

John 2:1-11

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[0 : 0 0] Father, may the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts and minds be pleasing and acceptable to you, O Lord our Maker and our Redeemer.

! Encounters with Jesus, for those of you that may be new to the Gospel of John, John is a biography about Jesus.

And it is written so that we may know who this Jesus is, and we may receive what this Jesus came to give. And last week we looked at the second half of the first chapter of the book, and this week we are looking at the first half of the second chapter, and the two happen to be connected.

Last week we saw that Jesus, some of his very first words in the Gospel are an invitation to seekers. People who are following Jesus because they're intrigued by him, they're interested, they're inquiring, yet they're not fully convinced.

And Jesus says to them, come and see. It's an invitation for seekers. And then at the end of our passage, the very end of John chapter 1 last week, we saw that Jesus also made a promise to believers.

[1 : 2 4] There's a new believer who's just believed in him for the first time, and Jesus says to him, that's all it took for you to believe in me? Surely you're going to see greater things in me than you see currently.

And so the Gospel begins with an invitation to seekers, come and see, and a promise to believers, you will see greater things. And in John chapter 2, Jesus starts to hold true to his promises.

He starts doing exactly what he says he will do. We're told in verse 11 that this first sign that Jesus did is a revelation of his glory. Look at verse 11 with me. This, the first of his signs, there's seven of these significant signs in the Gospel of John.

Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and he manifested, he revealed, he unveiled his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

So we're told right up front what the purpose of this first episode is. It is to reveal something about Jesus' glory. And so you may ask, well, what is it about Jesus' glory that this episode reveals?

[2 : 2 8] And I think the clue for us is if we go back to chapter 1 to the first time glory is ever mentioned in the Gospel. Chapter 1, verse 14. And the Word became flesh.

It's Jesus, the Incarnation. And he dwelt among us. And we have seen his glory. Glory as of the only Son from the Father. And then what is the Word? Full of grace and truth.

And then if you skip down to verse 16. From his fullness we have all received. What's the Word? Grace upon grace. So I actually think John puts this story up front at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry.

And notice, he's the only one that includes the story of Jesus' ministry. It's not in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. It's just in John. And he puts it up front because it's his way of unpacking what it means for Jesus to be full of grace upon grace.

And he shows us that at a wedding. Jesus turns water into wine at a wedding. He overtakes the wedding. He overtakes the wedding and makes it a celebration of his grace.

[3 : 32] And so we're going to look at three aspects of his grace this morning. Three points to the sermon. The timing of his grace, number one. Number two, the excess of his grace. And number three, the taste of his grace.

But I think I want to do it in reverse order. So let's start at the end with the taste. This comes in verses 9 and 10. The main point comes at the end of the story.

Verse 9. Now, in those days, the bridegroom was responsible for providing the food and the wine at the wedding.

So he calls the bridegroom and he says to him, Everyone serves the good wine first. And when people have drunk freely, meaning their taste buds are a little bit numb, then they offer the poor wine.

But you have kept the good wine until now. Now, the point's really simple. So, God has saved the best for last.

[4 : 42] The bridegroom has saved the best for last. And here, it's the sheer quality of the wine that shocks the emcee of the wedding banquet. It's like an explosion of flavor upon his tongue.

The perfect combination of sweetness and acidity and tannin and alcohol. And John tells us that no one at the wedding, except for the servants, knew where this came from.

And so, supposedly, the guests and the bridegroom are just as surprised as the emcee, and yet the reader is let in on the secret. This wine came from Jesus, and Jesus came from God.

And so we are to see in this wedding a much bigger point than just Jesus saves the day. The much bigger point is that God has saved his best grace for last. He gives us the greatest and the sweetest and the most pleasing and the most satisfying of grace in his son, Jesus Christ.

It is a grace that far surpasses all the other graces that God's people have received from him. I mean, to Abraham, God gave a wonderful promise. And yet, in Jesus, we have the fulfillment.

[5 : 52] To Moses, God gave him a glimpse of the back of his glory, and yet, in Jesus, we see his glory unveiled face to face. David was given a promise that he would have a son that would reign, his throne would be forever and ever, and yet his kingdom crumbled and teetered and toppled.

And in Jesus, we have the king who reigns forever. In the prophets, God promised a new creation, and in Jesus, we have the creator himself in our midst.

So it's this quality that shocks the emcee as he tastes it, but it's not just the quality. It's the combination of quality and timing. The best comes last, and this is a reversal of human expectations in the natural order of things.

So in this world, in this old creation that we live in, we know that things tend to move from life to death, right? They move from fullness to emptiness, from energy to fatigue, from hope to heartbreak, from good to bad to ugly.

And it's not just the law of attrition, it's the law of decay and degradation and death that is everywhere. And we don't need many reminders than just reading the news headlines.

[7 : 12] And here, what the emcee of the wedding is so shocked by is that Jesus reverses the natural order of his things. His grace comes in, and Jesus moves creation from death to life.

He moves us from emptiness to fullness, and he moves us from sin and shame to joy and blessing. And so the point here is simply, the taste of his grace is unimaginably great.

It's greater than anything we've ever tasted before. And the point is also that for the Christian, the best is never behind you. So that's the taste of his grace.

But the second point, if we scan our eyes up, is the sheer excess of it. The sheer quantity of it is just astonishing. So listen to the details that John gives us in verses 6 and 7.

He says, And so we have Jesus filling these jars as full as they can possibly be.

[8 : 21] There's six of them. 120 to 180 gallons, 400 to 700 liters, 600 to 900 bottles of wine. In other words, every guest at the wedding can drink as much as they want all week, and they're never going to get to the bottom of it.

And the point is simple. It's excessive. What Jesus gives is more than necessary, and it's far more than what is needed. You see, Jesus' grace isn't, he's not content in just being gracious and setting things right in our life.

He wants to enhance human life beyond what we ever thought was possible. Jesus isn't content with just filling in the gaps in our fears and our failures. He wants to fill us full of all that is good and true and beautiful in his eyes.

Throughout the Bible, wine is a symbol of joy. It's a sign of blessing. It's a sign of God's hand being upon his people and making their hearts glad in him.

And one of the great ironies of this passage is not only that the emcee that has tasted how good this wine is doesn't know where it came from, but it's that the emcee who tasted how good this wine is has no idea how much there really is.

[9 : 35] And it's a bit like the Christian life, isn't it? We don't actually know how much grace there is in Jesus for us. We haven't yet plunged the depths of the reservoir of his mercy.

We haven't yet circumnavigated how vast is the ocean of his love or scaled the heights and the mountains of his faithfulness. I tend to think of, I like riding my bike around Stanley Park and over the summer I pass by the horses.

And the horses, I notice they have blinders on them. And they need those blinders in order to focus on what's in front of them and keep moving forward and not get distracted. And yet those blinders are a reminder that their field of vision is narrow and it's limited.

And I think that sometimes, like us in the Christian life, we can't see the fullness of the grace that God has for us and we can only come to know it as we keep tasting it one moment at a time.

There's no way for us to see the whole picture of our lives. We can only experience it one drink at a time. Every morning and every evening, every worry, every fear, every loss, every grief, every regret and every shame, every shadow of sorrow and weight of sin, we keep coming back and we take a drink.

[10 : 56] And we discover day by day by day that the well is deeper than we ever thought it could be. The more you drink, the more you realize there is. So it's not just the sheer quality and taste of the grace that Jesus brings.

It's not just the excess of his grace, the abounding quantity of it. It is also, we discover, the timing of his grace. If you would look at verse 3 with me, the first surprise of the passage is not Jesus turning water into wine.

It's actually Jesus' interaction with his mother. Verse 3. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, they have no wine. In other words, Jesus, you know how to fix this.

And Jesus said to her, woman, what does that have to do with me? Let's pause there for a moment. Now this is an abrupt response from Jesus.

A bit shocking. I don't think it's meant to be rude or demeaning because Jesus uses the same language from the cross when he addresses his mom and says, woman, behold your son, and makes provision for her to have a home with his disciple John and live in his home for the rest of her life.

[12 : 11] So he's, it's not necessarily demeaning or rude word, but it's definitely an abrupt word. And Jesus is drawing a line in the sand. And the question is, what is the line that he is drawing in the sand?

And Jesus then goes on to say, my hour has not yet come. And his mother said to the servants, do whatever he tells you.

So there's something that I think we learn here. You could say it in a trite way, like God's timing is not our timing, but I think the fact is, is that Jesus ends up answering her request and he does what she hopes he will do.

But the important thing here is that Jesus wants us to know that he's going to do it on his terms and on his timing, not on anybody else's. In other words, Jesus will respond to human need.

Jesus cares. He loves to the very end. He weeps over the grave of a friend. He feels all the suffering of his people. He knows the weight of their shame and sin. He is not distant.

[13 : 14] He is there. He cares about our needs. But Jesus is not there just to serve what we feel are the most urgent needs in the moment. He has come for a much bigger purpose.

And that's where the language of hour shows up. Because hour in the Gospel of John, the whole Gospel of John can be seen as two halves.

The first half, my hour has not come. The second half, my hour is here. And what is this hour in John? For John, this is the hour. The hour is the mission that God the Father has given his son Jesus.

And that mission is to be glorified through death and resurrection. So the final hour is actually his death and resurrection, which is interesting because in the Gospel of John, that's the seventh sign is his death and resurrection.

So it shows us that here, when he's doing the very first sign at the beginning of his ministry, what's on his heart? The final thing, the death and resurrection. And what's significant about that is that it shows us that Jesus, who deeply cares about his mother, deeply cares about his family and his friends, actually comes as a missionary from God himself.

[14 : 29] And on his heart is to reveal his glory for the whole world through his death and his resurrection. And whatever he does is to serve those purposes.

Now, this is really, this sounds like a simple truth in one sense, but I think often we experience it as a painful truth. It means that the way in which Jesus' grace unravels in our life is not on our timing.

And that's hard for us to accept a lot of times. Because there are real painful things that we're experiencing. I mean, you see this in John chapter 11, where Jesus gets word that his friend Lazarus is ill, and then Jesus waits two days before traveling to go help.

And by the time he shows up, Lazarus is dead and he's in the grave, and Mary runs up to Jesus and says, Lord, if you had come right away, you could have helped my brother and he would not be dead. You can hear the anger and the pain.

And yet Jesus, who sees a bigger picture than she sees in the moment, says, this is going to work out for my glory. And that's when he declares that he is the resurrection and the life.

[15 : 40] And so one of the things that Jesus wants us to know at the very beginning is he will meet our needs, he will save us, excessively so, and graciously so, and yet his grace works at a different pace.

And the timing and the unfolding of it in our lives shows that his greatest intention for us is not just to meet our needs in the moment, but to reveal his glory in us for eternity.

So this is the first sign. It's all about Jesus, the glory of his grace, which is tasty and excessive and timely. And I want to conclude with just two implications that I think this has for us, one for our understanding of faith and one for our understanding of sin.

The first is that I think this understanding of Jesus' grace reframes what belief is and how it grows in our lives. Notice in verse 11 that belief comes in connection to the revelation of Jesus' glory.

That little word, and, connects it very closely to what came before. Jesus manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him. In other words, the faith was enabled by Jesus showing them who he really is.

[16 : 57] And this shows us that belief is not a blind leap hoping for the best. belief is not a shot in the dark. It's not an irrational trust against all odds and all evidence to the contrary.

It shows us that for the Christian, belief is having eyes wide open to the glory of Jesus and having our hearts pulled to him, his glory being like a gravitational force or a magnetic pull, and our hearts and minds being captured and captivated and convinced that the glory of this Jesus is what it's all about.

He is worth following and he is worth abiding in. And it also tells us that faith grows not as we try harder and as we do better, but as we see and savor more and more of Jesus' beauty.

It's as we're drawn to see who he really is and as he unfolds himself to us, as we taste and see the excellence of his glory and grace that our faith grows, not as we just white knuckle it and tight fist it.

And the second thing is related to sin. Jesus' understanding of grace reframes what sin is and how it dies. Sin, in the Gospel of John, is a lot of things, but one of them is choosing to drink cheap wine when really good wine is on the table.

[18 : 24] It's going for the boxed wine in the cupboard when on the table is an open bottle of a 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon from Napa Valley, the Oak Ridge area in particular.

Just saying. Just saying. It's like going to McDonald's when you go to Gotham Steakhouse. Now, we all love the sins that we feast in, and they grow their tentacles and their roots into our hearts, and we have to fight them deeply and daily because sin's grip still feels tight on us even as Christians.

And yet the way in which sin is loosened in our hearts is not by strong-arming it, white-knuckling it, pulling up our bootstraps, brute force of willpower. It's by being captured by a greater beauty, being satisfied with a greater love.

And once you've tasted the good stuff, you realize, oh, I don't really want the other stuff as much. This is one of the things that ruined me about growing up in California is I grew up on Napa Valley wine that I can't afford now.

And I don't really want to go back. And Jesus says to us in chapter 6, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

[19 : 51] I am the best bread you can ever eat. I am the finest wine you will ever drink. Come to me and eat. Come to me and drink.

And I will grow your faith in me. And I will loosen the grip of sin on you. And you will see my glory. And you will be satisfied as you savor what you see.

Brothers and sisters, this is what Jesus offers us this morning. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.