

New and Everlasting Joy

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Date: 24 January 2021

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[0 : 00] Turn with me in your Bibles, if you have one, or look along on the screen. We'll be reading from John chapter 2, verses 1 to 12, as we continue in our series through this gospel account.

John chapter 2, starting at verse 1. 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. 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 twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, Fill the jars with water.

[1 : 07] 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 Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

After this, he went down to Capernaum, with his mother, and his brothers, and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days. Things fall apart.

The center cannot hold. Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned.

The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity. Now, if you've never heard those words before, you might think somebody wrote them at some point in the past year, to describe something that happened.

[2 : 29] But actually, these words were written a hundred years ago, in 1919, by the Irish poet W.B. Yeats. He was writing in the aftermath of the First World War, that had left 20 million dead and 21 million wounded.

He was writing as political tensions were high in his own country, leading to the Irish War for Independence. And he was writing in a time of personal distress related to a pandemic. His pregnant wife was slowly recovering from a bad case of the Spanish flu that nearly took her life. But over the last century, Yeats' words have resonated with many people. They've been quoted or alluded to in books, songs, essays, novels, poems, movies.

Because isn't this what we often see when we look around at the world? We see things falling apart. We see the world around us gradually or even more quickly unraveling.

And that's the natural course of things in this fallen world. Empires rise, and then eventually they fall. Schools of thought become all the rage for a time, and then they fade into the footnotes of history.

[3 : 36] Great buildings are constructed, and then they begin to deteriorate. Even on a personal level, every one of us is living in a body that is in the process of aging, decaying, and eventually dying.

Running low and one day running out. Even the best things in this world will come to an end. But the story we're looking at this morning shows us that Jesus Christ came into an unraveling world to bring new and everlasting joy.

So let's walk through this story together, and then we'll consider what it means. So first, let's look at the story of this wedding at Cana.

Right? At the beginning, we see Jesus and his family members and his disciples invited to a wedding. Perhaps it was a family relative or a family friend. But at some point soon, they're confronted with a miniature crisis.

The wedding is falling apart because the wine has run out. Now, let me give a little historical context to put this situation in perspective.

[4 : 48] Three bits of historical context. First, back in the day, wedding celebrations often lasted for seven days. Now, not everyone would stay for the whole time, but a wedding was an occasion of great joy.

And people would normally invite as many guests, family, friends, neighbors, distinguished personalities as possible. And it would be an extended feast.

Second, the groom was the designated host. So the groom and his family were responsible to provide food and drink for all the guests. And back then, hospitality was a very important cultural value.

I grew up at my mom's side of the family is Italian. And, you know, I mean, when you go to an Italian household, right? You know, grandma asked you, you've already had four portions, but do you want a fifth, right?

Like, it's just the expectation. You don't ever run out of food in an Italian family. And it's the same thing back in the Middle East, right? You would never run out of food or drink for your guests.

[5 : 54] That would be extremely embarrassing. In fact, there's even some evidence that in a situation like this, the bride's family could have pursued a lawsuit against the groom and his family for failing to adequately provide for the guests at the wedding and dishonoring the bride in the process.

Sounds a little crazy to us, but it underlines how important it was. That hosting hospitality role.

Third, wine was the main beverage served at weddings.

So wedding celebrations would last seven days. The groom was the designated host and wine was the main beverage. Now, back then, wine was normally mixed with large amounts of water. So it had a much lower alcohol content than it does today.

Even less than beer today. So guests at a wedding could drink quite a lot of wine. It would keep them hydrated and they would not be immediately getting very drunk. But wine was seen as an essential beverage for celebrations.

That was sort of what was expected. So if the wine ran out, it meant two things. First, it meant the party would be over early. And maybe some of those guests who might have come later on during those seven days would have not even got to participate at all.

[7 : 16] But it also meant that the new husband's reputation in the village, especially a small village like Cana in Galilee, would be damaged for years to come. He's the one who was a stingy, skimpy host and didn't even have enough to properly provide for his guests.

So that's the problem that we see at the beginning of the story. But when the problem is brought to Jesus' attention, Jesus seems initially reluctant to do anything. Mary comes to Jesus and says, they have no wine.

Now, it's not clear exactly what Mary was expecting Jesus to do. John tells us in verse 11 that this was Jesus' first miracle. So presumably, Mary wasn't used to seeing Jesus perform miracles every time something happened or there was a need.

But it is likely that by this time, Mary was a widow. Why, you might say, well, Joseph and Mary appear together in the Gospel accounts when Jesus is born and when Jesus is a child, when he's 12 years old.

For example, going to the Passover and the temple together. But when Jesus is an adult, Mary continues to appear in the Gospel several times, but Joseph is never present.

[8 : 36] And so many commentators think that by this time, Joseph had died and Mary was raising her family alone. And so perhaps in the absence of Joseph, Mary had come to depend on Jesus, her oldest son, to help her out in a pinch, to help her find a way through hard situations.

And so she comes to him and sort of says, what do we do here, Jesus? But in verse 4, Jesus' response is a little unexpected. Woman, what does this have to do with me?

My hour has not yet come. Now that term woman was not a rude term. It was a respectful term, sort of like ma'am, but it was not a term that anyone ever used in the ancient world to address their mother.

It was not an affectionate term. It was not a term that you would normally use when speaking to your mom. And every other time in the Bible that somebody says, what does this have to do with me?

The expression always indicates some kind of challenge or rebuke. So there are actually at least four times in the Gospel of John when somebody comes to Jesus with a request or with some advice and initially he pushes back against it.

[9 : 56] So there's a situation here in chapter 4. There's an official at Capernaum who comes to Jesus and says, come down to my house before my son dies. And Jesus says, no, you go back home.

Or in chapter 7, Jesus' brothers come to him and they say to him, you should go to Judea. You should show yourself to the world. And Jesus says, nope, time's not right yet.

And in chapter 11, Mary and Martha send word to Jesus, come, Lazarus is sick. Come and heal him. And Jesus stays where he is for two more days.

It's striking if you compare all these incidents. People come to Jesus with what seem like legitimate needs and requests and initially Jesus seems to push back against them. And often we think, if I'm in a pinch and I'm turning to Jesus for help and if my request is reasonable, he should come right away and fix my situation.

And we might think that of all people that could ask him for help, at least Jesus would do so for his mom. But John wants us to see that Jesus does not act on our timetable.

[11 : 16] Jesus will not be controlled or manipulated by any human being, not even by his mother. Jesus came to earth to carry out the will of God, his heavenly father.

Not the will of any other human being. So sometimes we may come to Jesus with a problem or a situation or a request and he may seem to push back on that request or not to respond immediately.

But even if Jesus doesn't initially respond in the way that we desire or hope, John wants us to know that he does care and he will act on behalf of those who wait for him.

So every one of those four times that Jesus initially pushes back on someone's request in the Gospel of John, he actually comes through for them, but often in a way they don't expect.

So with the official who comes to him and says, please come down to my house and heal my son, Jesus says, no, you go home. And guess what? When he gets home, his son is healed. Jesus can heal remotely.

[12 : 21] Okay? There's even a biblical example of Jesus' ministry is not hindered by physical distance. When Jesus' brothers come to him and say, show your glory to the world, Jesus says, no, not now, but then he does go up to that feast later on and of course he will show his glory to the world through his death and resurrection and through the sending of the Holy Spirit in ways that are far more glorious than they would have ever imagined.

And of course, he doesn't just heal Lazarus from sickness, he comes and raises him from the dead. And here, he turns water into wine.

We don't know exactly what Mary was expecting, but surely this would have surpassed anyone's normal expectations. And Mary here is an example of faith, an example of the posture that we should adopt toward Jesus even when he seems to not respond immediately to our requests.

She's not turned off by Jesus' word of rebuke. She doesn't go away in a huff. No, she says to the servants, do whatever he tells you.

Now, Jesus didn't tell Mary in advance what he was going to do or how he was going to handle the situation, but she says, just do whatever he says. I trust him.

[13 : 48] I trust him. And you should too. You see, that's what faith is. We may not always understand why Jesus does the things he does when he does them, but faith is trusting that he's worthy of our trust and obedience.

obedience. Now, the story goes on. Jesus says to the servants, fill these six stone water jars. And of course, like Mary, the servants probably are like, what?

What's, what exactly? Why? What are you going to do? How does this relate? You know, you're not taking up a collection and going out to the store.

You're telling us to fill these huge water jars. But no, they just go ahead and do it. Right? They don't seem to, they don't stop and say, well, I'm not going to do it unless you tell me why you're telling me to do this.

No, they just go ahead and do it. And then Jesus says, draw some water and take it to the master of the feast. Now, the master of the feast was the head waiter. So, the master of the feast would have been the person responsible for seeing for all the food and drink and for all the sort of catering associated with the wedding.

[15 : 05] And the master of the feast would have been in charge of supervising the rest of the servants. So, the servants go to their boss and say, here's this, here's, here's this water that Jesus told us to bring to you and he tastes it and he calls the bridegroom.

Now, again, the bridegroom, the groom was responsible for providing all of the refreshments, all of the food and drink. So, that's why he goes to the bridegroom because the bridegroom is supposed to be in charge and he says, wow, nobody else does this.

You've saved the best wine for now. Usually, the quality just goes down and down and down over time as people have been around for longer and longer.

you've saved the best for last. And that's the climax of the story. You have kept the good wine until now.

The end of verse 10. So, that's how the story goes. Now, let's consider what it means. And John tells us what it means in verse 11 because he says, Jesus manifested his glory by doing this.

[16 : 28] How did Jesus manifest his glory? Well, at one level, Jesus manifested his glory very quietly and behind the scenes in this story.

All right, verse 9 says, the master of the feast, the head waiter, didn't know where the wine had come from even though he thought that the groom deserved the credit for it. And aside from the servants and Jesus' mother and his own disciples, it's not clear who else at the wedding even knew exactly what had happened.

Many of the guests probably didn't even know that the wine had run out or where the new wine came from. You see, sometimes in the Gospels, Jesus acts quietly and behind the scenes, discreetly, without making a public show of what he's doing and sometimes even tells people don't make a big deal of this right now, right yet.

Here, Jesus makes up and fills in for the deficiencies of this unknown bridegroom and he enables the party to go on for a few more days. He enables the groom's honor in the village to be preserved for a few more years.

And you know, the Bible says that Jesus Christ in union with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit continues to sustain this fallen world by his common grace.

[17 : 56] Working behind the scenes discreetly and quietly in ways that most of us never even notice or know about to hold together this world that otherwise would have fallen apart a long time ago.

long ago Augustine, the church father, said, we look at this miracle and we think it's amazing. Jesus turned water into wine. But Augustine says, look around at the world.

God does the same thing each year. The clouds pour forth water which sinks into the soil which makes the grapevines grow which human beings make into grape juice and wine.

He says, we've just gotten so used to that process that we don't marvel at it anymore. But Augustine wrote, who is there that considers the works of God whereby this whole world is governed and regulated who is not amazed and overwhelmed?

When we look at how our human bodies function, even if you study how when you get a cut how your blood clots and yet doesn't completely clot all of the blood in your whole system and then how your skin repairs itself.

[19 : 13] It's an amazing process. It's quite complicated and none of us, almost none of us except maybe the med students here really think about that and really give attention to that.

But it's something we depend on every day. Otherwise, every time you get a little cut you'd bleed your entire blood out and you'd be dead. But there's all kinds of things that are amazing that God does to sustain this broken and fallen world on a day-to-day basis.

There's all kinds of things that God does behind the scenes in our own lives to preserve us from troubles that we don't even realize that we might otherwise be brought down by.

Now, while that's important, that's not all that John wants us to see. The main point of this story is not how Jesus works behind the scenes to sustain the world by his common grace.

No, John says this is the first of Jesus' signs. Think about what is a sign. Well, a sign points to the reality of something greater.

[20 : 24] And this is the word that John uses most frequently to describe Jesus' miracles. He doesn't use the word wonder, sort of something that emphasizes how astonished we are at it.

He says they're signs. They're pointing to the reality of who Jesus is. He wants us to see something about who Jesus is in every one of the miracles Jesus does. He does seven of them throughout the gospel.

So every time Jesus does a miracle that is recorded in John's gospel, we need to ask what is this sign pointing to about Jesus himself? And the answer to that question here is that John wants us to see that Jesus is the true bridegroom who has come to establish a new and better covenant with his people.

Now you might say, how do I get that from this story? Well, John gives us three hints that point us in that direction.

verse 1, John gives a subtle hint indicating that Jesus has come to begin something new. And most of us might miss this hint, but when we look closer, it is there.

[21 : 39] When it talks about the timing of the wedding being on the third day. Now, two weeks ago, Pastor Nick pointed out that the first words of John's gospel are also the first words of the book of Genesis in the Old Testament, in the beginning.

And if we look more closely, we might notice another potential parallel between the first two chapters of Genesis and the first two chapters of John. They both begin with a week of events culminating in a wedding.

So the book of Genesis describes a week of God's creation culminating in the wedding of Adam and Eve when God brings Eve to Adam. And there's this sort of wedding ceremony in the Garden of Eden.

And John also begins with a week of God's action, a week of Jesus coming on the scene in chapter 1. So four times in chapter 1, verse 29, it says, the next day.

Verse 35, the next day again. Verse 39, they stayed with him that day. Verse 43, the next day. And then chapter 2, verse 1, on the third day.

[22 : 50] A week has passed and guess where we find ourselves? At a wedding. And so if you had been familiar with that pattern in Genesis and you see this pattern in John, you think, huh, that's an interesting echo.

John must be saying that Jesus has come to make a new beginning, to start something new. And you might even think, maybe he's the new Adam over a new creation.

Well, verse 6, John gives us another hint indicating that Jesus has come to establish not just something new, but something better. Something better than the old covenant provided.

John mentions that these six large stone water jars were used for Jewish rites of purification. purification. That is, they represented the rituals of the old covenant.

But Jesus has come to bring something new. Right? Jesus says, fill them to the brim. In other words, they've come to their fulfillment.

[24 : 00] And Jesus has come to bring something even better. A kind of purification that wasn't previously possible, a kind of joy that won't run out. But the clearest hint is in verse 10 at the climax of the story, when the master of the feast says to the bridegroom, you have kept the good wine until now.

Now, think about that statement. We know that the master of the feast is giving the credit to the bridegroom that he should be giving to Jesus. Right? Because the unknown bridegroom has actually failed to be a proper host to his guests.

he doesn't deserve any credit at all. But where the unknown bridegroom failed, Jesus has provided all that was needed.

And more, even something even better. So Jesus hasn't only fulfilled what was already expected of a host, he has surpassed all expectations. His provisions are unquestionably superior.

Jesus is the true and better host, the true and better bridegroom. And if we had missed all of those hints, in chapter 3, John says even more explicitly, if you look in chapter 3, verse 28, John the Baptist says, I'm not the Christ, I'm not the Messiah, I've been sent before him, and in the next verse he compares himself to the friend of the bridegroom, who rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice.

[25 : 28] And John says, he must increase, but I must decrease. So John the Baptist points to Jesus and says, the long-awaited bridegroom has finally arrived. So that's what John wants us to

see in this story about Jesus.

That's what this sign is pointing to about Jesus, that he's the true and better host, the true and better bridegroom who has come for his people. You see, throughout the Old Testament, the prophets had spoken of a future day when the Messiah would come and when feasting would abound.

We heard one of those prophecies read earlier to us from Amos. Amos said, the kingdom of David will be rebuilt and the mountains shall drip sweet wine and all the hills shall flow with it.

There will be wine and milk and honey in abundance. It's imagery of an unending feast where Jeremiah says, they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord, the grain, the new wine, and the olive oil. They will be like a well-watered garden and they will sorrow no more. Jeremiah 31, 12. And just a few verses later, Jeremiah wrote, behold, the days are coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

[26 : 41] Not like the covenant that I made with their fathers when I brought them out of Egypt, they broke that covenant though I was their husband. But this time he says, I will write my laws on their hearts and I will forgive their sins and remember their wickedness no more.

You see, Jesus is that long-awaited Messiah, that long-awaited bridegroom who came to establish a new and better covenant, who came to bring new and everlasting joy to the hearts of his people. That's what John wants us to see. But you know, when we read this story and if we see that, we might ask a question. we might say, but how does Jesus seal the deal?

Jesus doesn't, you know, this is somebody else's wedding. Jesus doesn't establish a new and better covenant with his people by turning water into wine at somebody else's wedding in Cana. Nope. But remember what Jesus said in verse four. He said, my hour has not yet come. And nine times Jesus refers to his hour in the gospel of John.

[27 : 58] And every time he's referring to the hour of his death on the cross at Calvary. That's where Jesus would seal the deal.

That's where the glory of his saving love would be revealed. That's where he paid the price so that we could be ours or he could be ours and we could be his forever.

You see, at every wedding, two people make a promise to one another. And they basically say, what's mine is yours and what's yours is mine. For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness or in health.

And that's the promise Jesus made to us, to all who would turn and believe in him. John 19 describes the hour of Jesus crucifixion.

And it says this, as Jesus was hanging on the cross, it says, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said to fulfill the scripture, I thirst.

[29 : 02] A jar full of sour wine stood there. So they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, it is finished.

And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. And he you see, what does John want us to see there? He wants us to see that Jesus drank the cup of our bitterness so that we could drink of his everlasting joy.

He received condemnation in full so that we could receive forgiveness in full. He took on all that was ours so that we might enjoy all that is his now and forever.

forever. Friends, that's the good news of the gospel. And it brings joy like nothing else in this world does. To know that Jesus is yours and we are his.

That will carry us through all of our days. So come to Jesus, receive his promise today, taste and see that he is good. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, thank you for the grace that you show us day by day in sustaining this world, in sustaining our bodies, in giving us moments and days and weeks of joy and laughter.

[30 : 36] Thank you for all the ways that you keep this world from immediately falling apart as it would do without you. Lord, thank you not only for that.

Thank you for sending Jesus to unite us to yourself, to bring us new and everlasting joy, to renew us and heal us from the inside out.

Lord, we pray that you would grant us today the joy of knowing that we are yours and you are ours forever. Lord, give us a taste of that joy that we will have for all eternity.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.