

Water and the Wine

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[0 : 00] the wedding day is something that the couple looks forward to eagerly, and they try to plan everything meticulously to make sure the reception is bountiful, it's fun, and then the ceremony is beautiful.

And so nowadays there are people who have made a career out of being wedding coordinators because it's become so elaborate and so much planning is involved in weddings. But of course, not everything always goes as planned in weddings.

Even in our wedding, I remember we had trouble lighting the unity candle, or we had the flower girl that was coming up who took a whole two minutes to come up because she was literally putting one pedal down at a time.

She was adorable, yeah. And so those are less embarrassing, really, the things that happen at weddings. But in this case, in this wedding, something really, really embarrassing happens, something that's particularly embarrassing in this culture.

And Jesus comes to rescue. They run out of wine during the celebration. And Jesus comes and turns water into wine. And in doing so, he saves the embarrassment of the bridegroom and the bridal party.

[1 : 04] And also, even more importantly, he demonstrates the fact that he is the glorious bridegroom that's come to usher us into the wedding feast of God.

Jesus is the glorious bridegroom who's come to usher us into the glorious wedding feast of God. And we're going to look at this, how John tells us this, teaches us this truth, by looking at three portraits.

First is the portrait of the embarrassed bridegroom. And the second is the portrait of the chided mother. And then lastly, the portrait of the glorious bridegroom. Now, running out of wine at a wedding doesn't seem like that big of a deal for us.

I mean, it's like wine is a luxury, right? I mean, if you run out, hey, we ran out. You have other food and drinks you could have. But in this culture, in Jewish weddings, that was a big deal because weddings lasted seven days.

You celebrate a wedding in Jewish culture for seven whole days. And so to run out in the middle of that, potentially the first day, because it seems like that's when the wedding was taking place, is a really big deal, a real oversight.

[2 : 08] And during those seven days, the master feast, as it talks about in verse 9, was in charge of making sure that everything is running smoothly. He's regulating the distribution of the wine.

And he apparently didn't do his job well. And because the bride, the groom, the man of the party, the wedding party, was responsible for paying, him and his family, they were responsible for paying for everything regarding the wedding, it was a particular embarrassment for them that this didn't happen.

And the Jewish culture, it's a shame culture, like a lot of the Southeast Asian cultures are. So for them, this kind of shame that you bring on your family would be, for ages, for years to come, a point of ridicule.

It would become the butt of jokes for years to come. So that's what's going on. So it's probably more similar in our context. Let's say you go to the reception after the wedding ceremony, only to discover that because of a calendar mix-up, the caterer hadn't showed up.

So there's no food at the reception. That's embarrassing. I mean, that's shameful, right? Almost. And that's the kind of shame that's in play here. And from the context, it seems like Mary and Jesus were somehow close friends or relations to this party that was getting married.

[3 : 25] And we know that because the whole family is invited, not just Mary, but also Jesus, and all of Jesus' disciples are also invited. We can infer from that because of that, the close relationship, Mary potentially may have felt some kind of responsibility to help maybe with the catering.

And so that's maybe why she comes up to Jesus and it says in verse 3, that when the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, they have no wine. And Jesus' response is a little jarring because from his response, you can tell that Mary wasn't simply observing the fact that they ran out of wine, but he was expecting Jesus to do something about it.

He wanted Jesus to do something about the situation. And some people, because of that, assume that Mary was somehow expecting a miracle. She had seen Jesus perform miracles when he was younger, whatever the case may be, and was expecting him to perform a miracle.

But that's probably unlikely because verse 11 tells us, if you look at this chapter 2, verse 11, this was the first of his signs. This is the first miracle that Jesus performed.

This is the first of his signs. So any other stories you have seen or heard, maybe you saw the Passion of the Christ when it came out, and in it a child Jesus is making a chair. One leg is a little too short, so he kind of magically extends it.

[4 : 48] Those are apocryphal stories, what you call stories, stories that are not authentic, stories that were made up throughout the history of the church. They don't belong to the canon, the scripture, the 66 books of the Bible.

So if that's the case and Jesus hadn't performed any miracles, it's probably more likely that Mary here was not expecting a miracle per se, but rather leaning on her son, her firstborn son, to do something about a dire situation.

And it's possible and probably likely that Mary is at this point a widow because we know that Joseph was there. But after that story of Jesus being lost at the temple grounds in Jerusalem, Joseph never appears in the scene again in the Gospels.

And when the Gospel writers, for example, Mark, describes Jesus, he calls him not just the son of a carpenter, which is how you would traditionally refer to someone, but as the carpenter.

And so you see this in Mark 6, 2 to 3. Where did these men get these things? These are Jews being amazed at Jesus' teaching. Where did Jesus get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?

[5 : 55] He's not this, the carpenter. The son of Mary and brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon are not his sisters here with us. And they took offense at him.

So notice how he mentioned all the family members except for Joseph. So that may be an indicator that Mary at this point is a widow. And like any widow that has lived and has a firstborn son, she had come to rely and to lean on the resourcefulness of her son.

And so at this point she comes and says, son, do something. So if we ran out of wine, can you do something? And so that's what she is doing. And then Jesus' response is shocking.

It's surprising because it says, read verse 4 with me. It says, Jesus said to her, woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.

Addressing someone as woman in English would be really, really rude, especially if that's your mother, right? I mean, you don't want to call your mother a woman, right?

[7 : 00] But in this context, it's not quite like that. The woman is a respectful term. It's more like madam or man. But even still, it's not exactly the appropriate way to refer to your own mother.

It establishes a distance. It's kind of a way to distance yourself from that person. So madam, what does this have to do with me? Literally, that phrase means what to me and to you?

What do we have in common regarding this matter? So it actually has a tone of rebuke, a tone of reproach, saying that what does this have to do with me and you? And from a human perspective, that seems really harsh, doesn't it?

This is your mom, and she's asking you to do something, and then you tell her, woman, what does this have to do with me? But we have to remember the context of John and what we just learned in chapter 1.

That's the only way this makes sense, because in chapter 1, John told us that Jesus is the incarnate word that was there before time began and is part of God's creative work. He's the Messiah of Israel.

[8 : 03] He's the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He's the Son of Man and Son of God. And because Jesus is this person, this Son of God, by probably rebuking his mother in this sense, he is emphasizing the fact that he has utter sovereignty and freedom from any kind of human advice, agenda, and manipulation.

He's saying that I am the sovereign ruler. I am the Son of God, and no one has special privilege or access to me. And in the same way, this is because it'll be kind of like this.

If you go to your doctor, right, and you get diagnosed, you do exams, and then imagine the doctor said to you, okay, so now what do you think we should do for your treatment?

That's nonsense, right? No, you don't want the doctor to ask you for advice. The doctor is the one that knows, and the doctor is the one that should tell you what to do. In the same way, it's good, and it's wise, and it's advisable for fallible human beings like us who have imperfect understanding and perspective to seek counsel from others, to consult others, and to listen to others.

That's good. That's a virtue for humans. But for an all-knowing, sovereign God to ask for human advice and to follow human agenda, that would not be a virtue.

[9 : 21] That would be a foolish vice, right? So in this instance, Jesus is establishing his identity as the Son of God, saying, no, I will not be following human advice agenda. I am the Son of God.

And from this point on, at the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus will answer to no one else except to his Father, who has called him and who has given him a mission to fulfill. This, of course, must have been extremely difficult for Mary.

You can imagine. The mothers in the room would know. I mean, she saw him. She gave birth to him, nursed him, saw him take his first steps, heard his first words, and then saw him mature into the fine man that he is, and she had come to rely on him as her firstborn son.

And but still, Mary no longer gets to view Jesus as every mother has viewed their own son. Now, from this point on, Mary now has to relate to her, like every other human being, as the Son of God, as the Messiah that has come to save the world.

That's why it's dangerous when someone says, this example proves very clear that Mary was just like all of us. She doesn't have special status before God as some kind of mediator that you go through, right?

[10 : 34] So that if you pray to Mary, then you will have special access to God because she is his mother. There's no such thing taught in Scripture, and this very clearly proves that. There's no other mediator before God as 1 Timothy 2, 5 says, for there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

He's the only mediator, and the only way to get to God is through him. It's the only way to pray to God is through him. That's why even in our service, we try to emphasize that. So when we have communion, right, the minister goes behind the table to offer the elements instead of standing between the person that's taking part in communion and the table because we don't stand in the way before God.

Nothing stands in the way before God. Christ alone is the mediator that gives access to God. And Jesus continues to give the reason why he is refusing his mother's request.

And what he says in verse 4 is, the hour has not yet come. Now, the word hour is a key word throughout the Gospel of John, and it consistently refers to the hour, the time of Christ's death on the cross.

And so that's chapter 7, 8, 12, it repeats over and over again. That's the hour that Jesus is going toward. And once Jesus starts to perform his signs, which reveal his glory glimpse by glimpse, then he is marching toward that death, toward that cross, and that hastens that process.

[11 : 59] And that's why Jesus says, you know, my time has not yet come. It's not time for me to die. It's not time for me to start on this. And that's why he refuses. But though rebuffed by Jesus in a respectful way for presuming on that family tie that she had with Jesus, she nonetheless persists in faith.

And you see this in verse 5. So his mother said to the servants, do whatever he tells you. So she's just rebuffed by her own son, but she persists in faith and says, you know what, just do whatever he tells you.

And this would have been understood by Jews as an example of good, persevering faith. Because we see examples of this throughout the Old Testament. For example, Moses, when God threatens to abandon Israel because of their sin, he says, no, you must go with us.

He insists. And then God listens. God helps him. Goes with Israel. In the same way, Jacob, wrestling with the angel of the Lord, demands, insists on God's blessing, even though the angel says, let me go.

And he does get the blessing. God blesses him through that. So God desires and commands throughout the Bible this kind of persisting faith. And Mary is really exemplifying a best version of that kind of faith.

[13 : 11] And so, to our amazement, the response is, the Son of God does honor this woman's request, Mary's request. And D.A. Carson, a Bible commentator, puts it in a really memorable way.

It says, in chapter 2, verse 3, Mary approaches Jesus as his mother and is reproached. In chapter 2, verse 5, she responds as a believer and her faith is honored.

Mary, in the same way as all of us, all human beings must, approach Jesus as the Messiah, as the Son of God. So now, we just talked about the embarrassing mistake, and then we talked about the chided mother, and then we're going to talk about the glorious miracle that reveals the bridegroom to us.

So read verses 6 to 10 with me. Follow along as I read. Now, there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification. It's holding 20 or 30 gallons.

Jesus said to the servants, Fill the jars with water, and they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, Now, draw some out and take it to the master of the feast. So they took it.

[14 : 19] 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 we will have drunk freely than the poor wine.

But you have kept the good wine until now. Now, there's a lot of things that are happening here, and Jesus, through this, reveals that he is the glorious bridegroom that ushers us into his feast, the wedding feast.

And he does that by really three signs here. It's really one sign together, but first by filling the jar to the brim with water, and then by turning that water into wine, and doing this on the seventh day.

And I'll explain all of this as we go. But curiously, he instructs the servants to fill the jars with water. And their stone jars, big jars, can hold 20 to 30 gallons. With six of them, that's 120, 180 gallons.

That's enough water to fill it, fill a tub, right? So that's quite a bit of water. And it was there for the purpose of the Jewish rites of purification, it tells us in verse 6. And that people, and I'll talk more about this, but you see an example of this in Mark.

[15 : 30] Chapter, let's see if I can find it for you. In chapter 7, verses 1 to 5, you can get a more detailed look.

Jesus says, The Pharisees who are gathered to Jesus kind of object to the way the disciples are eating without washing their hands. And he says, So that's what these water jars were for.

It's to wash all kinds of pots and vessels, to wash people's hands, to ensure that this ceremony is clean, that they're not defiled by their eating. It's a goat. Now, Jesus is telling them to fill this to the brim with water.

And by telling them to fill it to the brim, and even though he's not going to use that for the purpose of ceremonial washing, Jesus is indicating that the time for purification, for the ceremonial rites of purification, have come to an end.

It has been fulfilled. It has been filled. Now, he is the one who has come to bring a new age where he becomes the means by which we are purified. He's the bridegroom by which we are purified.

[16 : 56] So then Jesus commands them after that, after filling the jars, he tells them to draw out some of the water that the stone jars were filled with, and then to take it to the master of the feast.

So the master of the feast is kind of a head caterer of sorts who regulated the distribution of wine. And sometimes I will comment briefly on this because sometimes people make much of this passage to get into an argument about drinking alcohol.

Some people will say, you know what, we should drink alcohol as much as we want because look at Jesus. These people have drunk freely, but he makes more wine for them. And the other people who want to argue the opposite say that, well, you know what, Jesus isn't actually turning the water into wine.

He's just making the water taste like wine, which is the miracle, right? I mean, so I mean, these are argued in serious scholarly books because people obviously have a vested interest in proving it one way or the other.

But Jesus clearly turns water into wine, first of all. He says in verse 9, the master of the feast tasted the water, now become wine, right? That's unmistakable, right?

[17 : 58] It's not water that tastes like wine. It's water that's turned into wine. But it would also be untrue to paint Jesus as promoting drunkenness at the party. Because this is in the absence of refrigeration and sealing, hermetic sealing, right?

So they don't have the technology we have now. Because of that, any grape juice would very soon ferment and become wine, right? That was just a natural way to keep grape juice. And they didn't use an artificial process of distillation like we do to increase the alcoholic content in wine.

We do that and we distill it, remove the water so that there's higher alcoholic content in our culture. We do that. In this culture, they did precisely the opposite. When they have the wine, they actually diluted it.

Two to three parts of water, I mean water and one part of wine. That's what they did, right? So they diluted it. And the job of the head caterer, the master of the feast, was actually to regulate this distribution so that people don't go out of hand and become incapacitated and ruin the party.

That was his job, to make sure to regulate it. And the Jews in particular condemned reducing the level of dilution so that people get drunk faster, which some of the Greek orgies did, right?

[19 : 11] So the Jews were particularly observant of that. For that reason, I think it'd be wrong also to say that, you know what? Jesus loves drinking. He lets people drink however much. That's not what's going on here either.

But that's just a side point because to get into debate about whether alcohol is okay or not from this passage would really be to get lost in the trees and lose sight of the forest. That's not at all what this passage is about.

This passage is about the fact that Jesus is the glorious bridegroom who ushers us into his wedding feast. And he indicates this first by fulfilling the ceremonial washing, by filling the jars to the brim, and then second, by turning the water into wine.

And wine in the Old Testament referred to the time of the Messianic age. All the Old Testament prophets like Jeremiah 31, Hosea 14, Amos 9. All these passages talk about how Messianic age, the time of the Son of God come to the earth, would be characterized by abundance and the liberality of wine because it represents blessing, abundance, and celebration, and joy.

So Jesus is now bolstering his claim to be the Messiah when he turns this water into wine. And not only that, not only is Jesus coming to be the Messiah, but Jesus elsewhere symbolizes the consummation, the fulfillment of the Messianic age as a wedding feast.

[20 : 33] Maybe some of you have run into that. In Matthew 22 and 25, he describes that time when the kingdom of God comes in fullness, that he describes it as a wedding feast. And just a chapter later, in chapter 3, John the Baptist will say that Christ is the bridegroom who has come to claim his bride, and his bride is the people of God, people who have put their faith in him.

And so now by doing this, then his action of turning the water into wine at a wedding feast becomes an extended symbol. It becomes an active parable, really, where Jesus shows his claim that he is the glorious bridegroom that has come to claim his bride, to bring them in to the wedding feast that he has prepared for them.

And that wedding feast represents the presence of God, being reconciled to God and united with God. So that's the first two parts, the purification, right, and the wine, and his claim as the Messiah.

And this happens on the seventh day. If you're just reading it casually, you wouldn't have picked this up, but it says in the beginning of verse 1 that this was on the third day, right?

So it's the third day that you count from the last narrated event, which was when Jesus was talking to Nathanael, right? And Nathanael comes to faith. But if you go back to chapter 1, verse 19, that's when John starts counting the days with the delegation from the Sanhedrin coming to question John the Baptist.

[21 : 56] And then he says the next day, Jesus came to be baptized by John the Baptist in chapter 1, verse 29. And the next day, chapter 1, verse 36, John the Baptist's disciples begin to follow Jesus.

And then on the next day, or on the 10th hour, which is 4 p.m., which by the Jewish reckoning is the next day, Andrew tells Peter about Jesus.

And then next day, chapter 1, verse 43, and then third day from that point on, that adds up to seven days, which is, according to a subtle writer like John, that's very intentional because he had just given an account in the prologue about how Jesus is bringing about the new creation, right?

The days of creation, Jesus was the word incarnate that was there, the word that was there in creation, now becoming incarnate. And that now Jesus is bringing about a new creation. And in the same way, later in chapter 5, verse 16 to 18, when the Jews accused Jesus of violating the Sabbath, he says this, my father is working until now, and I am working.

And so this was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God. Now Jesus is identifying his ministry of new creation with the father's work of creation, and throughout those seven days, the son of God is revealed to the world.

[23 : 22] Now, how does Jesus bring about this new creation? And how does Jesus fulfill the purification law that he proclaims to fulfill by filling the stone water in the jars?

How does Jesus usher us, his people, into the wedding feast? Because we are sinful, right? And the answer lies in verse 11.

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

The New Testament uses several different words to refer to what we would call miracles. So some gospel writers call it mighty works. Some people call it wonders. But the word that John prefers to use is the word sign.

Because sign, by definition, always points to something else. It points to another reality. And here, the sign points to his glory.

[24 : 26] The glory of Jesus Christ as the only son of God, as he talked about in chapter one. And the moment of glorification throughout the gospel of John, as we talked about last week, is the cross.

That's the climactic moment of Jesus' glorification is his death and then his ensuing resurrection and ascension. That's when Jesus is glorified. So when it says here in verse 11 that this was the first of his signs, the sign of his glory, and this is how Jesus manifested his glory, it's pointing to that ultimate reality of Jesus going to the cross.

And it's at the cross that the ultimate laws of purification are also fulfilled, right? Because if you remember the quote I read for you from Mark 7 of the Jews being upset about the disciples not washing their hands and not washing the utensils before they eat, this is Jesus' response after their objection.

There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him. But the things that come out of a person are what defile him. Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him since it enters not his heart but his stomach and is expelled?

What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

[25 : 51] All these evil things come from within and they defile a person. Now you see the larger point that Jesus is making by saying that he claimed to fulfill the purification laws of old.

The purification laws in the Old Testament were about symbols. They were shadows that pointed to a greater reality because it's not what goes inside a man that defiles him but what comes out, the sinfulness in their hearts.

On the surface, if you look around, most people are living fine lives. They seem like nice people. They say nice things. They're wearing nice clothes. They have nice jobs or they attend nice schools. They seem to have their life put together.

But inside, when we are honest with ourselves and we examine our lives and we look at the hearts, then we find envy. We find pride. We find selfishness.

We find lust. We find anger. That's all of us. Every single human being. And that is what truly needs to be purified because that's what needs to be purified so that we can enter into that wedding feast with God.

[26 : 56] And how does Jesus do this? By dying on the cross. He absorbs the punishment and wrath of God that we deserve for rebelling against him. That's the gospel.

That's the good news of Jesus Christ. And by believing that, that's how we become apart. That's how we become purified so that we can be ushered into his wedding feast.

Now, as theologian John Stott describes this way in his book, *The Cross of Christ*, man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be.

And God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives that belong to God alone. God accepts penalties that belong to man alone.

That's the heart of sin. The essence of sin is that we are living in rebellion against God. We want to be God's ourselves. We want to live for our will to do our bidding and to live however we wish to.

[28 : 02] That's what we want to do. And that's what all the sins, all the lists of sins that you can find. That's all a manifestation of that pride. We want to do what we want. We want to live life however we wish. We want to be God's ourselves.

And that's the ultimate sin at the root of sin. But instead, but we can't, right? Because we are created beings and we're dependent on God and God has his intention and design for the way we ought to live.

And that is ultimately what is best for us. But because we have transgressed that and violated that now, Jesus takes our place because we must, and he bears a punishment that we deserve so that we can be reconciled to God.

And what is our response? The proper response is at the end of verse 11. It says, the Jesus' disciples believed in him. Do you believe in Jesus?

Faith is not merely a belief in a supreme being. It's not just a belief that God exists somewhere. Probably half the population of the world, more than that, believes that some supreme being exists, that God exists.

[29 : 08] It's like saying that you believe that a chair exists, right? That doesn't mean anything unless you're willing to also believe that this chair can hold your weight and you're willing to actually sit on it and entrust your weight to it.

Then the chair has meaningful existence and actually serving its purpose. It's no use to believe in a supreme being and say, oh, I believe in the existence of God. You must believe that this God is Jesus Christ.

You must believe that this God is the Savior, the Redeemer that has come to forgive us, to make a way for us to be reconciled to God. And then you have to entrust your life to him and believe in him and say that, you know what, as if, as in the same way you entrust your weight to the chair, you entrust your whole life to God saying, you know what, I'm going to live every moment of my life as if this is true, as that you, as if I was intended to live according to God's will, as if God made a way and saved me, he was gracious to me, he was merciful to me.

And then that becomes the new standard and the new, by which we do everything and judge everything. That's what it means to have faith. We become a new person, we have a new orientation toward God.

And that's what the disciples do. They don't, it doesn't say that they believe in him and then they just go back home and do whatever else they were doing before they met Jesus. They follow him everywhere he goes. And that's what we are to do when we come to believe in him.

[30 : 26] We are to follow him wherever he goes and to do whatever he wishes in our work, in our home, in our relationships. That's what it means to become a Christian. That's what it means to have faith.

So Jesus is the glorious bridegroom who ushers us into his wedding feast. And I want to close this with this image and I don't know if this is actually the reason why this tradition came to be, but in the wedding, the groom wears traditionally a black tuxedo, right?

And the wife, the bride, wears a white gown or dress. Isn't that a perfect picture? of what Christ did for us.

Christ is our groom. He takes on our sins. And we, his church, are the bride. We take on his purity, his holiness, his righteousness.

That's the picture of what Christ did for us and that's why he's the glorious bridegroom who brings us in to God's presence. Let's pray. O God, we long to know you, to be loyal to you, to love you as only you deserve.

[31 : 59] we want to approach you as the son of God who takes away the sin of the world. There are some of us who have not yet made that decision.

to help us to take that step of faith to follow you. For those who have made that decision, Lord, we pray that you would enable all of us to continue to follow you, to orient and redirect every part of our lives.

What we say, think, feel, and do toward doing your will for the sake of your glory. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen.