

Easter: A Life-Giving Feast

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Date: 21 April 2019

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! If you need a copy of the scriptures or you need a copy of that Bible, we have some in the back.

We'd love to give you one so that you can follow along. So John 2, I'm again reading in verse 1. So let's look there together. This is the Word of God.

It says, On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples.

When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, They have no wine. And Jesus said to her, Woman, what does this have to do with me?

[1 : 15] My hour has not come. His mother said to the servants, Do whatever he tells you. Verse 6.

Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding 20 or 30 gallons. Jesus said to the servants, Fill the jars with water.

And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast. So they took it.

When the master of the feast tasted the water, Now become wine, And did not know where it had come from, Though the servants who had drawn the water knew, The master of the feast said to the bridegroom, And said to him, Or called to the bridegroom and said to him, Everyone serves the good wine first.

When the people have drunk freely, Then the poor wine. But you have saved the good wine Until now. Now, This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, And manifested his glory.

[2 : 27] And his disciples believed in him. That is the word of God. The only authoritative, inerrant word.

I'm sure many of you have read Harper Lee's classic novel, To Kill a Mockingbird. The story revolves around a mysterious, reclusive fellow, Or man, named Boo Radley.

Jim and Scout, I'm sure you remember them, They're the children of the widower and town lawyer Atticus Finch. And these two are completely fixated on Boo.

What is he like? They would ask one another. Why won't he come out of the house? Is he scary? Or is he scared of something?

Or is it both? What is it with this Boo Radley? I'm going to read a little part of the book. It includes a conversation between Scout and her aunt, Miss Maudie.

[3 : 32] Scout said, Miss Maudie, I said one evening, Do you think Boo Radley's still alive? His name's Arthur, and he's alive, she said. She was rocking slowly in her big oak chair.

Do you smell my mimosa? It's like angel's breath this evening. Yes, but how do you know? Know what, child? That Boo, I mean, Mr. Arthur's still alive.

What a morbid question, Miss Maudie says, but I suppose it's a morbid subject. I know he's alive, Jean Louise is what she called her, her real name, because I haven't seen him carried out yet.

Scout continues, maybe he died, and they stuffed him up in the chimney. Where did you get such a notion as that? Miss Maudie said, that's what Jim said he thought they did.

Miss Maudie continues, Arthur Radley just stays in the house, that's all. Wouldn't you stay in the house if you didn't want to come out? Yes, ma'am, but I want to come out.

[4 : 38] Why doesn't he? Miss Maudie's eyes narrowed. You know that story as well as I do. But I've never heard why, though. Nobody ever told me why.

Miss Maudie settled back in her seat, said, you know old Mr. Radley was a foot-washing Baptist. Well, that's what you are, ain't it? Hey, my shell's not that hard, child.

I'm just a Baptist. Well, don't you believe in foot-washing? Yes, I do, at home, in the bathtub. But, Miss Maudie said, foot-washers believe that anything that's pleasure is a sin.

Don't you know some of them came out of the woods one Saturday and passed by this place and told me me and my flowers were going to hell. Your flowers, too? Scout said. Yes, ma'am, they'd burn right with me.

They told me I spent too much time in God's outdoors and not enough time inside reading my Bible. Now, I doubt any of us are foot-washing Baptists this morning.

[5 : 48] But I bet some of us may be tempted to believe that anything that's pleasure is sin. Maybe that's taking it a little bit too far, but I imagine you can feel a bit guilty for eating an extravagant meal or for taking a nap or for spending a day off fishing with the guys or eating a whole row of white cake with white icing.

Or imagine, we can at least assume we should feel a little bit guilty about those things. I mean, after all, there's so much work to do. There's souls to save.

There's poor folks to clothe. There's hungry folks to feed. How could we give time for pleasure when there's so much important work to do? Perhaps that's why people have had such a hard time with this first sign of Jesus.

Of all the places Jesus would go to begin His public ministry, why would He go to a wedding? More than that, weddings, as we know, or as we ought to know, lasted seven days in that culture.

And this wedding had already been going on for several days, so why wouldn't Jesus show His glory by sending the partygoers home? Or perhaps by preaching to them? Or healing the folks outside the gates?

[7 : 18] Or feeding the poor outside the gate? Why would He just make more wine so the party could continue? Some have had so much trouble with the wine part of this passage that they've gone on to say that Jesus really just served really, really good grape juice.

And some have said, He just served clean water and the mass of the feast just went along with it. Almost sarcastically. But this Easter Sunday, I believe the Lord has led us to this story to show us who Jesus is and the surprising things He came to do.

In a word, Jesus is a giver of joy and welcomes us to the truly life-giving feast. Jesus is a giver of joy. First point, Jesus is the true master of the feast.

You know, even though this story tells of the first of Jesus' signs, seven of which appear in John's gospel, Jesus is not the main character of this story. If you notice, He stays mainly on the sideline.

One of the main characters is the master of the feast. So you know, Jesus walks into this wedding along with His disciples. His mother alerts Him that there's no wine.

[8 : 31] And then she says to, He kind of has a conversation with her, and then He says, or she says to His disciples, do whatever He tells you. So this wedding is in Cana, a small, insignificant village about eight miles northwest of Galilee, northeast actually, where Jesus lived.

You know, it's probably a family member because weddings like this were an expensive affair, and Jesus was invited, His family was invited, and even His disciples. And when we arrive at the scene, Mary, Jesus, and His disciples had been there for several days.

Jesus is not walking in. As I mentioned, weddings like that would go on for seven days, and so the party was not beginning. We're just joining the party a bit late. Mary, perhaps staying close to where the kitchen is, informs Jesus, the wine has run out.

Now, we have to know a little bit about the master of the feast in order to understand the dilemma of what's going on. The master of the feast is something like a head waiter or a chief host.

In an elaborate feast like this, they were in charge of all the catering, all the servants, and all the logistics of getting food and drink to people. I'm not often invited to events that have a master of the feast, but you get the idea.

[9 : 57] This man was responsible for making sure all the guests were completely happy. I recently read an article about a hotel in Los Angeles that is very effective at keeping their guests happy.

It's called the Magic Castle. It's rated as the number two hotel in all of L.A., but if you see the pictures, it looks like a cheap motel painted yellow, but there's magic there.

It's cheap, too, to say, you know, but the magic is there's spotless rooms overlooking a pool where nice music is always playing and the party's always going. Free drinks whenever you want.

There's no vending machines that take money, only vending machines that you just press the button and you get a soda. I mean, my kids would be totally ecstatic about that option. There's free ice cream whenever you want, and the staff is at your service at any moment ready to provide anything that would make you happier.

And my favorite, there's a red phone by the pool any day and any time of the day. When you pick up that red phone, the person answers, popsicle hotline, may I help you?

[11 : 09] And then they come out with the popsicle of your choice served on a silver platter with gloves and an English accent. I mean, can it get any better?

But can you imagine if the magic castle ran out of popsicles? That would be a catastrophic dilemma. Ratings would plummet through the floor.

There might be no greater dilemma for the magic castle than running out of popsicles, and there may be no greater dilemma for this master than running out of wine. It's not merely running out of something for these people, but wine is not something they could just go out and purchase.

There were no Ingalls and no Walmart for them to run out. And so, running out would only mean that the master of the feast would be left utterly embarrassed, faced with the humiliation of sending everyone home.

It's hard for us to understand what that would mean because our culture is so different from theirs. We throw a party, everybody asks what they should bring, but when they throw a party, it was not like that. You weren't allowed to bring anything.

[12 : 17] It's a shame-based culture. So, the idea is you threw hospitality to show your status, show what you had, and so the idea of sending people away would be embarrassing, even humiliating.

Nevertheless, Mary says, the wine is running out, but Jesus is there. after being notified by his mom and having a little bit of a terse conversation with her, he gets to work.

Verse 6, he says, he takes those six stone water jars that were used for the Jewish rites of purification, he tells them to fill them up with the water, fill them to the brim, then draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.

You see, Jesus keeps the party going and in so doing, rescues the master of the feast from embarrassment and public humiliation. This is so striking to me. Jesus doesn't come into a temple, he doesn't go hobnob with the religious people.

When he comes to start his public ministry, he begins it by reviving and helping just a carnal master of the feast. There's no indication this guy's serving the Lord and yet he rescues him from embarrassment.

[13 : 31] Jesus is the true master of the feast. This guy thought he was in charge of making everybody happy, but Jesus made it very clear he is. The first thing this first sign shows us is that Jesus, or the first thing this first sign shows us is not that Jesus is holy or that he's righteous or that he's honorable.

It shows us that Jesus is the giver of joy. The very first thing Jesus wants us to know is that he's the giver of joy. He's not a religious curmudgeon looking to stop anyone having a good time.

He's not a no-sayer looking for something to condemn. He's not a killjoy. The scriptures are packed full. You know, in his presence there's fullness of joy at his right hand, pleasure forevermore.

He says, come and drink from my river of delight. He says, the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Jesus is not anti-joy. He knows where all the joy is.

He says, come to it. So he lets the party go. It begs the question, is that the Jesus we worship?

[14 : 43] Maybe our biggest problem with Jesus Christ is a misconception about who he is. Real Christianity does not boil down to rule keeping and rule following.

It boils down to joy. The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, Matthew says. The man in his joy went and sold all that he had to buy that field.

If our understanding of Jesus isn't mainly joy, then we've got something wrong. And so Jesus lets the party go. Man, he makes it better.

Point two, Jesus is the true bridegroom. Jesus is the true bridegroom. Forgive me, my voice is having a little trouble today.

They'll briefly mention another character or another main character in this story is the bridegroom. I've commented a little bit on the weddings in that culture, but unlike American weddings, in traditional cultures, it's the bridegroom and his family that throw the wedding party.

[15 : 52] The bridegroom chooses a bride. He gives a dowry. You know, I have a daughter I'd like to get back into this. He gives a dowry to secure his bride.

He throws a party to rejoice in his bride. He funds the whole wedding and all the festivities. He is the man with the wallet that pays for it all.

So it's not surprising that the master of faith, when he discovers that this wine, that he's got more wine, this wine's even better, he goes to the master of the feast and he thanks him. Verse 10, he says, everyone serves the good wine first when people drunk freely, then the poor wine, but you've kept the good wine until now.

Now perhaps you've been at a party like that, serves the good wine first and waits on the bad wine until everybody's drunk enough, but the idea is he's complimenting him and thanking him for how unlike every other bridegroom he is.

And yet again, hidden in plain sight, it's Jesus who's the true bridegroom. While this earthly bridegroom does gather the people and gets the party going, it's Jesus who gives the good wine for all to enjoy and keeps it going.

[17 : 13] Jesus gives a lot of wine. You know, sometimes the scripture gets real specific on really strange things. And this is one of them. It says six stone jars. He's holding 20 to 30 gallons of wine.

That's 180 gallons of wine. I don't think the Walmart's got that in there. That's a lot of wine. But not just that.

When Jesus makes this wine, he makes a lot of good wine. No, this wasn't water and this wasn't grape juice.

This was good wine. What's Jesus trying to say? What's the point of all this? You know, it's just so that we go party down or something like that.

The point is, Jesus is not just the one who gives joy. He's the one who gives good gifts for all to enjoy. He will not be outgiven. We see this from the beginning of creation.

[18 : 15] I got a passage for you from Psalm 104. One of my favorite psalms. He says, Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, you're very great.

You're clothed in majesty and splendor. You set the earth on its foundation so that it would never be moved. You make springs to gush forth in the valleys. They flow between the hills.

They give drink to every beast of the field. The wild donkeys quench their thirst. Beside them, the birds of the heavens dwell. They sing among the branches. From your lofty abode, you water the mountains.

The earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work. You cause the grass to grow. Not for, but for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate that he might bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man's heart.

It continues, Oh Lord, how manifold are your works. In wisdom have you made them all. The earth is full of your creatures. These all look to you to give them their food in due season.

[19 : 20] When you give it to them, they gather it up. And when you open your hand, they're filled with good things. Do you see what he's trying to say? He sets the earth on its foundation, all the mountain stars and seas and so on.

He fills the earth with beauty, creates countless animals and gives them all that they need to live and sing. That's a message right there.

They are all his creatures and completely dependent upon him, he gives the fields for men to cultivate, to bring forth food and all these things. He gives skill to create and wisdom to rule. When you open your hand, it says, all creation is satisfied with good things.

And we can keep on going. Good things keep coming from his hand. Books, work, sex, money, houses, laughter, art, music, sports, and yes, movies.

Even, well, some of them. You know, in many ways, in many ways at this wedding, Jesus does what he always does, what he's done since the creation of the world. He gives good things for people to enjoy.

[20 : 25] He loves the smile that breaks across the face when somebody's eating something that satisfies them. That's who he is. John came fasting, but Jesus Christ came feasting to say something about who God is.

He's generous. He's lavish. He's over the top. He doesn't make one jar of wine. He makes six, 180 gallons. Isn't that wasteful Jesus? Isn't that dangerous Jesus?

What are they going to do with this wine? The second thing this first sign shows us is that Jesus loves to give good things. That's his heart.

Real Christianity is not trying to be good enough to get something good from him as if we have to twist his arm. Real Christianity realizes he freely gives good because he is good.

and our job is to get good at receiving. That's what he wants. The best Christian is not the one who prays the most or fasts the most or reads their Bible the most or gives the most.

[21 : 38] The best Christian is the one who's always thankful and has a heart ready to receive everything as a good gift from the Lord. The best Christian realizes he's not self-made.

You know, we in America, we live the American dream. You know, we want to be dependent on no one. The best Christian realizes he's sunk apart from the Lord who just freely gives good gifts.

What do I have that I didn't receive, Paul said? And if I received it, why do I act like I didn't? Jesus loves to give good gifts because he's the true bridegroom.

Point three, Jesus is the true sacrifice. Though not a character, much of this story focuses on those few stone jars.

John very carefully tells us that those jars were used for Jewish rites of purification. The idea is that they would have been used to make clean any utensils that were used used for serving the food.

[22 : 48] Because anything that was used for serving the food must be made clean or you would be made dirty because of it. That's what the Old Testament law, they would have used it to wash their hands. The idea is that if you didn't wash your hands and you would make yourself unclean by eating something, you'd make it dirty and eating it.

Get the idea. These jars were used to make people clean. It's part of the Old Testament law and Jesus takes these very jars and the water within them and make something better and new.

You know, in fact, this entire section within John presents Jesus as coming to make all things new. Jesus enters the temple. He takes a whip. If you remember that, he drives people out. He says, this house is a house of prayer.

He says, I'm making a new temple. Destroy this temple in three days. I'll raise it again. The new temple is his body. Jesus says to Nicodemus, you remember that, he comes to him by night. He says, you must do more than follow me.

You must be born again. You must be made new is what he tells him. Jesus says to the woman at the well, another wonderful encounter that we don't often forget.

[23 : 54] He says, the hour is coming when people will not worship in Jerusalem. They'll worship anywhere and everywhere in spirit and in truth. You get the idea. All these things are new, a new heart, a new people, a new temple, a new worship.

And so at this wedding, Jesus takes these stone jars. They were used for purity or to purify the people. And he turns the water into wine. The idea is, in this little act, Jesus is pointing to what he came to do.

He came to undo all that the law has said before. There's no more need for water cleansing. There's going to be no more need for sacrifices. There's going to be no more need for fasting.

There's going to be no more need for priests. There's going to be no more need for offerings. The law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. He came to make it all new.

Jesus came to bring grace. This drove people nuts. It still does.

[24 : 56] You know, in fact, if you don't understand, or when you come to understand grace, if you're not frustrated at first, then you probably don't understand it. It means that nothing you do makes God love you more or less.

Nothing you do now, nothing you have done, nothing you will do will make God love you more or less because he loves you only through Jesus Christ. That's grace. God's riches at Christ's expense.

And that's what Jesus came to do. He came to make all things new. He came to silence once for all that we must do good to receive good from his hand. Amen. And yet, he did it in a most surprising way.

This gospel continues. On this day, only a few saw. It says in verse 11, this was the first of his signs.

Jesus did at Cana in Galilee and manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him. Only a few saw.

[26 : 07] Remember, he told his mother, my hour has not come. And so, he remained behind the scenes and let only a few see.

But as he stood at this wedding feast, he no doubt knew it was coming. He came to do the Father's will is what we read today. Jesus continues to preach and he gathers disciples and he continues to do all these wonderful signs.

He heals the official son. He heals the lame man. He feeds the 5,000. He walks on water. He heals the blind man. He raises Lazarus from the dead after he'd been dead for days.

And all the while, the opposition against him continued to increase. The hostility and the hatred of this man continued to increase. But nevertheless, he plotted forward to Jerusalem.

Remember, he told him three times that when I go to Jerusalem, I'm going to be arrested. I'm going to be persecuted. I'm going to die. And so just moments before his betrayal when he was in that dreadful garden, he said, Father, the hour has come.

[27 : 12] The first time throughout the gospel, he says, the hour has not come. Now he says, the hour has come. Glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world.

He says, let him see. Only a few saw in John 2, but here in John 12 and on to the end of the gospel, all see.

In fact, the gospel, a lot of people say the first 12 chapters are the book of signs when he's doing these things. The second, 13 through 20, are the book of glory.

Because there he lifts the veil and the father answers his prayer. He does glorify him. He glorifies him by lifting him up on a cross.

Before we can see the glory of the cross, we must take a closer look at the shame of it. Cursed is any man who's hanged on a cross is what Deuteronomy said, but he didn't just hang there.

[28 : 21] The king of glory was mocked, spat upon, beaten, ridiculed, stripped, naked, and nailed to that shameful cross. He who gave us everything willingly, willingly gave everything away.

And we want to see. I want to see. You know, I don't know if I've ever read any story that compares to the shame of the cross like this one that I read about Corrie Ten Boom.

Yet during World War II, Corrie, her sister Betsy, and their family were so-called righteous Gentiles because they were arrested for hiding and helping Jews in Nazi Germany.

Nevertheless, Corrie and her sister suffered the same horrible treatment as her Jewish friends. She writes, I've read a thousand times the story of Jesus' arrest, how the soldiers slapped him, laughed at him, flogged him.

Now such happenings, she says, have faces and voices. She continues, Fridays, the recurrent humiliation of medical inspection.

[29 : 49] The hospital corridor in which we waited was unheeded and a fall chill had settled into the walls. Still, we were forbidden even to wrap ourselves in our own arms, but had to maintain erect hands-at-side position as we filed past the group of grinning guards.

How there could have been any pleasure in the sight of these stick-thin legs and hunger-bloated stomachs, I could not imagine. Surely there's no more wretched sight in the world than a human body unloved and uncared for.

Nor could I see the necessity of completely undressing to walk down these walls when we finally reached the examination room and the doctor looked down each throat. He looked at our teeth and he looked in between our fingers and that was all.

And then we trooped down again the long cold corridor and picked up our X-marked dresses from the floor. But she says, But it was one of those mornings while we were waiting shivering in the corridor naked that yet another page in the Bible leapt into life for me.

He hung naked on the cross. She says, The paintings, the carved crucifixes show at least a scrap of claw, but this I suddenly knew was the respect and reverence of the artist, but oh, at the time itself on that other Friday morning there was no reverence.

[31 : 40] No more than I saw in the faces around us now. She said, I said, Betsy, they took his clothes too.

Ahead of me I heard a little gasp. Oh, Corey, Corey, and I never thanked him. There was indeed no reverence on that shameful cross, on that horrible Friday.

He who possessed all glory from the foundation of the world was stripped of everything. He who knew the endless praise of adoring angels and the affirmation of his father was completely forsaken and reduced to hearing only the mocking of foolish men.

He who created the human mind was subjected and broke it under the most painful and shameful death the human mind had ever conceived. But before we can see the glory of the cross, we must see its shame.

And we must see its shame by seeing our faces in that shameful crowd. You know, as one friend has said to me, before we can see the cross as something done for us, leading us to faith and worship, we have to see the cross as something done by us, leading us to repentance.

[33 : 02] Only the man who is prepared to own his share in the guilt of the cross may take his share in his grace. He hung there naked and alone for three hours experiencing God's righteous wrath, not for his sins, not for his own personal sins, but for their sins, for my sins, sins, have you thanked him?

Have you owned your share? When you go back to that day, would you have thought, I would be there, I would be the one, I would have stopped this. That's not what the scripture says.

You laid iniquity on him. Have you admitted it? Have you bowed the knee to this Jesus Christ?

Before we can share that grace, we have to own the guilt. That's what I offered you, the gospel of Jesus Christ, that he who knew no sin became sin so that in him you might become the righteousness of God.

The scriptures say, if we call on the Lord, we will be saved. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved because they believe that God raised him from the dead and he died in our place so that we might receive eternal life through Jesus Christ.

[34 : 34] That's what we do. We come in and we do that by owning our share in the guilt so we can receive his share of the grace.

And after the shame the glory came. The crowds were wrong. The shameful cross was his finest hour. Three days later he rose from the dead. It was not possible for death to hold on to him.

God purposed to raise him from the dead and he lifted him up so that he might draw all men to himself so that anybody who would want to find life in him might come to him so that that shameful cross might be joined with his resurrection so that new life would come to everyone who calls on the name of the Lord.

That's the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But that's not all. He said I'm going to go ahead and prepare a place and a feast for you.

I will come to you and I will take you. I will prepare you. I will cleanse you of all the guilt and shame and I will clothe you with all the beauty and grace that will never cease to sparkle.

[35 : 37] And he said I'll take you to the real feast that will never end. You'll be my guest. Better yet you'll be home. The wine will never run out. The party will never end.

We're not meant to take away from this wedding and can't to party and just party for our whole life. We're meant to take away that there's a greater party awaiting. One day we'll lay down these rows.

One day we'll lay down the armor of the Christian armor of fighting for the glory of Jesus Christ because the night we've walked through but the morning is coming. Darkness, death, sorrow, and sin will never haunt again.

that's what Jesus did it for. He said that for the joy set before him he endured the cross despising its shame.

And that's our joy because of grace. Until we get there all the joy and good gifts and feasting are just a small taste.

[36 : 44] not meant to distract us but to pepper our steps further to what's to come. The past is ahead. Father in heaven thank you for this morning.

Thank you for these few moments. Thank you indeed that Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Thank you that as he stands we no longer stand in our sins.

Thank you that as he stands he gives to us his perfect righteousness and all that we need to be completely accepted in him.

Thank you that nothing will change about us from this day until the end because of what Jesus has done. Thank you that he's done it all. We praise you and worship you Lord we give our lives to you.

We humble ourselves before you. Lord we pray that you use our life for the glory of Jesus Christ. There's nothing we want than for our lives to make much to celebrate Jesus and his free grace.

[37 : 58] We worship you this Easter day and give you the praise you alone deserve. In Jesus name. Amen.

You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com Bum Bum Bum Bum