John 2:1-11 (New Year's Day)

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[0:00] Well, let me again say Happy New Year, church. It's good to be with you all this morning. We are looking this morning at the Gospel of John, chapter 2, verses 1 through 11.

This coming spring, we're going to do a series in the Gospel of Luke in the early part of Jesus' ministry. But for the next couple of weeks, we're just going to take just a couple of weeks and look at some various texts together before we dive into that series.
So this morning, we're going to be in the Gospel of John, chapter 2, verses 1 through 11. That's page 887 in the Pew Bible, if you want to turn there with me. Gospel of John, chapter 2.
All right, let me read this text for us. John writes this. He 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? My hour has not yet come.
[1:12] His mother said to the servants, Do whatever he tells you. 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 came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew, the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, Everyone serves the good wine first.
And when people 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 Canaan and Galilee and manifested his glory.
And the disciples believed in him. Let's pray together. Father, we ask that this morning, as we attend now to your word, Father, that your living word, the Lord Jesus Christ, would come and be present to us and speak to us by your Holy Spirit.
[2:25] Lord, as we put ourselves under your word, we pray that you would raise us up by your spirit to hear and see and know and to taste that you are good. Lord, would we come to understand you and love you and know you more fully this morning as a result of this time together around your word.

God, we ask that our time spent here this morning would bring much praise and much honor and much glory to you, our great and loving King. We ask this in his name.
Amen. Well, it's the start of another year, isn't it? Hard to believe. 2017, how many months is it going to take you to write the right date on your checks?
Oh, wait, we don't write checks anymore, so forget about that. Our cell phone just does it all for us, right? But I think this is a good time of year, isn't it, to recalibrate and to realign ourselves with what's really important, both as individuals and as a church.
And as I thought about a text that would help us do that this morning, this is the text that came to mind. Because I think that this is a text that helps us to see in a really vivid way, as John says at the end of our text in verse 11, it helps us to see in a vivid way the glory of Jesus.
[3:43] This, the first of his signs, John writes, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee and manifested his glory. After all, what is really important?

What is worth building your life and reorienting your life around? What ought we as Christians, as a church, constantly be recalibrating and reorienting ourselves around?
If we are listening to God's revelation in scripture, that thing above all else is the glory of Jesus. If you think about it, most of us are hunting and searching for glory, aren't we?

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For something beautiful and awe-inspiring. In other words, we're looking for something that's worthy, worthy of giving our lives to, worthy of our time and our efforts and our dreams and our energies, aren't we?
I think in our worst moments as human beings, we're hunting for our own glory. We want ourselves to be great. But thankfully, by God's common grace, we're often not as bad as we could be.
[4:50] And in those not as bad moments, rather than wanting ourselves to be great, we want to be a part of something great. We want to live for something or someone that is truly worthy. But it's so easy to go after the wrong thing.

Even as Christians, even as a church, we often get caught up in secondary things and lose sight of the main thing. But John's entire gospel that we're just dipping into this morning is written to show us that this desire for glory within all of us is really meant to find its object, its goal, its satisfaction in the one who is glorious in Jesus.
The word of God who became flesh so that we might see the glory of God. And by believing in him, we might become the children of God. That is, we might become partakers of that glory.
So here then, as we begin another year, I think there are three things in this text that can help reorient us back to the center, back to the main thing. Back not just to an idea or a program or a set of resolutions, but back to a person, back to Jesus himself and to his glory.
The one who is truly worth actually living for. So let's look first at what we see here. First, we see here the glory of the power of Jesus.
[6:15] Don't we? I mean, at the most basic level, this text is about Jesus doing something extraordinary, isn't it? He literally turns water into wine.

Now this event in the life of Jesus is so familiar to so many of us that we can lose sight of how extraordinary it actually is. How many children's Bibles have this story in it?
We're so familiar with it and yet, it's incredible. Look again at verses 6, 7, and 8. Look down there in the text again at 6, 7, and 8 where this miracle happens and notice what Jesus doesn't do there. There's no big production, is there? He doesn't wave his hands over the water and say something really profound and powerful, right? He doesn't sort of gather everyone around to watch him work. He doesn't say, stop the feast. Something big's gonna happen right here. You know? He doesn't tell the disciples to cue the music and fire up the smoke machine. You know?
[7:19] The final countdown, here we go. Because the magic's about to happen. None of that. In fact, John narrates this story so beautifully, so subtly, doesn't he?

Look again. Where in this story does the miracle actually happen? In verse 9, John tells us that the master of the feast tasted the water, now become wine.
But by that point in the story, by the point in the story where John actually says that the water had become wine, the miracle's already happened. At some point between the servants filling the jars to the brim and Jesus saying, now draw some out, Jesus had already done the impossible.
Just like that. Perhaps with that simple word, now. Now draw some out, Jesus says. And with that simple word, this everyday substance, this water, has been changed forever.
Imagine yourself at the gym. Come on. It's New Year's Day. I'm sure I'm not the only one who's been thinking about my need to get to the gym, right? So imagine yourself at the gym.
[8:37] And there are two people there lifting weights. First one comes up, grabs the bar, stares into the mirror. Why do people always lift weights looking in a mirror? I don't get it. You can tell I don't go to the gym a lot.

Grabs the bar, and with a good deal of grunting and groaning and this noise, sts, sts, sts, why do they do that too? With a solid yell, they lift the bar above their head.
Not bad. But then another steps up, and without a sound, without seemingly any effort, lifts the bar aloft and puts it down again.
And of course, in that moment, we know who has the greater strength, don't we? Not the one who is grunting and groaning, but the one who can do it without the slightest sign of exertion.
And is that not Jesus here? And yet he's doing something more than lifting a barbell, isn't he?
[9:35] He's altering something in the created order at its very root and bringing it into newness. Water becomes wine. And as his ministry continues in the Gospel of John, this is just the beginning.

This is just the first, this is just the beginning of his signs, John will say. In chapter four, an official son will be healed with just a word. In chapter six, 5,000 people will be fed with just one small meal.

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In chapter nine, a man who's been blind since birth will see again with just a little wash in the city pool. And in chapter 11, with a simple prayer and a command, a dead man will walk out of his own tomb.
So who is this Jesus? Who is this one who has such power to overcome sickness and hunger and blindness and even death itself?
The earliest followers of Jesus all came to one conclusion. That in Jesus, God himself, the creator God himself had come. Here's how John explains it in the opening chapter of his gospel.
[10:50] In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God and all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.

And then he goes on to say, and that word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory. Glory is of the only son from the father full of grace and truth. This is who Jesus is.
The word of God, the son of God, the second person of the Trinity become flesh and dwelling among us. Almighty in power. And that helps to explain Jesus' interaction with Mary in these opening verses, I think.
Mary tells Jesus that they've run out of wine. And how does Jesus respond? Well, surprisingly, he responds with a gentle but firm rebuke.
Woman, what does this have to do with me? Not exactly how you think Jesus would respond to his own mother, right? Now, the word woman there sounds really harsh, doesn't it?
[11:57] If I were to walk up to someone and say, woman, da-da-da-da-da-da-da, you would think, whoa, where's that guy get off? No, well, okay. But in the historical context, that particular word in this particular context would have actually been a quite respectful way for Jesus to reply to Mary.

In fact, that same sort of expression can even be used with some warmth and some affection in certain contexts. That's the same way Jesus will address his mother at the end of his life at the cross when he's sort of making sure that Mary's taken care of by John.
So Jesus is being respectful. He's being caring here. But in the rest of his reply, Jesus is telling Mary what? He's telling Mary in no uncertain terms that she or anyone else can dictate the terms or the times of his ministry.
He is telling her that his ministry will be utterly free from any kind of human advice or agenda or manipulation. Not even Jesus' own earthly mother has an inside track to get Jesus to do something on her timetable.
You see? This almighty Lord Jesus isn't something that we can control. Isn't someone that we can control or even someone we can advise.
[13:24] Mary wants Jesus to act but Jesus is clear that he will work in his own time and in his own way. Rather, the lesson here is that we should respond the way Mary responds and how she advises the servants to respond in verse 5.

Do whatever he tells you. That is the right response to this almighty Jesus. He's not someone that we could ever possibly control but he is someone that we must trust.
He doesn't obey us but we must obey him. Do whatever he tells you.
So this text is helping us to see the glory of Jesus' power and a little bit of how we should be responding to that power. But this miracle is a lot deeper than that.
There's more going on here than just a brute display of power and there are hints sort of all over this narrative that tell us that something more is going on. First, Jesus talks about his hour in verse 4 and then second there's this detail that John points out about these jars being used for Jewish purification in verse 6 and then third we're told that this miracle is the first of Jesus' signs in verse 11.
[14:48] All these little hints in the narrative are pointers that what Jesus is doing here is more than just showing his power. It's more than just a trick to display how great he is. There's something deeper that we're meant to see and this is our second point.

The deeper thing that we're meant to see is the glory not just of Jesus' power but the glory of his mission. Now isn't it strange that Jesus replies to Mary what does this have to do with me?
My hour has not yet come. That's all the more strange when you realize that in John's gospel whenever Jesus talks about his hour he's talking about something very specific.
It's not just a general way of him referencing his ministry as if it's not my time yet to sort of start doing all these things. In fact throughout the first half of John's gospel as we're being told about

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Jesus' ministry we're constantly being told that his hour hadn't come yet.
It's not until chapter 12 after Jesus rides into Jerusalem for the last time that finally he says now my hour has come. This is my hour because at that moment he's on his way to the cross and to his resurrection and to his exaltation.
[16:08] You see in John's gospel Jesus' hour is the hour of his death and resurrection. So the question is why when this young couple runs out of wine at their wedding feast and Mary says Jesus you should probably do something here why does Jesus say but my hour hasn't come?

And by the way Mary probably isn't asking Jesus or intending for Jesus to do something miraculous here she's probably just asking him for help. John tells us in verse 11 that this is the first miracle Jesus did so Mary probably isn't expecting him to do something miraculous.
We know from Luke 1 and 2 that Mary knew that Jesus was destined to be Israel's long awaited king but she probably hadn't seen him do anything like this before. So she's saying Jesus help and yet Jesus in response comes back with this almost nuclear reply but my hour hasn't come yet.
What did Jesus see in this moment that Mary didn't see? What is it about this setting and this context?
A bridegroom a bride a wedding a feast what about all that made Jesus think explicitly of his hour?
Well friends I think Jesus was thinking of his hour because of what he understood his mission to be.
[17:43] You see when the great Old Testament prophets look forward to the messianic age to the age when God would come they often characterize it as a time when the wine would flow freely when fasting would give way to feasting.

That's what Jeremiah 31 was all about that we read earlier. Just one of many texts in the prophets when they looked ahead and saw that one day God would finally be united to his people like a groom united to his bride and that that would be a celebration to end all celebrations and they would feast and they would drink and they would do so forever.
Later in his ministry Jesus himself would adapt the image of a wedding as a symbol for the completion of the messianic age. And you see friends that was Jesus' mission.
He had come to begin to inaugurate this great work of God this in breaking of God's kingdom to start this banquet of lasting joy because God was breaking in.
You see all around him in this moment in John 2 Jesus was seeing an image a parable of why he came and at the center of that great feast that great feast of God that the prophets spoke of at the center of that great coming feast that Jesus had come to inaugurate just like a marriage in the center of that feast there was a covenant it's no accident that Jesus told them to fill the jars that were ordinarily used for purification rites there were probably other jars they could have used by the way you see there were rituals in the first century for Jews rituals for washing their utensils and rituals for washing their hands and all of these sort of were ways of kind of embodying and expressing the mosaic law and these big jars were the ones that you would use so what better way for Jesus to show that now the old covenant was being fulfilled in the new that the new had come than to take those old jars and fill them with something radically new to do a work of transformation in them the water of those old purification rites that water that could only wash you on the outside and it had to be repeated again and again and again was now giving way to the new wine of the great feast that God had all along promised you would bring this wine that you would drink down deep into the inside of yourself and that would satisfy you once and for all again
[20:42] John's gospel is in many ways all about this theme in his opening chapter we read there again and the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory from his fullness we've all received grace upon grace for the law was given through Moses grace and truth came through Jesus Christ the law of Moses the old covenant was just a pointer was just a shadow and Jesus came to bring the substance the fullness he came to bring the new and lasting covenant and at the heart of this new covenant that would bind God and his people together in lasting joy joy like a feast like a banquet at the heart of that binding covenant at the heart of that covenant was what those jars stood for but could never actually deliver at the heart of the new covenant was something that the law could never give lasting real purification cleansing the forgiveness of sins and that's why Jesus was at a wedding thinking of his hour that's why his mother's request for more wine made Jesus think of the cross because Jesus knew that one day he would be feast with his bride one day there would be festival joy with his church and there would be no unstoppable limit there would be nothing that would stop the feast of that day but to get there to win his bride to cleanse her so that she might drink deeply of the wine of his love and be satisfied

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Jesus would need to say I thirst God John will show us in chapter 19 that as Jesus is hanging on the cross they'll fill a sponge with sour wine bitter to the taste and in his thirst he will drink it isn't it amazing how this gospel is constructed that the very first miracle that Jesus does is bringing the best wine that they had ever tasted but in order to bring it home Jesus will drink the bitterness of our sin and our guilt and our death he'll drink it down so that we can drink the wine of his righteousness and because he's taken our cup down to the very dregs we can have no fear that the cup of his righteousness will ever run dry you see friends this new covenant that Jesus has come to bring cannot and will not be broken because he's fulfilled all the terms and this is the glory of his mission to fulfill the law and to complete what the prophets spoke of to win his bride and to save the feast isn't that a sobering description of our human condition verse 3 the wine ran out how often do our human attempts to find joy and happiness come crashing down no matter what it is the wine runs out but here to rescue us

Christ intervenes in verse 10 the master of the feast pulls the bridegroom aside now in that culture the groom actually would have been responsible for paying for and putting on the wedding feast so that's why the master of ceremonies this master of the feast pulls the groom aside and he tells this young man he says everyone serves the good wine first and when people have drunk freely then the poor wine but you have kept the good wine until now and is in that moment an incredible picture of the gospel this young groom is about to experience the embarrassment of his lifetime in an honor and shame culture this wedding feast that he has planned and he has paid for and his family is responsible for is about to come up short and all of his family and all of his friends and all of his in-laws are there and there's a whole mountain of social shame that's about to come crashing down on his head a mountain that he might never come out from under but instead of getting all that this young groom he gets the credit for what

Jesus has done and he's saved and that's the heart of the gospel friends that through believing and trusting in Christ you get the credit for what he has done his death pays for your sin and his righteousness covers your life and you are saved have you come to rest in that or are you still trying to prop up your identity in some other way are you still trying to get out from under that mountain of shame in some other way are you still trying to be whole in some other way and your wine is running out instead receive him get the credit for what he's done that's the gospel and that's the glory of his mission let's finish with the last point that we see here third I think we see here the glory of Jesus's lasting joy don't these words just ring out the master of the feast says you have kept the good wine until now that's the note that the story ends on and of course the irony is is that the bridegroom had served his best he had done all he could do and it fell short and it wasn't enough and it was about to end in disappointment and shame but the wine that Jesus brings is better better than the best thing that they could ever come up with on their own you've kept the good wine until now

J.C. Ryle put it this way commenting on this paragraph of scripture he says the world gives its best things like the best wine first and its worst things last the longer we serve the world the more disappointing unsatisfactory and unsavory will its gifts prove Christ on the other hand gives his servants their best things last they have first the cross the race and the battle but then the rest the glory and the crown for the believer in Christ friends there is always better to come no matter how good things are now no matter how terrible things are now better things are still to come and what we know from the New Testament is that the work of Christ will ultimately end in the renewal of all creation that these joys that we experience now that if we are in Christ they're just a foretaste of something better to come when

[28:17] Christ returns and heals this created order when the banquet of heaven becomes the feast of earth and again all of creation rejoices in the presence of its creator and redeemer and we the bride of Christ those who have trusted in him will be in the midst of that celebration living out the glorious freedom as Paul says of the daughters and the sons of God no matter what our journey has been in this life one day we will turn to the great master of the banquet and say you've kept the good wine until now and it will only get better so for instance this is glory so orient your life around this make this what you live for this glory yeah and you will not be disappointed let's pray our Lord Jesus how often we have sought for joy and happiness and created things when Lord you are the giver of all good gifts Lord thank you that the promise of this passage is that you have come to give an undestructible everlasting joy Lord help us to fight for that joy help us to live in the midst of that joy even as we weep with those who weep even as we work for justice even as we go about our daily routines Lord even as we suffer Lord help us to know that there is joy in knowing you and that

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one day you will come and make all things new so Lord Jesus as we now come around your table as we celebrate communion as we remember your body broken and your blood shed would you take these signs of what you've done for us and would you seal on our hearts the glory of who you are and what you've done and would we know the assurance of being loved and known by you

Lord Jesus be present with us now encourage our hearts fan the flame of our faith we pray so that we might see your glory and believe in you amen

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