

# The Wedding at Cana

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 13 March 2024

Preacher: Rev Gordon Matheson

[ 0 : 00 ] In John chapter 2, that passage we've read about the wedding in Cana. Shame is a powerful tool.

We know it in the toolkit of the playground bully. Heaping embarrassment on young men or women in front of their peers is a great way to get what they want.

Even the threat of it is powerful. I think we see it as well in the toolkit of some politicians. Can an opponent be shamed into a humiliating resignation or a U-turn in full sight of the media who are just as mean and merciless an audience as the kids chanting and egging on a bully in the playground? Shame has been abused in the toolkit of some pastors of God's flock.

The woman caught in adultery, treated so gently by Jesus, might have not so long ago found herself on a sinner's stool in front of the whole congregation, publicly shamed and rebuked from the pulpit.

[ 1 : 34 ] Shame is a powerful tool of abuse. Sometimes has its uses internally. We might feel ashamed of our sin and be moved to do something about it.

But more often than not, shame leads us away from God. It doesn't lead us to do much about our problem. It leaves us like Adam and Eve, ashamed of their nakedness in the garden, running and fleeing.

Or it can be destructive, like it was for Judas, who cast his 30 pieces of silver before the Sanhedrin and then went out and took his own life.

Shame is a powerful thing. Shame is a powerful thing. And there's a symmetry in John's gospel where the themes at the beginning of the gospel are really important when you come to the end of John's gospel.

Angus Macrae, when he was with us at our recent communion weekend, highlighted some of this. He was saying there are things to see. You know, woman, see your son, and so on.

[ 2 : 50 ] There are things to see at the beginning of the gospel that we have to see at the end. So there is the glory of the only son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

There's John's exclamation to his disciples, Behold, see the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And here in John chapter 2, Jesus is the one who is doing the showing.

John tells us this was the first miracle that Jesus had done, and he did it to manifest his glory. And so right at the beginning of John's gospel, there is something there for us.

This miracle tells us about Jesus showing us what's important, the glory that we need to see. I want to suggest this evening that we see the glory of Jesus in the way he removes shame.

Angus preached on that at the communion season, how at the cross our shame is dealt with. And that's there at the beginning of John's gospel as a pointer for us, to see how Jesus is going to deal with shame in the experience of men and women.

[ 4 : 11 ] The context matters. It's a wedding feast. And in first century Jewish custom and culture, the job of the groom at a wedding feast was to prove his worth.

He had to prove to the bride's family that he could be counted on to provide for this woman who was leaving her family and becoming part of his.

And so this feast has a master. And the master could well have been, in fact, the groom's new father-in-law.

And those of us who are married can know how intimidating that relationship might be at times, but how it can grow into something wonderful and a great friendship as well.

But at the beginning, it's intimidating. And this groom has now committed an enormous blunder.

[ 5 : 20 ] The wedding feast isn't over yet, but the groom's provision of wine for the feast has run out. And he is about to experience the greatest shame imaginable, the greatest humiliation, a reputation

earned in this moment that is going to linger with him probably his whole life.

Mary finds out about the problem. She's probably a close relative of the groom's family, and that's why she's highlighted as being invited. And then Jesus with his disciples are invited along as well. And so in this context, we see Jesus appealed to by his mother to deal with this shameful situation. And there are three things that we need to spot that are just glorious.

Because John tells us, Jesus is revealing his glory. He's manifesting his glory in this, what is in fact in many ways an invisible miracle. It's not something done in front of great crowds.

It's not something where people even know that Jesus is the one who did it. The only people who know are the servants. So it's private. It's a small thing done in a corner, but it reveals the great glory of the Lord.

[ 6 : 42 ] Firstly, Jesus deals with shame in God's gracious timing. Our shame is dealt with in God's gracious timing.

Mary brings the problem to his attention. She says there's no wine. And his response is really a bit odd.

The word that's used actually in Greek is gume. It's not mum. It's not even mother. It's very formal. The closest I think in English would probably be something like mom. The way folk in the southern states would, younger men would talk to older women. They'd say mom. There's that formality to the way Jesus speaks to his mother.

It's the same language in fact that he uses at the cross. When he says woman behold your son. There's that same formality to the language that's used. And the way it's recorded by John for us.

[ 7 : 47 ] It's full of respect. But it's very formal. But then there's that strange comment. What has this to do with me? What has this got to do with me?

It's a phrase that you find in fact quite often in the Gospels. But only here on the lips of Jesus.

Normally in the Gospels where this phrase is used. It's on the lips of demons. Demons who are aware of the authority of Jesus.

But issue a futile denial or challenge to his authority. And say what have you to do with me? I know who you are.

The son of the most high. Get away from me. Don't cast me out into outer darkness. Don't destroy my presence and power and influence and grip on this world.

The demons would want to deny the power of Jesus. Which just serves to show his great authority. And Jesus when he firmly says to his mother and respectfully tells her.

[ 8 : 50 ] Basically that she doesn't have the authority to tell him what to do here. It's of that order. It's saying if I'm going to act here it's not because you've asked me to.

The timing of my miracle here is not yours to command. It's entirely of God's grace. I will act according to my father's will.

Not according to what you want me to do. And so having told Mary that he's not going to act for her sake. He then, Mary very intuitively and wisely.

Recognizes what's about to happen and she says to the servants do whatever he tells you. Then he acts. He comes and acts not on the strength of his family connection into the situation.

He comes and he acts because God is a gracious God who overflows with grace into situations mired in human shame.

[ 9 : 55 ] And this is an evidence I think of right at the beginning of John's gospel of the covenant love of God. The covenant love of God is that word in the Old Testament in Hebrew.

It's the word chesed. It's maybe best described as God's love for the unlovable. It's his sovereign choosing love. That God in his love comes into the garden knowing full well that Adam and Eve have sinned against him.

But he comes into the garden to find them and to talk to them. He comes to Abraham and makes his covenant with Abraham and promises him a land and an inheritance and descendants. And ultimately one final descendant who will come and be there.

And when Abraham asks for a proof of this, God establishes his covenant with him. And it is when Abraham falls asleep and the covenant is formed. It's not Abraham who's a party to the covenant, but God himself.

As the father and the son, I think, who pass between the torn animals of the covenant. Taking full responsibility for Abraham's future promise and salvation. It's covenant love.

[11:07] It's love without any obligation. It's love without any purpose or foundation outside of God's own mere good pleasure. And that is tonight where our salvation ultimately comes from.

He saves us. He takes away our shame and our guilt simply because he has chosen to. We are the product tonight as an assembly of saints.

The product of God's good pleasure. Electing some to everlasting life. And all the benefits of salvation. And so for us, that should move us to worship.

It should inspire us to bow before him and give him our praise. But there's also a lesson. Because for us, we have to ask the question, how do we deal with the urge to use shame in our day-to-day lives?

There's sometimes a great desire to jump in with a gotcha moment when somebody that we're in competition with has blundered, has been left vulnerable.

[12:20] And we want to rush in and shame them because it might get us some advance, some promotion, some success, some victory.

The way of Christ's disciples is to be like the master. And therefore, when we see someone's shame, we should act graciously as Jesus does.

To cover it and do what we can to bring help. You see, secondly, when Jesus kind of deals with his shame in this situation, he deals with it by offering a new kind of purity.

And again, it's a glorious way forward. There's two features of this miracle that tell us that. The first is, Jesus says to Mary, my hour is not yet. The hour in John's gospel, it's like a thread, a golden thread really, that runs through the gospel.

The hour is the moment of the cross, the moment of the crucifixion. That's where John's gospel is heading, right from the beginning. And the hour is still to come. And when Jesus here says, my hour has not yet come, he's drawing attention to this idea that what he's about to do here is somehow a pointer towards that moment.

[13:42] He's taking us on the first step in the gospel towards the hour. We're now aware there's an hour still to come. So when you're reading this for the first time, that's what you think.

Oh, what's the hour? The hour is still to come. Let's look for the hour coming. And you see like a trail of breadcrumbs that take us towards it. And so there's something about this miracle that shows us something about the hour.

And that's this revelation of the grace with which he acts. The climatic three hours of darkness on the cross where Jesus has resolved to act graciously, not under compulsion, but because of the mere pleasure of God in bringing salvation, the hour of shame for him when all of his shame covering work is going to be done.

There's also the mode of the miracle that points us towards that idea of him bringing purity and a covering for our shame. And it's what he uses to perform the miracle. There's these vats and they are vats.

I don't know if you've ever seen them, these blue drums that are filled with water or chemicals or something. This is a 120-liter drum. So from the table, it's probably something about that high.

[15:00] If it's full with water, 120 kilos, you're not going to easily carry it yourself, maybe if you're very strong. But this is a big stone jar full of water.

So it's a heavy thing. And they're used for ritual purification because for the Jews, everything in life revolves around purity. How am I pure in order to go to the temple? How do I purify myself after I've touched a dead body?

How do I purify myself after some event in my life that is beyond my control? But how do I get myself pure in order to go about my religious duties and life? And so they had these vats for purification.

And Jesus comes into this situation and he takes these vats, which would have been holy, set apart, specially for this purpose.

And he says, fill them with water. And everyone's thinking, well, the servants probably are thinking, okay, they're ritual purification. Vats, water is what you put in them. And in the course of the miracle, the contents are transformed.

[16:00] They're now wine. Wine. And that means, incidentally, that these vats can never be used again for ritual purification. They are now unholy.

They're now common. They're secular. They're just ordinary vats. And no Jew would dream of going back to that empty vat to fill it with water for a religious purpose now because its special

holiness is compromised.

And Jesus is saying the old paths for sin and shame's removal are over. The hour that's to come is going to replace these.

It's going to fulfill them. The ritual cleansing that we need, the baptism that we need, is not a baptism of mere washing with water. It's a baptism into Jesus himself.

It's into his shed blood at the cross. It's a baptism of union with Christ through which we now will have our purity. That's where our purification will come from.

[17:10] And there is this incredible, glorious symmetry to John's gospel that at the end of the gospel, that's where purity comes from.

What makes the disciples pure is the work of Jesus to cleanse them. He is the bread of life.

He is the lamb of God who takes away their sin and their shame and their guilt. Simply put, Jesus is our purification tonight.

When we're feeling ashamed, when we know our sin is awful and overwhelming, we're invited tonight to come to Jesus anew, to recognize his sufficiency for us and to find cleansing and hope in him.

Just finally, there's one last thought. And it's this that Jesus deals with shame by putting something much better in its place.

[18:15] Imagine the bridegroom in this story. What happens to him is really amazing. He has blundered.

He's messed up. The shame is going to haunt him for the rest of his days. But the servants take the water that is now wine to the master of the feast, like I was saying, possibly his father-in-law.

And they take it to him and they say, try this. And the master of the feast tries the wine. And his reaction is astonishing.

It's a wow moment. The wine that was normally served by this point in the feast would be the cheap stuff. You get the good stuff in at the beginning when people are likely to remember. At the end of the story, at the end of the festival, at the end of the feast, you bring out the bad stuff.

But here, the master of the feast says, you're unusual. Because normally, this isn't what people do. Normally, people save the best for the beginning and the rubbish stuff at the end.

[19:24] But you've saved the best until last. And can you just imagine that bridegroom's reputation? He's expecting to be utterly ashamed and humiliated in his community, worthless.

But instead, he is the guy who uniquely has taken the best wine at the end of the festival. How great is he?

How marvelous is he? How thoughtful is he? How wise is he? How generous is he? How magnanimous is he? How wealthy must he be?

How capable must he be to support the bride that is now his? Isn't he great? And that is now the reputation that remains with this man, probably for the rest of his life.

Jesus has given him a new name. Jesus has given him a new stature. And this is showing his glory.

[20:28] Remember, as John has told us already, we've seen this glory of the only son from the father. It's a glory that is full of grace and truth, full of faithfulness. And that's what Jesus comes into our lives to do.

He comes into our lives with his grace to set us where? Now, what are we tonight?

Are we worthless sinners? Are we ashamed of what we are? Perhaps secretly we might think that. We might believe we know it.

But you read the New Testament. Tonight we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places. We are raised up to be called the sons and daughters of God. We are joint heirs with Christ. And one day we will judge the world with him.

That we are inheritors of glory. That we are in fact God's inheritance. We are in fact the righteousness of God. And the titles that belong to the saints, the titles that belong to the church, are not ours.

[21:33] We haven't earned them. They're given to us graciously by Jesus because of what he does in dealing with our shame. We are lifted out of the mire and seated at the right hand of God with our brother Christ.

And tonight that status, that new change is ours. It took Christ great humility to do this. I mean this, you know, you look at this story and you think, well who deserves to have the great fame at the end of this?

Does the bridegroom deserve the fame? No, Jesus does. He's the one who's done it. But it's a private miracle. It happens in a corner. Only the servants know. This is part of the humiliation of the divine son of God.

That even the great miracles he performs, the first of his miracles, nobody sees it. There's no great audience that says, wow, look at him. It's just done in a corner.

But it shows his glory. And so tonight we're invited as his disciples to follow in these footsteps. Showing grace and faithfulness.

[ 22 : 47 ] Perhaps in invisible ways. Perhaps in the closet in our prayer life. Perhaps in a corner where we're invisible to the world. And yet still glorious.

And bringing forth the work of God. As we cover up shame. And bring forth glory. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we ask that you would help us to grasp what Jesus has done all the more clearly. Help us to see that he has taken away our shame and guilt. And he has clothed us tonight in righteousness. Given us a name that is wonderful. Because we are his brothers. Because he is our Lord. Because we are your children tonight. And so Father, help us tonight to rejoice in all that Jesus has done. And to delight all the more fully. In the covering for shame that you have provided. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.