

A Glorious Wedding

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[0 : 00] Well, we have all been guests at a wedding, I'm sure, for the privilege not just of being a guest at a wedding, but of being the celebrant, in other words, being the minister who marries the man to the woman at a wedding ceremony.

And I've witnessed not just a lot of marriage vows being taken and promises being made, but I've also witnessed a fair amount of really quite awkward and embarrassing situations at weddings. Let me just share a few with you. The best man forgets the rings, I've seen that a few times. I've seen the mother of the bride and the mother of the groom turning up with the same dress, exactly the same dress, same color.

I've seen the photographer in days before digital cameras, his camera broke, he had no film, so he had no photos of the whole wedding day. I've seen the bride not just being fashionably late, but being extremely late, so that the groom wondered whether she would even show up at all.

I've seen the groom forgetting to bring the marriage schedule on the day of the wedding, which you'll know if there's no marriage schedule, then legally there is no wedding. I've seen her wedding. I've heard best men crossing the line in their speeches and then crossing the line again and again.

[1 : 21] I've heard a minister who, in an Anglican church or Episcopal church in Edinburgh, he was using the Book of Common Order for the marriage ceremony.

and when he got to the end of the marriage ceremony, he read a prayer from a funeral order instead of the order of service for a wedding. I've also seen the bride forget to take her wedding dress to the hotel for the wedding ceremony and she wore something else, kind of nondescript. But anyway, awkward and embarrassing situations at weddings and I'm sure you'll have your own awkward and embarrassing situations as well. But there is one that tops them all and it is the one we read about here in John chapter 2 when the wedding runs out of wine. And that might not sound like a really big deal to us today, but that's because weddings in Jesus's day were different to the weddings that we're used to in our western culture where today a wedding lasts a day. But then and there, wedding celebrations could last as long as a week. And it was the responsibility of the groom to provide for the guests of the wedding and that included providing the wine. And so in this kind of honor-shame culture, it wasn't just embarrassing if you ran out of wine, it was a total disaster. You would lose face socially if that happened. And this is the context in which the public ministry of Jesus begins. So it's the first, this miracle of the water into wine, it's the first of a number of signs that Jesus performs in the Gospel of John. And so the key that really unlocks the meaning of the sign before us is there in verse 11. Did you notice this? What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him. So the point of Jesus performing this sign, the water into wine, was in order to reveal his glory. And as he did so, the disciples put their faith in him. They believed in Jesus. And so the water into wine is also a sign for us because it reveals the glory of Jesus to us so that we also would believe in him. And so I'd like us to look at this passage under three headings this afternoon. First of all, there's the sign. Secondly, what the sign shows. And then thirdly, where the sign leads. The sign, what it shows, and where it leads. So first of all, the sign. Well, the sign is obviously the water into wine. So let's look again at verse 1 to 3. On the third day, a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, they have no more wine. Notice that John states that this took place on the third day, meaning if you've been reading chapter 1, this completes the first week of the ministry of Jesus, his public ministry. So last time we noted how John marks out this week, really from chapter 1, verse 19 through into chapter 2, verse 1. And he marks this week out possibly to echo the creation week at the beginning of the Bible, the beginning

of time, where Jesus, the Word, as John calls him in chapter 1, the Word through whom the first creation was made, now gets to work on the new creation as he creates wine from water. And then John also notes that

Jesus' mother was at the wedding, and his disciples were there too, probably suggesting that it was the wedding of a family member or of a family friend. And that may explain why Jesus' mother points out that there's no wine left. Perhaps she was in the catering team for the wedding. Now in Judaism, wine was symbolic of joy. It was symbolic of celebration. So this is more than just a practical problem, as we'll see. But notice how Jesus responds to his mother's concern there in verse 4 and 5.

Woman, why do you trouble me? Jesus replied. My hour has not yet come. His mother said to the servants, do whatever he tells you. So Jesus' mother is appealing to Jesus to help. And it might sound like Jesus' reply to his mother is disrespectful or it's rude because he just calls her woman. Sounds like he's saying to her, like, this really isn't my problem. But the fact is, Jesus is not working to anyone else's agenda. Jesus is following his father's plan for his life because he says, my hour has not yet come.

[6 : 42] So what does he mean, his hour? Well, as we read through the Gospel of John, Jesus continues to talk about his hour. He speaks of his hour again and again and again. Sometimes it's his time or his hour.

And it's clear that the word hour is a reference to Jesus' death. And so whenever he speaks about my hour, he is talking about his death on the cross. And so when we get to John chapter 17, just before his death, Jesus is praying to God the Father and he says that the hour has come. And he means the hour of his death is here. And so Jesus' hour, the hour of his death on the cross is still to come. Remember, this is the beginning of his ministry. And yet while his hour was still to come, it is already on the horizon as he begins his ministry here on earth. And so let's see what happens. Because Jesus performs the sign not simply to avert disaster at this wedding in Cana in Galilee, but to reveal his glory in order to show who he is and what he had come to do. And so let's see the sign in verse 6 to 10.

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from 80 to 120 liters. Jesus said to the servants, fill the jars with water.

So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet. They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine.

He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine, but after the guests have had too much to drink. But you have saved the best till now. Notice that Jesus instructs the servants to fill these six large stone water jars.

[9 : 05] And so if each jar could contain, as we read, 80 to 120 liters, that is a massive amount of liquid.

And so to fill them, it would hold between 480 to 720 liters. That's multiplied by six. And so that would be the equivalent of 360 to 540 bottles of wine. So that is a lot of wine. But the miracle is not just about the quantity of wine here. It is also about the quality of wine, because this was superior quality wine. On Friday afternoon, I googled most expensive bottle of wine. And apparently, you can get a 12-bottle case of Chateau Latour, 1982, from Fine Wine Direct for 29,000 pounds.

So that must be good wine. I didn't click buy, but good wine. And that's the kind of quality of wine that we are talking about here, because it's the wine that Jesus produces. And it's the master of the banquet, the master of ceremonies. He's the one who testifies to just how good this wine is. And so as we read it, normally, the good stuff would have been served first to the wedding guests. And then when the wedding guests were in a good mood, or perhaps some were worse for wear, then that's when the cheap plonk would come out and be served to them. But did you see the kind of jars that are used for this water, which then turned into wine? It's no coincidence that these particular jars just happened to be sitting there, because John notes for us that they were used for ceremonial washing. Now, this was very common in Judaism, where the water in this ceremonial jar would be used in a symbolic way to show that we need to be clean, we need to be pure in order to come before God. And so they give a clue as to the meaning of this sign, because they're saying to us that the old ways of Judaism are being replaced by something far better. Those ways were good. Those ways did serve a purpose, because they highlighted the need for purification from sin, the

need to be cleansed before being acceptable to God. But all the ceremonial washing under this Jewish religious system, it can never actually wash away the sin on the inside, the sin in the heart. And so the ceremonies and customs, the rituals and regulations of the Jewish law could never truly cleanse somebody.

They could never bring real forgiveness. They could never bring true joy. And that's why Jesus gets the servants to use these specific six stone water jars, not just to save the wedding host from the shame of such a disaster, but to fulfill the promises of the prophets in the Old Testament about what the Messiah would do. And so the sign is not merely an amazing display of Jesus' creative power, although it is definitely that. It's a sign that points to God's purposes for the world, which are now being fulfilled in the person of Jesus the Messiah. So that's the first point. That's the sign, the water into wine. The second point, what the sign shows? Well, it shows the glory of Jesus.

Read verse 11 with me again. What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him. So John concludes this story, this wedding with the meaning. It's a sign, but the sign has a meaning. And he makes it clear that this is the first of the signs. First can be translated as beginning or as primary, indicating that there are more signs to come. And this is just the start. In fact, Jesus performs a series of signs or miracles throughout the first half of John's gospel. Sometimes it's called the book of signs. There are seven of them. And each one is a signpost to point us to the true identity of Jesus, of Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God, so that we might believe in him, just like his disciples do here. Because that's what happens. What does the sign of water into wine do? It reveals the glory of Jesus, and it causes the disciples to see it, to believe in him. The glory of Jesus. What did these disciples see? Because not everybody saw the sign. It's interesting. Even everyone who did see the sign didn't necessarily believe. And so if you look, the master of the banquet, he didn't know what Jesus did. He didn't see.

[14:48] The guests, they probably didn't see what happened, although they no doubt enjoyed it. The servants who filled the jars, they saw the sign, but we don't read of them seeing the glory and then believing.

It's only the disciples who glimpse the glory of Jesus through the sign and believe in him. And so the sign is not some spectacular display of power, and nor does Jesus perform the sign in front of the whole wedding and every single guest. It seems to happen in a quiet kind of a way. Why? Well, because Jesus's hour had not yet come, and his glory had not been fully revealed just yet. His glory would be revealed in the cross and in the resurrection and then in his exaltation. His glory would be clearly seen on the cross. And so what's happening here is just as John said in his prologue, John chapter 1 verse 14.

He said, The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. And so the disciples are seeing Jesus God the Son who has taken on our human nature while still being fully God, clothing himself in flesh, and they see him do what only God can do. This amazing miracle, this spectacular sign of turning this water into the very best of wine. So there's a sense in which his glory was covered, covered because Jesus looked like an ordinary guest at that wedding. He looked no different from Joe Bloggs who was also there at the wedding. He was a man, a human being. But here, as on other occasions in the Gospels and especially in John's Gospel, the glory of Jesus is revealed and people see, see God in Jesus. When we lived in Edinburgh, my neighbor Andy had a Porsche, really, really cool Porsche. Not just any Porsche, it was a Porsche 911 Turbo. It was lovely. But the thing was, nobody knew that Andy had this Porsche. It was hidden away in his garage at the end of the lane and it was under a cover inside the garage. I only find out about his Porsche when one day Joshua was cycling his bike up and down the lane. And then Andy came out and said, do you want to see my car? I was like, well, I've seen your car. It's parked out the front. It's not that great. I don't really need to see your car.

He said, no, no, no. Come and see my car. And so he took us into his garage and he pulled back this cover and revealed this pristine Porsche 911. I'd never seen such a beautiful car before. And then he let me sit in the driver's seat. And then he let Joshua sit in the driver's seat. And I've never been in such a valuable car, either before or since. And so I said to Andy, Andy, who knew? How long have you had this car for?

And he said he'd had it for a number of years and it was in his garage and it was covered over. And yet when the cover was pulled off, the glory of the Porsche 911 was revealed. This magnificent car

hidden to the normal human eye. That day, we were able to catch a glimpse of its glory.

[19 : 02] Now, hopefully you see where this illustration is going because it's not about Andy's car. Because in a similar kind of way, this is what's happening here with Jesus. Jesus, the man, performs a sign at this wedding. But it's a sign that only God could do. And so when he changes the water into wine, it's as if the cover is pulled back and the disciples catch a glimpse of his glory.

They're able to see the true identity of Jesus and what he does. And so they believe in him. And that's what we're supposed to see too. We're supposed to see his glory in this sign and in all the other signs in John so that we would believe in him. And so the question has got to be asked as we apply this to ourselves. Well, have I paid attention to the sign, this first sign of water into wine, which reveals the glory of Jesus, but also all the other signs too. Have I been looking and seeing? Because the signs are there. And the issue is whether or not we have seen them.

And if we have seen them, then the question is, have I done anything about them? Because if we're driving, to use another driving analogy, we all know the dangers if we're driving, not just of missing the signs, but of choosing to ignore the signs altogether. And yet sadly, that's what many people do when it comes to Jesus. They not only miss the clear signs that have been given to us, but some even choose to ignore them altogether. So please don't let that be you. Let's move then to our third and final point and see why this really matters. So the sign, what the sign shows, and then thirdly, where the sign leads. The sign leads ultimately to the wedding supper. So as the sign reveals the glory of Jesus, it points us to who he is and what he brings. So the water into wine is saying the old order is passing away and the new order is breaking in. So the emptiness and the powerlessness of Judaism symbolized by these ceremonial water jars, it's being replaced as Jesus the Messiah brings the joy of something far better. And that's what's emphasized here in Jesus providing this superior wine. The sign is leading us to this new messianic age that Jesus is introducing. Jesus is the Messiah. He comes. The old is gone. The new has come. And the new is this messianic age where Jesus is the king and it's his kingdom that is coming. And this is spoken about all through the Old Testament. And it's interesting when it's described in the Old Testament, it's described as a time when wine would flow abundantly. It says that new wine will drip from the mountains and will flow from all the hills. Listen again to how Isaiah puts it in Isaiah 25, which Ash read at the beginning of the service.

All the earth the Lord has spoken. See what Isaiah is holding out here, this vision of the future, looking forward to a time when the Lord will bring about his new creation. What's it going to be like, we wonder? Well, it's pictured here in the Old Testament as this richest of banquets, the richest banquet imaginable. Think of the best party you've ever been to. Multiply it by infinity. Still not even close to what the Bible is describing as this great banquet. And what's it going to have? It's going to have the best of foods and the finest of wines. And so when Jesus changes water into wine at Cana in Galilee, we're seeing the arrival of this new age. It's already here, but it's also not yet. It's arrived, but there's far more still to come. As this miraculous supply of the very best wine really just gives a preview of the messianic age. It's like a trailer telling us that the movie is coming out and it will be eventually released, but here's a trailer to help you see and grasp and know what it's going to be like.

And so the time of salvation has come in Jesus and it will come in all its fullness in the future. And it's characterized throughout the Bible by great joy and as a fantastic banquet, or even more specifically, it's described as a wedding feast. A wedding feast where Jesus himself is the bridegroom.

[24 : 57] That's what Jesus calls himself in the Gospels. And it's what the book of Revelation at the end of the Bible speaks about, calling it the wedding supper of the Lamb. That's where the sign at this wedding is ultimately taking us. You know, I said at the beginning that the responsibility for providing for the guests at the wedding was the responsibility of the bridegroom. He had to provide the wine.

But this bridegroom here at this wedding had failed in his duty to provide. And yet Jesus takes on the role of the bridegroom by stepping in and sorting it out. And so it's saying to us here that Jesus is the true and better bridegroom. And he is the one who invites us to join him at the wedding supper of the Lamb, which is the wedding feast, to end all wedding feasts with the best of wines. And it brings the fullness of joy. And yet it's possible to get a taste now as we see the glory of Jesus and believe in him. And that's how to respond to his invitation and to get into his feast, into his wedding supper that goes on forever. It's to believe in him. And this wedding supper is so fantastic

that the very best of wedding celebrations and we've all been to them, and the richest experiences of joy in life, and we've all had them and can think of them, all of that just pales into insignificance compared to the unending joy that is to come. And it's only on offer through Jesus Christ. And yet sadly, so many people turn from Jesus because they fail to realize that Jesus is the true source of joy. Our culture, our culture preaches many messages, and one message it preaches is that there is no joy in becoming a Christian. Don't give your life away.

Don't waste your life by going to church, by believing in Jesus, by reading the Bible, any of that stuff. Don't do it. Suggesting that believing in Jesus will actually make your life joy less. Giving the impression that following Jesus gives you less of a life rather than the life that Jesus promises, which is life in all its fullness. And our culture seems to think that Christianity is some kind of straitjacket, that it's restrictive, it's life diminishing, it is joy sapping. Where there's just so much stuff you can't do if you become a Christian. So why would you want to become a Christian? You've just got to consign yourself to a dull and boring existence. And maybe when you die, it gets better. But this life's not fun.

But that's not what this passage portrays to us, is it? And actually, nor is it what our contemporary culture has painfully discovered. Any analysis of Gen Z these days, Gen Z, that's those between the ages of 14 and 29, any analysis highlights that this generation, Gen Z, is less happy and more anxious and more depressed than ever before. A Gen Z writer who's really good, a girl called Freya India, she said in an article this week, she said, I'm curious about Christianity myself. And I've noticed changes lately, conversations with young people who were raised as atheists and almost wish they hadn't been, who wonder what it would have been like to grow up with more guidance and guardrails. She's looking at her contemporaries, her friends, and realizing they are more depressed, more anxious, more suicidal.

[29 : 17] Why is that? And as someone who wouldn't call herself a Christian, she's beginning to see that what people have written off Christianity, life in Jesus Christ, is actually what we need for life.

Because Jesus is the one who gives us what we've been seeking our whole lives, even if you've never realized what it is you've been looking for. Jesus is the one who helps us see what we seek, because he is the one. Every heart ultimately is looking to find fulfillment and joy and peace and happiness in. In Jesus alone do we discover that our greatest needs in life are met. And in Jesus alone do we discover that our deepest longings, the deepest longings of our hearts, are only satisfied in him. And so the questions we need to end with are, have you seen his glory? Do you know who he is? Have you experienced the joy that he gives?

If not, then taste the new wine of his kingdom by believing in him. Let's pray together.