

New Wine, Pure Joy

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[0 : 00] Continuing now with our series from John's Gospel, the signs of John's Gospel. So we're on chapter 2, verses 1 through 11, page 88. We have the wedding of Cana in Galilee.

When I was in my bachelor years, there was a period of time when it seemed that all of my friends except me were getting married. And I seemed to have to go to one wedding after another.

Wedding season would come, and there seemed to be no end of weddings to go to, each one requiring a present. And so I fell into this pattern, I was very proud of myself at the time, of always buying a vase.

So everybody, whoever they were, got a vase from me. I just went to Ikea and bought the same vase always at all times. Which I thought was a very good idea.

Until I got married, and we got six vases. However, by a stroke of misfortune, which turned into fortune, while we were away on honeymoon, the house we were going to move into, where all our wedding gifts were, was broken into, and all our wedding gifts were stolen.

[1 : 10] Except the vases. And in the end, what I had to do is, instead of sending out thank you cards, I had to send fingerprint kits to all our guests. So top that.

However, a miracle happened in the midst of it. A miracle called insurance. And wonderful things happened as a result of that in the end. So we recovered from our loss.

So we come now to Jesus' first sign in John's Gospel. And this takes place at a wedding. And this setting is no accident. As Jesus embarks upon His ministry and reveals Himself to be the Messiah.

The imagery of a wedding banquet. With a bridegroom. And a bride speaks of the completion of the age which He was inaugurating in His birth and ministry.

But now at the beginning, the first sign. And on the surface of it all, Jesus seems to give a wonderful, glorious wedding present to that couple. In the form of 120 gallons of fine wine.

[2 : 14] Who wouldn't want that as they start on their married life? But the result of this wedding gift that He gives at this wedding is not what we might expect. And we see it in verse 11.

We see that it says, Jesus manifested His glory and His disciples believed in Him. So right there we see the purpose of this sign at this wedding.

The purpose of this sign was to manifest Jesus' glory. To reveal His glory. And second, to engender faith in Him.

So we want to ask ourselves as we look at this sign. How does it reveal His glory? And what kind of faith does it engender? And I've just got two brief points that I want to look at.

The first is the God agenda. Verses 3 to 5. The God agenda. And here I want to focus on the interaction between Jesus and His mother.

[3 : 13] We notice in the story, by the way, a great deal of detail is given. Of location, an occasion, it's a wedding, time, and even a guest list.

This is not being presented to us as myth or story, but as fact. Jesus' mother is there along with Jesus and His disciples. And then the crisis happens that sets up the sign.

The wine gives out. I feel a chill pass across the congregation at the very thought. And in verse 3, we see the mother of Jesus said to Him, They have no wine.

Now, much has been said about what Mary might have meant here. She can come across in various ways as a woman of great faith or perhaps a slightly nagging Jesus. We're not quite sure.

But if you look at the text, really all she does is point out to Him the problem of the wine. But whatever was going on, it is Jesus' response that is important.

[4 : 09] He says, Oh woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come. His hour. His hour is the cross. And this runs through John's Gospel.

His hour has not yet come. His hour has not yet come. And then the hour is now for the Son of Man to be glorified. And so right at the beginning, before He does anything, this places the cross in our sights.

We know now that Jesus has the cross in view. He is heading to the cross. This is what He came to do. The context in which we are to interpret the sign is the cross of Jesus.

This is His glory. Just before His crucifixion, He will say, Now is the Son of Man glorified. The cross is His glory.

And the cross is in view right from the beginning. And nothing that He does or says makes any sense apart from the cross. Jesus does not make any sense apart from His cross.

[5 : 15] Some in His time will look for a political Messiah and be disappointed by Him. But His glory is not to have a golden crown or to sit upon a throne, but to have a crown of thorns thrust upon His head and to be hoisted on a Roman cross.

His glory is to die. This is His purpose. And that is why He speaks to His mother as He does. What have you to do with me? Because He can only answer to one authority.

And that authority is God. This is about the God agenda. Jesus will only do what His heavenly Father tells Him to do. As exalted as His mother might be, she is still but a human being.

The Messiah does not answer to human authority or a human agenda, no matter how well intended. And so before He sets up the miracle, He puts the cross in view and establishes that there is but one authority to which He submits.

He does not submit to the crowd. He does not submit to the religious leaders. He does not submit to His disciples. He does not submit to His mother. He submits to God.

[6 : 36] It is God the Father who is in control. And it is in obedience to God the Father that He acts. Later on in John's Gospel, he says, I tell you the truth. The Son can do nothing by Himself.

He can do only what He sees His Father doing. Because whatever the Father does, the Son does also. Or again, He says, I love the Father.

And I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. Exactly what the Father has commanded me. And we need to note this, that everything He says, and everything He does, right up until going to that cross, He does in perfect obedience to God the Father, and not any human agenda.

If Jesus' agenda could be altered by human wishes, then He really would not be the eternal Lord who transcends human history.

He would become a man of His time, reacting to and conditioned by the culture around Him. Jesus is often compared to figures from history, great men and women, who rose to the challenges of their time.

[7 : 47] We might think of Gandhi, and the struggle for independence in British India. We might think of Martin Luther King Jr., and the struggle for human rights in the United States.

I even heard of a sermon in which Jesus and the environmentalist David Suzuki were compared to each other. I have to say, I think that is stretching a point. Now, all of these in different ways are outstanding people who did outstanding things in the times and places in which they lived.

And we may or may not be able to draw lessons from their lives and apply them to our time. But Jesus is nothing like that.

He comes from God, and He is Himself God. And everything He said and did, He said and did under the authority of His Heavenly Father. His eyes fixed firmly upon the cross, which was His glory and His purpose.

And that means that we can completely trust Him. Never to go out of fashion. Never to fade. His word stands. And His death continues to resonate in human lives today.

[8 : 59] His death was no accident. It was His purpose and His glory. And we need to grasp this today. It's important for us to realize this in an age of do-it-yourself religion in which what I believe is right for me and what you believe is right for you.

When Christian doctrine and practice can be decided on by a vote, and we need more study anyways because we think we know better now, Jesus stands. Eternal, unchanging, trustworthy, because He lived in complete obedience to God's agenda.

And so it's a good thing He talked back to His mother because it means we can trust Him completely with our lives and with our church. It's the God agenda.

But secondly, the replacement. And here I'm looking at the miracle itself. Verse 5 through the end. Go from the God agenda and then we come to the miracle itself.

The replacement. We notice that Mary now submits to Jesus. She says to the people, do whatever He tells you. The woman who received the angel's promise with the words, be it unto me as you have said, now in faith submits to her Son.

[10 : 17] You know, there's so much said about Mary in the church, so much surrounding her. And of course, she is a very, very special person. She is the mother of our Lord. And yet Mary stands in the great tradition of biblical people who simply responded to God's Word in faith.

People through whom God could work out His purposes. She is a wonderful example for us of that faith. Faithful response to God's Word. And now she submits to her Son and gives Him complete freedom to act.

So we have six stone jars used for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding 20 or 30 gallons. Now, our attention is being gathered here.

Our attention has been captured. Because the content of what we're thinking about and what's going to happen is this, purification. So Jesus tells them to fill the drawers with water to the brim.

They do so and then He tells them to draw some out and take it to the steward at the feast. And when they do, we get this wonderful response in verse 7. The steward goes to the bridegroom and says, Every man serves the good wine first.

[11 : 24] And when the men have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now. And He's telling us something wonderful about the age in which He is ushering in the Messianic age.

Saving the good wine to last. But this is what Jesus does. He replaces the water with the wine. And in doing so, makes a very important point about who He is and what He is doing.

The prophets who spoke to the people of Israel in exile described a day when God would bring them home and restore them to the land. It would be a Messianic age.

And the Messiah would come. And one of the marks of that age would be wine dripping from the mountains and flowing from the hills. So Jesus is revealing Himself to be God's Messiah.

Our eyes are meant to be opened. This is the Messiah. This is the One. Jesus is the One. He's revealing Himself to us. But what kind of Messiah?

[12 : 28] Of what consists His Messiahship? What will He do? What is the content of His Messiahship? Will He drive out the Romans? Will He occupy a royal throne?

Will He be an angry judge? Will He be an eco-warrior? No, He replaces the water with the wine. He brings purification.

He has come to replace the dead religion of the scribes and the Pharisees with its rules and rituals with the true religion of the living God who long ago had said that the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart.

The people of Jesus' day were tied into an extensive series of rituals to purify themselves which affected the whole of their lives and had to be repeated over and over again in the temple and at home lest they should be defiled by contact with anything unclean or anything Gentile.

And that's why those stone jars were there. They were for the rights of purification. Jesus replaces the old water with the wine of the Messianic age.

[13 : 41] He replaces the religion of ritual with the religion of the living God which heals the heart. What's needed? Our hearts turn toward Him.

not more ritual. Hearts. That's why He says to Nicodemus in the next chapter, you must be born again. Born of water and the Spirit. That's why He says to the woman at the well speaking of Himself, whoever drinks of the water I give him will never thirst.

Indeed, the water I give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. because all the old rituals could never deal with sin and could not purify the heart.

All those rituals which left them dry and hungry and dirty as ever. You know, Jesus, quite often in John's Gospel, pointing this out. This is one of the things that really angers the scribes and the Pharisees.

The wine replacing the water reveals that Jesus is the Messiah and shows us what His purpose is. He has come to bring purification from sin.

[14 : 55] We think of the cup at the Last Supper when He took the cup of wine and said, This is My blood which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. We think of the blood poured out on the cross that we might be clean.

Rituals cannot accomplish this. His blood poured out does. His life laid down. Last week, the Pope relaxed the rules on saying the Latin Mass.

Now, as a Latin scholar myself, I need to say, I think we'd all be better if we did say the Latin Mass. But don't tell the rector I said that. Actually, seriously, you know, the thing about, I love about saying our prayer book service.

You know, we say week after week and yes, it's true, maybe the words seem a little outdated. And we have to say the same thing every week. These are gospel words. They are gospel words.

And it is because they are gospel words that they feed us. And they provide this wonderful framework for our life together.

[16 : 03] They nourish us in ways we can hardly imagine. But simply saying these words is not what makes us holy and it does not purify us.

Nor does anything else we do. And it's important that as Christians we never fall into that trap of turning the things we do into rituals which purify and make us holy.

That is not what it is about. ritual does not change the heart. Ritual for ritual's sake does not purify. And that is not the religion God wants.

He wants to heal our hearts. He wants to purify us from our sin. It's a broken spirit and a contrite heart that God has always wanted.

A relationship. A healed relationship. And it is He who purifies. And it is we who receive.

[17 : 03] After all, isn't that what we prayed at the beginning of this service? Almighty God to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love You.

And so, as I close, Jesus' wedding gift is much greater than 120 gallons of fine wine.

He has revealed Himself to us as the Messiah who has come to purify sinful hearts whose glory is to die that all might live. How do they respond?

The disciples, anyway, believe in Him. They don't vote on Him or study more. They believe. And that's all we need to do in our lives.

It's that simple. Jesus, who has revealed Himself to us, we embrace Him. And Christian brothers and sisters, in this time in the life of our church, we can do no less.

[18 : 20] it is our privilege to believe and to follow. Amen.

Amen.