glory of God that's all just a fleeting glimpse that's gone so quickly but nevertheless that's how it works now Howard was who was the man who started the inter varsity christian fellowship he was a graduate of Oxford university and he came over and traveled right across the country visiting universities back in I think the late 1920s and he was the one who established this work here and in a book he called, which he wrote in those days, called Sacrifice, and it talked about the doubts and uncertainties that afflict us as Christians, you know, because all of us have lots of doubts and all of us have lots of uncertainties. And he said that you live with that as a perpetual condition, but you have moments when it's all totally clear to you and you understand it.

[36 : 54] In other words, moments when in a sense you glimpse the glory of God, you know. Mostly you have to live with your doubts and difficulties and questions and, you know, and indigestion and other things like that that afflict us, but you have glimpses of the glory of God. And those glimpses are the things that sustain you. And that's what, and I guess that's what preachers try to do, is they try to give you just a glimpse of the glory of God so that you will see it. You know, Christ, I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me. When you see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, the glory of God is spoken of. God reveals his glory in raising Jesus from the dead. That's why preachers like to talk about the resurrection. Because if people somehow get a glimpse of the glory of God in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that will have a very beneficial effect on them.

And when you're reading, when you're reading the New Testament, as you are reading it, you occasionally get glimpses of the glory of God. The way to best understand this, I shouldn't say this is the best way, but it's a very helpful way, is to go to a book called The Wind and the Willow. And you go to a chapter called The Herald at the Gates of Dawn. And you read that chapter about Rat and Mole going in search of the tiny otter that had been lost, you see. And it's a lovely story because the otter had been rescued and rat and mole ultimately find him. And they recognized that the rescue of this tiny otter was because of the intervention of the great otter or something. I forgot what it is.

But you know it's there. You can't quite see it. You're convinced of it. And you are, in a sense, amazed by it, rat and mole are. But it fades very quickly. They can't hold on to it, you know. To hold on to this awareness of what's happened, it fades from their mind very quickly because they can't accommodate it.

Well, I think that's what's meant when it says something like, you can read that story because it's a lovely story. And I think it's meant to illustrate this point. I think that's why he wrote it. I think it's what is meant in this story when it says that Jesus thus manifested his glory.

[39 : 50] He gave them a glimpse of something infinitely beyond anything that comes within the normal realm of human experience. He gave them something which transcended everything they'd ever known.

And they couldn't describe it. They couldn't hold on to it. They couldn't take it with them. They couldn't formulate it. They couldn't cut a piece of it off to take home. It was something that happened to them. And in that, they glimpsed the glory of God. And that's what happened to the disciples.

They glimpsed the glory of God. And the result of them doing that was this. If you look at it there, it says, he manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him.

So he won their personal trust. They knew there was something about this person. That made it worth giving up their fishing nets and giving up their work and giving up everything to follow him.

They suddenly realized that whatever it is, it's worth it. And they put their trust in him because they had glimpsed the glory of God. And of course, that's what the story is there for us to know. It's that you come to this place of personal faith and trust in Jesus.

Now, I don't want to labor this point too much, but fundamental to our Christian faith is a personal trust in Jesus Christ. That you should be led to that kind of personal trust.

[41 : 38] That's the basic, ongoing, day-by-day reality which you need, which we all need.

You can go on from here to learn about him, to learn about the incarnation, to learn about the atonement, to learn about the ascension, to learn about the death and resurrection, to learn about all the teachings that happen and that the church has built up around the right understanding of who God is and how he has revealed himself in Christ and how by the Holy Spirit he draws people into the community of the church. All that you can learn on the basis of the one thing that you have come to put your personal faith and trust in Jesus. That's why it's terribly important. And the way the church gets very confused about this is that the church has the responsibility of passing this faith on to the next generation. And so they have to be very careful to say that, you know, that I believe in God, the Father, Creator of heaven and earth, anything that is false teaching, that you believe correctly, you don't become a heretic. And so, you know, when you start off the Athanasian Creed, it says, whosoever would be saved must first believe in the holy Catholic faith without which he will most certainly die, you know, perish, because he doesn't have a right understanding of who Christ is.

But you don't have a right understanding of Christ until you come to faith in him and learn about him. So that in our personal experience, the thing that any of us can have is a personal faith in Christ long before we have a PhD in Christian theology. But the church tends to put it backwards and makes you think, once you've earned your PhD in Christian theology, then we will call you a Christian.

While the New Testament says, once you have put your faith in Jesus Christ, you can go on to learn about God. And that's why you find lots of Christians with a personal faith in Jesus Christ who are somewhat heretical or unorthodox or have wild ideas that they haven't dealt with.

But the reality of their faith in Christ is what sustains them and what must come first. And that's what Jesus did for his disciples. He still has another 20 chapters to teach them in in this gospel. But here he wants to illustrate how they came to believe in him, to put their personal faith and trust in him.

Let me pray for you and for myself.

[44 : 43] Lord Jesus, thank you for the wonder of how you make yourself known to us, how in the circumstances of our life you can manifest your glory, so that we come to put our faith in you.

And then by your grace and the leading of your Holy Spirit and the teaching of the church, go on to understand all that that means. Thank you most of all that you, in grace and in humility and in mercy, bring us to the place where we can say, I believe in the Lord Jesus.

So help each one of us as we work that through in the miracle of our own individual existence, how we come to that faith and how we are sustained in that faith.

Amen. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you all very much. And we will go on from here next week into further into John's gospel.