

Sermon on John 2:1-11
The Sign of the Wine

Today is Epiphany Sunday. Our English word comes from the Greek word, epiphaneia, which means **appearance** or **manifestation**. This really is a very important word when we think about God and our situation as human beings.

We learn in the Bible so much about our own human condition and about God himself which we never would have known had not God revealed them by his Holy Spirit through men who he inspired to write the Holy Scriptures. We learn in the Bible that we are actually ignorant of much of God and his nature and his attributes and his will, and we are certainly ignorant of our own lost and sinful condition before him.

If there is one thing that is desperately needed by human beings, it is that we need an epiphany, we need many epiphanies. That is, we need appearances or manifestations of God or of his messengers. God has to manifest, that is reveal himself to us, because we are blind to his presence and his person. We need, in other words, an epiphany from God. We need a manifestation from God, we need an appearance from God.

Over the course of human history, in particular, Biblical history, we read that over the last few thousand years there have been a number of manifestations of God or his messengers, such as angels, to human beings.

God appeared in some form in the Garden of Eden to Adam and Eve, he also spoke to Abraham, his power and glory were revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai, and the supreme manifestation or epiphany of the eternal God to humanity was in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, when he was born of the virgin Mary, and lived among his people as the Son of God.

To a lost race of humans, ignorant of God and of their own sins, this is the greatest thing that could have happened: the eternal God himself appeared among men and women, he manifested himself to us in Jesus our Lord. This was the greatest Epiphany to the human race that has ever happened and we are still basking in the wonderfulness of that event.

The invisible God who cannot be seen by human eyes, he who is eternal, took upon himself in the person of the Son of God our full human nature so that we could learn of him more clearly and fully – it was a divine appearance, a divine manifestation of the person of God – and we are infinitely better off because of what God did in the person of his Son in actual human history some 2,000 years ago. Make no mistake, we are talking about an appearance of God in time and space, in a geographical place, among a specific grace of people, living in a distinct culture, under a political system known as the Roman Empire.

It is almost unimaginable to believe this that the God who created the heavens and the earth, who holds to galaxies in the palm of his hand, would descend from his throne in

heaven and submit to taking upon himself our human nature, and then live among us, in all the stresses and stains and heartaches and joys of a human life. But that is exactly what God did and this is very good news, the best news that a spiritually bankrupt humanity needed above everything else.

Today in John's gospel I want us to study chapter 2, verses 1-11, which is the account of Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding feast, and the text says in verse 11:

11 This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him."

So what we want to do today is see how this happening at this wedding, this turning of the water into wine, this miracle of Jesus, is a "sign" of who Jesus is, and a manifestation of his glory.

So let's read the text. Please follow along in your Bible as I read John 2:1-11:

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples.3 When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come."

5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

6 Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. 9 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 10 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."

11 This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

So we see there that there was this wedding taking place in a village called Cana, which is 8 miles north of Nazareth, where Jesus grew up. Jesus' mother was there and Jesus and his disciples were also there. There was no doubt a lot of celebration going on, weddings are joyful occasions, with lots of good food and drink. But then something

very disconcerting happened – the wine ran out! Now this would cause a major damper on the festive occasion.

Evidently Jesus' mother had some responsibility in overseeing the provision of the food and drink for the guests. It's likely someone in her family was getting married, like the daughter of one of her sisters. Jesus had been invited, so they were at least friends of the bride and groom.

Now to run out of wine at a Jewish wedding was a very serious matter. It would be a great embarrassment to the groom, who was responsible for providing food and drink for the guests. It would be a matter of great shame for him. We don't know why the wine ran out, but it did. I remember once I attended a wedding and the food that was provided was rather sparse. I was a little mad, to tell the truth, "What is this? A wedding and so little food." I think there was a failure on the part of the caterer to do her job.

But Mary was in a tither. What were they to do? So she found her son, Jesus, he had always come to her aid over the years when there was problem providing for the needs of the family. Jesus would know what to do; he would always come up with a solution. So we read in verse 3: "...the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."

What we read next is quite startling. Jesus says to her, "'Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come."

The first thing that startles us is Jesus' abruptness in calling his mother, "woman." The next thing that surprises us is Jesus' words, "...what does this have to do with me?" Why would Jesus say such a thing if his mother was asking for help, and he may have been related to the bride or groom, and here was a potentially very unhappy situation that he surely could have soon something to help out. But he seems to be saying something like, "That's not any business of mine."

The first major point I want to bring out in this passage, as I understand it, is that...

I. Jesus had entered a new kind of relationship with his mother.

He had grown up in her home. As an infant he had sucked at her breast. He had no doubt learned the scriptures from her and Joseph. She had taught him and loved him and provided for him as a faithful mother. Then when he became a man she depended on him to help provide for the family; it's likely that at some point Joseph had died.

But something had happened. Jesus had sensed that the time to begin his Messianic ministry had arrived. He went to the Jordan River and was baptized by John the Baptist. Then as he was coming up out of the water the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove and he was anointed for his public ministry. Then the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan for 40 days and nights.

Then Jesus began to preach; his public ministry had begun. We read in Mark 1:14-15:

14 ... Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Jesus had begun his preaching, healing, and delivering ministry and as he's back in Galilee he is invited to what may be wedding of a family member. And yet in a certain sense he's not the same man he was a few months before when he had left the household to begin his three-year ministry. He is now the anointed One, the Messiah, he has actively begun his work as the Redeemer of God's elect, the Servant of Jehovah, the One whose life was to be offered up as a sacrifice and substitute for the sins of his people.

You remember the ancient promise God gave in the Garden of Eden...he spoke to Satan and said:

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

As David Strain has pointed out, what we see here is the Jesus is the offspring, the Seed of the woman, who would crush Satan's head. And now the Seed of the woman is this particular person, born from this particular woman named Mary.

So Jesus' relationship to his mother is one that has cosmic significance for every human person. She is the particular woman from ancient prophecy who would bear the Seed who would be the Savior of God's people. So Jesus address her is a recognition of that fact. She is not just "mother," but she is that woman who is fulfilled prophecy, so he addresses her as such. One other time in John's gospel Jesus addressed her as woman – when he hung on the cross. We read in John 19:26:

26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"

So, what are we seeing here? We are seeing that Jesus **...had entered a new kind of relationship with his mother.**

It was based not just on family lineage and family relationship, but salvific relationship, that is, she is the One who had born the Messiah, she is the One who had born the promised Seed who would come to reconcile sinful humanity and the holy God. She is still his mother, but she is also more than that, and so Jesus' address to her as "woman" brings that into focus. Derek Thomas in his sermon on this passage thinks Mary caught

this distinction. She was not offended. After all, she had been “treasuring up in her heart” the things since her son was born and the angels appeared and the Magi came from the East. So it all came together when she called her “woman,” not “mother.”

Mary must now see more clearly that her son was not just her son, but also her Savior. He was the promised Seed, the Lamb of God, the King of the kingdom of God, the Son of Man, and so she says to the servants at the wedding – see verse 5, “Do whatever he tells you.” This seems like a simple order to the servants. But nothing in John’s Gospel is put there haphazardly. We can hear in Mary’s directive to the servants a directive, a command also to us, “Do whatever he tells you.”

My friends, not only Mary, but God himself would say to us this morning and every day of our lives, “Do whatever he tells you.” Do whatever the Son of God tells you. If you belong to Jesus, your life does not belong to you anymore. You are not the captain of your own ship, but Jesus is your captain and commander. You are not your own, but you are his – to be used of as he sees fit, to be directed as he sees fit, to be commanded to live and think and act according to all his holy Word and holy commands. This is no small privilege and no small command from God to his people but it is true for all of us who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, “Do whatever he tells you.”

So maybe we can now understand better why Jesus calls his mother, “woman.” It is because “Jesus had entered a new kind of relationship with her.”

But look at what else he tells her in verse 4. He says, “My hour has not yet come.” What is he talking about? This is not difficult to know what he is talking about because throughout the Gospel of John Jesus talks about the coming “hour.” We read in...

John 7:30 - 30 So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come.

Jo. 12:27 - 27 “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.

Jo. 12:23-24 - 23 And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

So, what is the hour that Jesus tell his mother that has not yet come? It is the hour of his death, the hour of his crucifixion. What we are seeing here is second main point I want to bring out for us today, and that is that...

II. The hour of Jesus' death was already at the forefront of his life.

Ever since he had been taught the Holy Scriptures and was old enough to think about sacred truth, he had begun to realize that he was destined for this hour. And here in the midst of a wedding feast, in the midst of all the music and dancing and laughter, in the midst of all the special food and drink, he has not forgotten why he had come, why the Father had sent him to earth. It was for him to go through the hour of his death. It was to be offered up on Calvary's cross as the substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of his people.

So, when Jesus says, "what does this have to do with me?," that is, the running out of the wine at the wedding, he is showing that he cannot be encumbered and weighed down with these domestic responsibilities any more, like he used to be when he was living with his mother and siblings, but instead he is focused on the coming hour.

Mary, as I mentioned, may have caught his drift, his meaning, and she realizes in a flash more clearly who her son really is. So she tells the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Her meaning, I think, is "he is the Son of God, he can take care of this situation." And, of course, he did.

Let's look at what he did: he told the servants to take 6 stone water jars and fill them with water, which they did. Then he told them to draw out some of the water and take it to the master of the feast, which they did. We read in verses 9-11:

9 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 10 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."

So, what has happened? This common, everyday water, was suddenly changed into wine, and not just ordinary wine, not just cheap wine, but good, high-quality wine.

The third major point I want us to see here is that...

III. Jesus' divine power over nature was revealed.

Now who can do something like this? We read in Exo. 7:20

Moses and Aaron did as the Lord commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the **Nile**, and all the water in the **Nile** turned into blood.

Who alone can turn the water of the Nile River into blood? It is Yahweh, the eternal Creator God. Man cannot do this.

And so here. What Jesus did was something no human could possibly have done. A creative miracle was performed in the sight of the servants at the wedding feasts. The disciples saw this, not every one at the wedding saw this, but Jesus' disciples did, and what effect did it have on them? Verse 11 says, ¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

What was happening here? This was the first of the seven "signs" in John's gospel that were meant to point to Jesus' identity – who he really is, the divine Son of God, so that people would know who he is and believe in him. The seven signs are:

1. Turning Water into Wine ([John 2:1–11](#))
2. Cleansing the Temple ([John 2:12–17](#))
3. Healing the Nobleman's Son ([John 4:46–54](#))
4. Healing the Lame Man ([John 5:1–15](#))
5. Feeding the Multitude ([John 6:1–15](#))
6. Healing the Blind Man ([John 9](#))
7. Raising Lazarus ([John 11](#))

John tells us at the end of his gospel in chapter 20, verse 31 the purpose of his gospel:

³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

The disciples saw that water that one moment the servants at the wedding at poured into the six stone water jars and a few moments later they saw them drawing out the same water, but it was no more water, it was fine water. It was no longer clear, but it was red, red like the color of blood. They could not deny it; they were there; they saw it happen; Jesus had caused the water to turn into wine. So they saw this manifestation of his divine glory and believed in him. No mere man could have done this. The word you see there in verse 11, "manifested," is from the Greek verb from which we get the word epiphany. This miracle at the wedding feast was an epiphany, a manifestation of Jesus' glory and it was enough to cause the disciples to believe in him.

Jesus would manifest, reveal six more signs in this gospel, all reinforcing this first sign, all seven were strong and clear reasons for the disciples and anyone else to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and so by believing they might have life in his name. Have you seen, have you read, do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God. The church can answer, "We have seen, we have read, we believe that Jesus is the Son of God."

So this was the first sign, it showed **Jesus' divine power over nature.**

But there is one more point I want to bring out today. It was no mistake that these six stone water jars for purification were there at the wedding feast. And it was no haphazard command that Jesus gave when he told the servants to fill them with water. And it was no after-thought on Jesus' part when he turned the water into wine.

What we are seeing here is the following truth...

IV. Jesus' coming death would truly purify from sin.

In the religious customs of the Jews they would use the water in these stone water pots to ceremonially cleanse themselves from sin. For example, when they would come in from the market place they would wash their hands, presumably to cleanse themselves from any pollution or contaminant, sinful pollution or Gentile pollution. We read in Mark 7:4:

and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they **wash**. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the **washing** of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.)

The Jews wanted to be cleansed from any defilement they may have picked up rubbing shoulders with people in the market – there were “sinners” there and some Gentiles, and so they would wash themselves so they'd be at least ritually clean.

But when Jesus turned the water in these purification jars into wine he was showing that it was only the wine of his blood that could truly wash away sin.

The newly created wine in the water pots was linked to the coming “hour” of his death, the coming shedding of his blood, the pouring out of his blood on Calvary's cross to truly and actually purify his people from their sin.

Water could not do it, good works good not do it, religious works of every kind could not do it, my parents' faith could not do it – the only thing that can purify from sin is the sacrificial blood of the Son of God.

This is the great lesson here that was revealed in the midst of the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee. What is a “sign” in John's gospel? It is a physical miracle that is great enough just by itself but it is more than that. It is a pointer, a sign pointing to who Jesus is, his true identity as the divine Savior of the human race.

We see the Messianic Age is breaking in here at this wedding feast. Big changes are coming because of the advent of Jesus Christ. A new covenant will soon be inaugurated and set in place through the poured out blood of the Lord Jesus.

True purification from sins would soon be happening as the crown of thorns ripped Jesus' forehead, as the nails pierced his hands and feet, as the Roman soldier's spear pierced his side.

We read about the heart of the matter in Hebrews 9:13-14

¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

¹⁵ Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

The water turned wine in the six stone water jars pointed to the purifying blood of Christ that would be poured out at the hour of his death.

What have we seen happening at this wedding feast at Cana of Galilee?

I. Jesus had entered a new kind of relationship with his mother.

He was much more than her son, he was also her Lord and Savior. We are Jesus' brothers and sisters, but we shouldn't get too buddy-buddy, too familiar with him, but remember he's the holy one. He is our God and we are his people.

II. The hour of Jesus' death was already at the forefront of his life.

We need to also always live with the end in sight – the coming of Christ that we might be about his work, pleasing to him.

III. Jesus' divine power over nature was revealed.

This was the first sign. Jesus said if you don't believe me, believe my works. Jesus is revealed by his teaching and his mighty works. They are verifications of who he is – man but more than. "God from God..."

IV. Jesus' coming death, his poured-out blood, would truly purify from sin.

Have you been to the fountain? Are you washed in the blood of Christ? Has his blood purified you from your sins? He is the divine Messiah. He alone can purify us from our sins. Let us continually go to him, for as we have fellowship one with another...."

We who know him have drunk of the wine of his forgiveness, we've been washed in his blood, and know the joy of his unending presence and fellowship.

It is good to be washed in the blood of the Lamb, is it not? (the church answers, **It is!**)

