

Glory Saves a Wedding

John 2:1-12

As we continue our worship by focusing our minds on the word of God, I would invite you to open your Bible with me to John 2 for this message entitled, “Glory Saves a Wedding.” Our text for today is John 2:1-12 and in this text we see the glory of Jesus Christ manifested for the first time at a wedding through an act of creation.

Follow along as I read John 2:1-12. . . .

Our Father, with this text open before us we submit our hearts and minds to what the Spirit would teach us today. Open our minds, illumine our hearts, show us Christ. Sanctify us by the truth; your word is truth. For those among us that need it—young and old—give sight to blind eyes, hearing to deaf ears, life to dead souls. We believe that only you, Holy Spirit, can save and sanctify; and we pray that you would do it for the glory of Christ. For his sake we pray. Amen.

There is glory in this text. Did you see it? In vs. 11 the Apostle John tells us that what we read is a manifestation of the glory of Jesus. Don’t let your familiarity with this event lull you to sleep. There is glory to behold here if we will give minds to consider what happened at this wedding.

And we have to see this glory if we’re going to understand why the Holy Spirit inspired John to document this account for unbelievers to know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and for believers to know that Jesus is able rescue us from any trouble.

We’re going to walk through this text under four headings. We’ll see the setting in vs. 1-2, the setback in vs. 3-5, the sign in vs. 6-10, and the significance in vs. 11. The setting, the setback, the sign, and the significance. That’ll just help us keep track of where we are in the narrative as we move through it.

The Setting (vs.1-2)

We begin with the setting. LOOK at vs. 1-2. . . .

Most English versions don’t translate it, but the first word in the Greek is “and.” So it should be, “And on the third day.” By starting with “and” John connects this section to the three days of events that span 1:19-51. The “third day” then is the third day since Jesus met Nathanael which makes it six days since Jesus was publicly presented by John the Witness as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Six days from that momentous event there's a wedding in Cana, and Jesus and his family are there. Cana is about nine miles north of Nazareth where Jesus lived with his family, which is about a half-day of travel. It's far enough away that Jesus and his family were not part of that community, so it must have been a close friend or relative who went out of their way to invite them.

In that day weddings were not the partial day celebrations they are today where a couple spends many months and thousands, if not tens of thousands of dollars planning for a 30-minute ceremony and an hours-long reception. Neither were there such things as small private weddings. No, weddings were week-long celebrations and included many in the community and friends and family outside the community.

We have no record of a formal ceremony that would take place, but the couple officially transitioned from betrothed to married on the first day of the celebration. Whereas we send a couple off to their honeymoon for a week or so, at this time there was no private honeymoon. They would come together that first night in the specially prepared bridal chamber, and then enjoy being the center of attention for the rest of the week's festivities.

Whatever else might be involved in the week-long celebration, there was expected to be abundant food and drink to be enjoyed by all. Abundance was the name of the game. Assuming Jesus and his disciples came to the wedding on its first day, some number of days passed between vs. 2-3. How many we can't be sure, except that the provision of wine which undoubtedly was intended to last all week ran out. So it would seem that they had been enjoying several days of feasting and celebration when the wedding hit a setback.

The Setback (vs. 3-5)

The wedding in Cana is the setting, now consider the setback. LOOK at vs. 3-5. . . .

We've all heard about, and some of you have experienced, epic and memorable failures at a wedding. Perhaps you've seen the video of the pool-side wedding where the best man went to give the ring to the minister, but he tripped on the steps and caused the minister and the bride to fall in the pool behind them. Or there's the wedding party taking pictures on an old dock over a lake which collapses under them. There's the pastor who never showed up, or the invitation that gave the wrong church in the wrong city as the location and somehow no one noticed until they started showing up.

These kinds of failures cause a range of emotions in the moment, but they tend to make great stories after the shock has worn off. But the failure at this wedding is

not that kind of failure. In fact, calling this a setback was necessary for alliterating the outline, but this is actually a tragedy in the making, not a mere setback.

For you fathers who went into shock when you learned how much it would cost to feed the guests one meal at your daughter's wedding reception, consider what it would cost to feed the community for a week! But you're off the hook because at this time, it was the father of the groom who was responsible to pay for it.

And when I say they were responsible to pay for it, this was not a responsibility that could be taken lightly. This was a shame culture which means that if you failed or shirked your responsibility, you brought shame upon yourself and your family. But it's worse than that.

If the father of the groom failed to sufficiently provide for the wedding, he not only shamed his own family, including his son and new daughter-in-law, he also brought shame upon her family as well. After all, the bride's father agreed to let his daughter marry this family's son. This was not a shame that would wear off with time and turn into funny stories in future years. This was a shame that had an impact on one's standing in the community and one's economic opportunities.

There were even legal implications. Failure to fulfill your wedding responsibilities rendered you liable to lawsuits from the bride's family because of how your failure could impact their lives and livelihood. So I say again the running out of wine was a tragedy in the making.

However she found out about this, Mary understood the significance of having the wine run out. So she finds Jesus and says, "They have no wine." Now from where we sit, it's easy for us to imagine why Mary would ask Jesus to get involved. But if we think it's because Jesus is God and can perform miracles, we would be wrong.

Understand that this happened before Jesus died and rose again, before he healed the lame and the sick, before he raised the dead, and before he cast our demons, and before he walked on water and fed thousands of people with one person's meal. None of that has happened yet. In fact, it says in vs. 11 that what Jesus does here is the first miracle he performs.

That's important because that means it's quite unlikely that Mary is asking Jesus to do something miraculous in response to the situation. That's key here. Mary knows who Jesus is by virtue of the revelation given to her and Joseph by the angel before Jesus was born. She has treasured in her heart the memory of the shepherds and the wise men. She remembers how when Jesus was 12 he went off by himself to the temple and spent days there in his Father's house.

And it's likely that by now she's been told about John's declaration just a few days earlier that Jesus is the Lamb of God. But she has not known Jesus to perform miracles. So what is Mary thinking? Why does she assume Jesus can solve the problem if she's not expecting a miracle?

Think with me about it. Though Jesus is truly human, he is sinless. Which is to say that his character is perfect, holy, unstained. Specifically, he is perfectly humble, kind, gracious, faithful. He perfectly loves God his Father with all his mind, soul, and strength; and he perfectly loves his neighbor as himself.

Think about what kind of activity that character produces. Jesus would have done all things with excellence, he would have been trustworthy, he would have been hard working in his responsibilities, creative in solving problems, resourceful in addressing needs. He had the perfect balance between being people-oriented and task-oriented. And as a 30-year old man, Jesus would have demonstrated these qualities for a number of years in working to provide for himself and his family.

With Jesus in the home, Mary probably never thought to herself, "If you want something done right, you gotta do it yourself." No, she probably often thought, "If you want something done right, you gotta have Jesus do it."

So in this moment where there's a major problem not only for the guests at the party but for the bride and groom and their family's long-term social standing, there was no one better to find a solution than Jesus.

LOOK at Jesus' response in vs. 4. . . . Immediately we're confronted with how Jesus refers to his mother. He doesn't use her name. He doesn't call her "mother." He doesn't use some term we would recognize as soft and respectful.

Some say that this is the equivalent to "Ma'am," but there's really no evidence for that in any ancient Greek literature. What commentators agree on is that this is not disrespectful as it would be in our culture, but it is distancing. By saying "woman," he's respectfully but directly putting space between them indicating that their relationship has now changed. She has no authority over him and cannot ask him to do things that would redirect his God-given purpose.

Now this certainly doesn't mean that Jesus is no longer part of that family. In vs. 12 we see that Jesus went down to Capernaum with his family. But sometime after he was teaching in a home which was so crowded his family couldn't enter, so they waited outside while someone called out to Jesus, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to you." And Jesus said, "Who is my mother and by brothers? . . . Whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother." Even this did not mean there was a break because

as he hung on the cross, he looked at his mother and said, “Woman, behold your son.” And he entrusted the care of his mother to the apostle John.

So at this moment Jesus responds to his mother in a way that expresses a change in their relationship. The rest of his answer is curious and difficult to translate precisely. Literally the Greek says, “What to you and to me?” But that’s recognized as an idiom that means something like “What does that have to do with us?” or “What has this concern of yours to do with me?” or as it says here in the ESV, “What does this have to do with me.” Whatever the precise meaning is, the general idea is clear: “What are you expecting of me? My hour has not yet come.”

“My hour has not yet come.” What does this mean? Flip over with me to John 7. In John 7 Jesus taught in the temple things that upset the Jewish leaders, so it says in vs. 30. . . . Turn over to 8:20 where again Jesus again taught things that upset the leaders and it says in vs. 20. . . . Now turn to 12. In 12:20 some Greeks who had converted to Judaism wanted to see Jesus. When Andrew told Jesus about it Jesus responds in vs. 23. . . . he says again in vs. 27. . . .

Now LOOK at 13:1. . . . and finally go over to 17:1. . . . All those passages clearly point to the Jesus’ “hour” as that time of Jesus’ redeeming work on the cross. There was a time when the Lord would not let the enemies of Jesus arrest him because it wasn’t time—it was too early. But the time came when his hour arrived and he submitted to the Father’s plan and went to the cross.

So is that what Jesus means when he tells his mother that his hour has not yet come? Coming back to our passage, it would seem a bit odd for Jesus to respond to his mother that his time of suffering has not yet arrived. In light of that, it’s best to understand this as not that his time of suffering hasn’t yet arrived, but that the inauguration of his ministry which will culminate in his suffering has not arrived.

It’s not clear in this or any other gospel what formally launches his ministry. Is it his baptism? Is it his victory over temptation in the wilderness? Is it the public declaration from John that Jesus is the Lamb of God? Is it, as we see in the next section, when he cleanses the temple—something he’ll do again at the end of his ministry? The four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—don’t point to a specific moment or event which formally launches the ministry of Jesus. Perhaps the closest we get is from the gospel of Matthew which tells us that around this time John the Baptist was arrested and Jesus, it says, “began to preach.”

This passage in John 2 happened before Jesus began his public preaching ministry, so it would make sense that Jesus would rebuff an attempt to do a public act that would draw attention to himself—miracle or not.

So Jesus respectfully but directly communicates to his mother that the nature of their relationship has changed and that he is on a timetable that does not correspond to what she is asking him to do.

LOOK at her response in vs. 5. . . . There's a number of ways you can take this, but I agree with those who see this as an act of faith. However Mary interpreted Jesus' words, she did not think he would let the problem go unresolved, so instead of discussing it further with him, she gave instructions to the servants.

This is like the Gentile woman who pleaded with Jesus to heal her daughter. Jesus initially rebuffed her and said, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." He was saying that he was there to serve the Jews, not Gentiles. But out of great faith she said, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." And based on her faith the Lord healed her daughter.

In the same way that he graciously and compassionately healed a Gentile though he came for the Jews, we see that Jesus responded to Mary's act of faith by doing what she asked, even though his hour had not yet come.

The Sign (vs. 6-10)

With that in mind, let's LOOK at the sign in vs. 6-10. . . .

Jesus responds to this crisis in a radically different way than you and I could. He doesn't stress out, he doesn't argue, he doesn't complain, his blood pressure doesn't go up, his mind doesn't race. In addition to whatever solutions he could attempt as any other person could, he has options available to him that no one else does because he is, in fact, the Creator. John told us that in 1:3. . . . When you have that creative power, there are all kinds of things he could have done to solve the problem.

Rather than going out and buying wine and rather than causing wine to appear of nowhere, Jesus sees the stone jars used for purification and decides to make use of those. Now this is no incidental detail. These jars were used so that the people could perform traditional washing of hands and dishes to maintain ritual—not physical—purity.

Listen to Mark 7:3-4 which tells us about this tradition, "(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, 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.)"

This tradition had nothing to do with digesting or spreading germs—it had everything to do with maintaining a right relationship to God according to their man-made religion.

So listen: when Jesus decides to use these stone jar, which were mostly or entirely empty since this would have been a few days into the wedding feast, he makes these jars unavailable for the Jewish rites of purification. He was more concerned about the temporary and long-term problem of running out of wine than he was concerned about ritual cleansing. In so doing Jesus demonstrates that people are more important than tradition.

Throughout his ministry this proves to be a major point of contention between Jesus and the Pharisees. In fact, back in Mark 7 where we learn about ritual cleansing, it's in the context of the Pharisees making a big deal that Jesus' disciples ate with unwashed hands. And Jesus responds to them by pointing out they elevate their tradition over God's commands. He says in Mark 7:8, "You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men. . . . You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!"

God commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and Jesus understood that solving the problem of the lack of wine was more loving to the people than ensuring they had the jars available for purification.

Do we have a tendency to uphold our traditions such that we fail to care for people well? Are we so committed to what we think is right and best that we forget our highest goal is to glorify God and serve others? The Pharisees were happy to violate people as long as they didn't violate their tradition. May that not be true of us. We should be like Christ who was always ready to forgo cultural or personal sensibilities for the sake of loving people well.

Now these water six water pots, it says, hold 20-30 gallons, so let's call it a total of about 150 gallons. That's a lot of water that will get turned into wine. We'll talk about what this wine was in a moment, but so you get a visual, this would be over 750 standard bottles of wine today.

LOOK at vs. 7. . . . To hold 20-30 gallons, these stone jars would be very heavy, so if they weren't already near a source of water it would take a good amount of time and effort—well over an hour—to fill them up. But eventually they filled them up to the brim and that's important. Because being full to the brim no one could claim that Jesus simply added water to wine or used the method of putting a concentrated wine syrup to make the wine. Being full to the brim there was no room for anything else.

LOOK at vs. 8-10. . . . The master of the feast would be a combination of the wedding coordinator and the master of ceremonies today. He was in charge of making sure everything went smoothly and directed the festivities. No doubt he had been told about the problem and now is learning that a solution has been found. He seems to assume this was intentional on the part of the bridegroom of his family.

When it says he “called the bridegroom” the word “call” is *phoneo* which means to call out or speak loudly. He didn’t whisper in his ear—no he made this declaration for all the guests to hear. Jesus’ gracious act not only preserved the reputation of the host families but it elevated their reputation in the community. Rather than being known as stingy or poor, they’re now known as generous and lavish.

Jesus will not take credit for what he did. The bridegroom getting the credit preserves Jesus’ ministry timeline and it solves the problem in a way that turns a wedding tragedy into a wedding triumph for the new couple.

Now, what kind of wine was this? How much alcohol content did it have? This point is really irrelevant to the point of the text, but it’s a point that people wonder about because there’s an aversion to the idea that Jesus would make an abundance of alcohol for a feast were people might already be drunk.

That’s what some understand the master of the feast to mean when he says in vs. 10. . . . The phrase translated “when people have drunk freely” is better translated, “when people have become drunk.” It’s the same word used in Luke 12:45 about a servant who eats and drinks and gets drunk. It’s the same word as Ephesians 5:18 which says, “And do not be drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.” Or 1 Thessalonians 5:7, “For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night.” The word, *methusko* means to be intoxicated. There’s no way around that.

So the master of the feast says that the typical way of handling a wedding feast is that once the guests have had enough to drink that their senses are dulled and they don’t have the same sensitivity to taste, that’s when the cheaper and inferior wine comes out. So does Jesus contribute six supersized kegs to a drunken party? May it never be.

The offense of the thought leads some to conclude that the wine was non-alcoholic. The problem with that, though, is that it depends on a lot of extra-biblical evidence that doesn’t fit with the language of the New Testament.

It is true that the word “wine,” *oinos*, is used in different ways such that it can mean unfermented grape juice. And it’s also true there were different kinds of wine in the

first century, with various words and adjectives to distinguish them like new wine, old wine, sour wine, and sweet wine.

But it's also true that most of the uses of oinos, wine, in the New Testament requires that there be some amount of fermentation and alcoholic content. Virtually all ancient wine was diluted and had far less alcoholic content than what people drink today. But it could still lead to intoxication even if it took longer. Otherwise, how could Paul say, "Don't be drunk with wine?" Or how could the Jews mock the believers who were speaking in tongues by saying, "They are filled with new wine?" and Peter respond, "It's only 9 o'clock in the morning! These ancient people did have ways of stopping fermentation from happening, but the New Testament is replete with evidence that believers were to avoid enslavement to wine and addiction to wine and lingering long over wine because it would caused intoxication.

So we cannot escape that most of the wine in the Bible had alcohol and therefore the wine Jesus made must have included some alcoholic content. And that isn't really the problem. The problem is in our assumption that people at the wedding feast were drunk. The master of the feast said described the typical practice, but there's no reason to conclude that the people at this particular feast were intoxicated.

His point was that the standard practice is to start with the best wine and end with the worst. But in this case, the best wine came after the first wine. The wine that Jesus created was better than the best wine man could make. When he makes something, he makes it perfectly according to his design and intended purposes. And that includes how he made you.

The Significance (vs. 11)

Having looked the setting, the setback, and the sign, we're now ready to consider the significance. LOOK at vs. 11. . . .

This is the first of his signs, John says. His use of the word "sign" is significant. You could say it was a miracle, you could call it a wonder, but John calls it a sign. This is because what Jesus did here and really all the displays of his power were not ends in themselves—they were means to an end. And the end of all that Jesus did was to manifest his glory which demands a response.

Jesus was not a performer of wonders to make a living entertaining people. Rather, he displayed divine power to validate his claims in order to compel a response. His displays of power certainly benefited people along the way. Here he prevented a catastrophic moment in the lives of these families. Later he healed the sick and

raised the dead and cast out demons and that had significant personal benefits. When he calmed the storm that benefited the disciples who thought they were going to die. But even those benefits, as great as they were, were not the ultimate end.

The ultimate goal of his miracles was to signal to people that Jesus is not someone you can ignore. He is not one of the many great people in the world that you hear or read about but then move on with life. He is not the subject of an interesting video clip that amazes you but then you move on to the next clip. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. And he proved that he is the Son of God by what he did. And then God validated Jesus' claims and miracles by raising him from the dead.

So what we have here is the first of many signs of who Jesus is. John then says that he manifested his glory. I told you as we started that there's glory in this text. Back in John 1:14 it says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." When we studied that I focused on the glory of God as manifested in through God's character of grace and truth. That's the kind of God he is.

But here we see Jesus display the glory of God by demonstrating the power of God and doing what only God can do.

As you think about the sign Jesus performed, notice that he didn't do anything observable to turn the water into wine. Nor did he say anything to turn the water into wine. How did the water turn into wine? Simply by an act of his will. He willed it in his heart and it happened.

Psalm 33:6 says, "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host." John 1:1 tells us that Jesus is the word. Therefore he doesn't need to speak to accomplish something because he himself is the agent of creation. So he simply wills and it is done.

But let's get even more specific. How can water turn into wine? What is required for water to turn into wine? We have the elements of the Lord's Supper before us. If the women who put this together for us put water into the little cups instead of grape juice, what would have to happen for that water to turn into the fruit of the vine?

Answer? The very fabric of nature has to change. Those jars were full of water molecules. Water molecules are made up of hydrogen and oxygen atoms. Wine molecules are made of hydrogen and oxygen and many other chemical compounds. Without changing the volume of liquid in the jars, Jesus changed the atoms and molecular structure of the water in those stone jars. He brought into existence chemicals in those jars that didn't exist, and he rearranged the hydrogen and

oxygen atoms that were already there, and he fit them all together in the perfect structure to make the best wine anyone has ever tasted.

This sign required the same power God exercised in the creation of the universe where he both brought into existence that which did not exist, and he altered the atomic and molecular structure of the universe until he completed his work of creation on the sixth day.

Jesus didn't pray and ask God his Father to turn the water into wine. There was no declaration, "Let there be wine," or action like moving his hands over the pots. Jesus involved no one else in this act. He created wine by simply willing that the fabric of nature change.

This is unfathomable glory and power! Do you know what this means? If Jesus, who is the Son of God, which is to say he shares the very nature of God, if Jesus can alter the fabric of nature to turn water into wine, that means he can do anything he wills to do. What can stop him from doing what he wants? Nothing! Who can stop him from doing what he wants? No one. What power or person exists that can thwart the will of Christ? None.

Compared to the creation of the billions of stars in the universe, turning 150 gallons of water into wine is relatively insignificant, but that small act tells us that when Jesus faces a problem and it is his will to solve it, he is not bound by the kinds of solutions you and I could come up with. If he deems it necessary, he will simply alter existence as it is to conform it to what he wants it to be.

Beloved, when you pray, it is not at all wrong to ask the Lord to solve your problems a particular way. But do not think that he is limited to the solutions you've come up with. And when you don't think there is a solution, do not think that God is limited by your inability to find one. We are bound by the knowledge we have and the research we're able to do and the relationships we have and the connections we can make. But God knows all 8 billion people in the world and he knows all the available resources there are and he can put together a solution in an instant that we couldn't in a lifetime. And if the solution he wants to provide can't be done with what exists, then he can call it into existence.

That is the kind of God we worship and that is the glory of Jesus Christ that he manifested at this wedding. And that, beloved, is the power that is at work in your life and to which you can appeal in your time of need.

This power is what solved the greatest problem in the world. The greatest problem in the world and that spans all of history is that mankind has sinned against God. We have violated God's law and we deserve eternal condemnation. In our natural

sinful condition we hate God and we demonstrate that hatred by how we ignore him and reject his standard of truth and right and wrong. We live our own way and in so doing we demonstrate that we believe we're better off with God dead.

But because of who God is—that he is the creator of all things and giver and sustainer of life and provider of every good thing—to think we're better off with him dead is to wish death upon ourselves. And that's the punishment we deserve for our disdain of God.

This is the greatest problem mankind has. It's a bigger problem than running out of wine at a wedding; it's a bigger problem than having a broken marriage; it's a bigger problem than not being married; it's a bigger problem than the multitude of sorrowful experiences we have; it's a bigger problem than depression or anxiety or PTSD or addictions. Our greatest problem is that we have sinned against God and we deserve death.

But God, because he is rich in mercy, he provided a solution no one could have come up with. He sent his own son with whom he enjoyed perfect harmony and joy and love for all eternity. And the Son of God came into this world as a baby and lived a perfect sinless life. And at the cross he endured the wrath of God that sinners deserve. And having received on himself the punishment for sin he died and was buried and rose again on the third day. All this he did by the power of God to forgive and redeem sinners.

We read here at the end of vs. 11 that his disciples believed in him when they witnessed this display of glory. They had much still to learn about Jesus but they had seen enough—they believed that he is the Messiah. What about you? You've not only heard here today how Jesus put his glory on display and saved a wedding, but you've also heard what he did to solve your greatest problem. Believe in him today.