

Water Transformed into Wine **John 2:1-12**

Our sermon text is John chapter 2, verses 1 to 12. Before the reading, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer. Father in heaven, we pray that you would speak to us from your word this evening. May we be given ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts to understand and to obey. These things we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

John chapter 2, starting at verse 1, and we'll read to verse 12: “¹ 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. ¹² After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.” Amen.

So we're all familiar with the story, I'm sure. Jesus and the disciples are invited to a wedding. We'll stick, at least to start with, to the simple basic facts of the story. We'll simply get through and look at what's there, what we know. We won't try and be too fancy. I don't want to try and be too fancy with this passage.

I've done a lot of reading on it and lot of study. I guess I should say, I try to do a lot of study on any passage that I'm preaching from, and what I've found is that over the years, many people, many preachers, many teachers, have gotten a little bit fancy with this passage, and kind of allegorized it. So the stone jars had a certain meaning, and the water had a certain meaning, and the wine had a certain meaning, and the master of the feast was a certain person, and on and on it goes. I think they were getting just a little bit too fancy.

I think you've got to start at the foundation—what exactly is happening here? What exactly is being done? What can we learn from just exactly what happens here as it's told. And then maybe after that, we'll try and expand it out a little and bring in a little bit more of Scripture and a little bit more of an overall picture of where this might stand in the story that we call “redemptive history.” Jesus and the disciples were invited to a wedding, and it says His mother was there. This would indicate that this is either a good friend of the family, possibly even a distant relative or a cousin. And Jesus attended the wedding.

If you don't know, a Jewish wedding is very much a feast; it's very much a festival. It runs from anything up to a week—a week of celebration, even partying. Now I don't think that there was raucous drunkenness at this wedding, unlike many weddings that you could possibly think of here in Australia. You've got to understand, the wine that was being drunk wasn't distilled down to make it ridiculously strong. You know, we can buy bottles of wine that are 12%, 15% alcohol. That's not the way that Jewish wine was served up at a feast. It was generally a weak kind of wine that was often watered down. You would be lucky that it was 3% or 4% alcohol.

But still, it was a wedding and it was a feast, and whilst the people would not have been raucously drunk, there would have definitely been merriment—a lot of talking, a lot of noise, some kind of folk music being played, probably some kind of folk dancing being done—that kind of wedding.

In the first instance, let's simply look at the fact that Jesus was not an ascetic. He was not a person who demands sour-faced obedience—you know, the sort of abstaining Christianity that doesn't touch or get involved in anything. God ordained marriage, as it says in the Anglican Prayer Book, and God ordained marriage as a good thing. Marriage was ordained to be celebrated.

And I talked about some preachers and teachers getting a bit fancy with the text. Well, some go off in another direction, and because they're from such a strict denominational background, they go off in the direction of trying to somehow or other prove that it wasn't really wine, and there wasn't really alcohol, and the grape juice wasn't really fermented, and no one was really giggling at this wedding. There's nothing in the text that suggests this is anything other than ancient Jewish wine, made from fermented grapes, which would have been served up watered down—around about one quarter wine to three quarters water. That would have been pretty much the standard way it was served up.

A wedding was a feast, a big deal, and the host of the wedding was expected to lay everything on in plenty. There was expected to be no shortage. The people at the wedding were to feast, to eat, and to drink to their fill. And there was nothing more embarrassing than running out of food. It was something that would have been talked about. It was something that would have been seen as a very bad omen, a very bad feeling or mood about that marriage if the feast runs out of the necessary goods. So it's a bit of a domestic emergency, we could say. We're at a wedding—a time of feasting and joy.

I want to read to you from a commentator, Matthew Henry. I love this. It's quaint, but I just love the way he says this. From Matthew Henry's Commentary: "It is very desirable when there is a marriage to have Jesus present at it; to have his spiritual gracious presence, to have the marriage owned and blessed by him: the marriage is then honourable indeed; and they that marry in the Lord do not marry without him. They that would have Christ with them at their marriage must invite him by prayer; that is the messenger that must be sent to heaven for him; and he will come: Thou shalt call, and I will answer. And he will turn the water into wine." Now I just love that. "It is very desirable when there is a marriage to have Jesus present." Really good, old-fashioned, simple application.

We've got here a wedding, Jesus is invited along with His disciples, it's a feast. As I said, it's a very bad thing to run out of wine at such a feast. If we look then at verse 3: "³When 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.'"

It's a bit of strange conversation, we might think. "Woman"—why did He call her "woman"? Well I think we could take an English equivalent of something like, "Ma'am." Something a little bit more polite than "woman." You know the ladies present wouldn't be impressed if when we met on the street, I said, "Woman, how are you?" It isn't quite the same as, "Ma'am," a polite address, but it's still an address which carries with it some kind of rebuke. "What does this have to do with me?" Or literally it says, "What is this to me to you?"

"What does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." What's that all about? Well, think of it: Mary the mother of Jesus; Jesus conceived miraculously by the power of the Holy Spirit; the virgin Mary conceives the Son of God; and she was told by an angel, no less, that the one she was carrying would be the Son of God.

And think of all of the events leading up to and around His birth and His childhood—visiting angels, visiting shepherds, visiting wise men, escapes into Egypt, from Egypt back into the Promised Land. Think of when they took Him to the temple at eight days old, and there were the old saints who prophesied over Him—how He was to bring salvation to the many. Another old saint prophesied that Mary was going to get a sword through her own heart. Think of His childhood, and the time they lost Him in Jerusalem at a feast, and they found Him in the temple conversing with none other than the theological leaders of the nation. And they were amazed at His knowledge and understanding.

Mary knew she had a special son here. She knew this was no run-of-the-mill boy. Furthermore, she had a boy who was without sin. She raised a boy who needed no harsh discipline; a boy who was without sin. I'm pretty sure that Mary was kind of getting keen to see the show begin. It's been at least thirty years. She's kind of keen to see the ministry of this son that she had borne by the power of the Holy Spirit. And just before the wedding, John the Baptist had publicly proclaimed that He is the Messiah, that He indeed is the Son of God, the promised Saviour.

So I think it's only natural that here's a mum, her son is now thirty, and she's thinking that it's about time some things started to happen. He's now been proclaimed by a prophet that He is the Messiah, that He is the Saviour. It's about time that God's redemptive program went public. I think that might have been what she was thinking. I don't know that it was necessarily sinful, but perhaps just a little bit impatient. Perhaps she just felt that the timetable could be tweaked. You know, the car needed a bit of choke just to get the engine running. That's the sort of thoughts that I think she was having.

"And Jesus said to her, 'Woman,' Ma'am, 'what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.'" So what He's saying to her is, "Ma'am"—bear in mind she was His mother—"this isn't running according to your timetable. My ministry is not running according to what you think is best. I'm running on a timetable that you don't understand."

Jesus said, “My hour has not yet come,” and He says that often through the gospel of John, right through into John chapter 12, verse 23, where finally He says, “The hour has come,” and there He’s talking about going to the cross. “My hour has not yet come,” He’s saying, “It’s not yet time for me to make a public splash.”

Continuing in verse 5: “His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’” The famous evangelist George Whitfield has a sermon on John chapter 1, verse 5. You can find it in print. “Do whatever he tells you.” It’s one of those old-fashioned kind of, I call it a “Puritan” sermon, where the preacher takes just one verse, or just one part of a verse, just one short text, and from there he develops a full, four-point sermon, I think it was. “Do whatever he tells you.” And the whole sermon was simply based on the idea that when Jesus tells you to do something, Do it! You get in there, you do it! It’s good advice, isn’t it? “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.” What’s that all about? Well, there was a certain ceremonial washing. If you’ve come from the marketplace to the table, you were to wash the uncleanness from your skin. It was a specified way of washing and involved a whole lot of specific and particular hand movements—left onto right, right onto left, front onto back, back onto front—on and on and on until you were clean.

So there was a lot of this water there. It must have been a fairly big wedding. There must have been a lot of people present. So you’ve all of this water there for the purpose of the ceremonial washing. “⁷ Jesus said to the servants, ‘Fill the jars with water.’ And they filled them up to the brim.” So at this point, you’ve got nothing in them other than water. They simply bring more water and fill these jars with water to the very top.

“⁸ And he said to them, ‘Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.’” So between the filling and the drawing, the water changes into wine. “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.’”

It seems fairly clear and fairly sensible, doesn’t it? And you could imagine in a seven-day wedding festival, in such a massive public occasion, it would only make sense to start the meal off with the best. But when Jesus makes wine, it’s better. Verse 11: “This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.”

Now, it’s an interesting sign. It’s done in public, but it’s hidden. The only people who knew that He did it were the disciples and the servants. The master of the feast was blessedly ignorant, we could say, perhaps not blessedly, but ignorant—unaware, didn’t know where it had come from or what had been done. So Jesus has solved the problem. He’s supplied the wine that was needed. And this manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him. And by that we know that His disciples have the light and the power of the Holy Spirit working in them. They had been called. Verse 12: “After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.”

Well that's our text. That's the basic, straight-up understanding of it. Now I don't want to get fancy, I've said to you already I don't want to get too fancy. But there are things in here that I think we can draw out from this. And the first thing I think we can draw out from this is the idea of transformation.

Transformation is actually a bit of a theme here. When God the Son of God took upon Himself flesh, and walked upon this world amongst men, things started to change, and there are three transformations set in the gospel of John next to each other. We're looking tonight at the transformation of water into wine. Next time we're in the gospel of John, we're going to look at the transformation of the temple. The temple is now no longer a building, it's a body.

Look if you will at verse 18 of chapter 2. ¹⁸ So the Jews said to him, 'What sign do you show us for doing these things?'" Jesus had just cleansed the temple. ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' ²⁰ The Jews then said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?' ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body." A transformation of the temple—it's no longer a building of stone and mortar and brick. The temple is now the body of Christ, the presence of Christ. That's the temple. That's where we must come to worship. We come into the presence of Christ.

And then in John chapter 3, in the meeting of Jesus with Nicodemus, we get the transformation, I'll say, from death to life. Looking at verse 3 of John chapter 3: Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again," or born from above, "he cannot see the kingdom of God." And then verse 5: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"—the transformation of humanity from deadness, dead flesh, blind flesh, unhearing and unseeing flesh, to life from the Holy Spirit.

So we've got a section or gospel text here that deals with transformation. And that's the first thing—transformation. Now this transformation is a supernatural work. We're supposed to understand that this is a miracle. Once again, I read an awful lot about any passage that I come to, and I can tell you, there are so many scholars trying to find so many ways for this to be anything other than a miracle.

"Oh, no. Oh, no, Jesus didn't turn water into wine. What happened was, at the bottom of the wine pots, there were three or four inches—the dregs of the wine, the bitter and sour stuff, and He poured water on top, and it all tasted like wine, and no one knew any better because they were already drunk." You know, anything but a miracle.

No, it's a miracle. And it's a miracle performed at the will and at the command of Jesus, because He is God the sovereign Son of God. The change happens because God says the change should happen. How do you get, for example in John chapter 3, from death to life? A miracle. Power from above, being born of the Holy Spirit. You know, there are books written, "How to be born again," and it gives you a ten-step process to get yourself from death to life. That's pretty ridiculous. I'll tell you how you're born again. You're born again when God says, "That one lives." He gives life. He ordains life. He awakens to life. It's a miracle of transformation.

The next thing I want us to look at is what was actually done. I don't really want to go too far, and I don't want to go allegorical here, but it is simply a fact that wine in the Old Testament, particularly in the prophets, the blessing of an abundance of wine, was the blessing of God upon a nation. The promise of God upon the people of Israel was that when times were good, their vines would produce with such abundance, and they would have so much, that they would still be drinking last year's wine when this year's wine was being made. Wine was actually their second greatest product, in terms of their farming produce. Number one was olive oil; number two, wine—fermented grape juice.

So we have to assume that in some way, the text is telling us that in blessing this water and turning it into wine, Jesus is in a way fulfilling Old Testament prophecies. These things point to Jesus as being the fulfillment of God's word. God is blessing His people with an abundance of wine.

Think of the reading that we started the service off with from Isaiah chapter 55 verse 1: "Come and buy food and wine in abundance, and pay nothing for it." Pay nothing for it. I mean, it says He made probably 120 or 130 gallons of wine. What's that going to be in liters? About 500 liters. If you think of the little, what do they call it, Chateaux cardboard casks? What are they, if they're a four-liter one? It's a hundred of those. That's getting close to a pallet of wine. It's an abundance. It's more than any wedding feast would need. This is the blessing of God being poured out in the production of wine.

The next thought that I want to bring from this is, I think there might actually be an important little clue there in what John is trying to communicate to us when he points out in verse 6, "Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification." Stone.

Remember back in John chapter 1 in the prologue, it says something about Jesus in comparing him to Moses. Look at verse 16 of John chapter 1. "¹⁶For from his fullness," that's speaking of Jesus, "we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." It's suggesting that something good came from Moses, but something better came from Jesus.

Now once again, the picture from Scripture that I'm seeing is that Moses got water from a stone. Jesus got wine from the water. You see the chain of revelation, of God's increasing blessing, grace upon grace, grace becoming abundant, overflowing, being poured out. And so we've got this idea of Jesus being greater than Moses.

What else is there? Verse 11. "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him." That word "glory" is an important word in Scripture. If our faith, and if our understanding doesn't come to glory, if it doesn't come to giving glory to God in and through Christ, my friends, we're on the wrong track. We're on the wrong path. This is all about the glory of God. This is all about revealing the glory of God.

God is not a hard and unloving God. Now I often preach to you that He is to be feared, and that God is just and righteous, and that He must judge and that He must do right in all the earth. But

even so, He is perfect in love. You don't ever want to try and get a picture of God that is lopsided. You don't ever want to treat God like a smorgasbord-type meal, where you grab your plate and you walk along those long tables and you pick your personal favourites—I'll have a little bit of this, and I'll have a little bit of that, but I'll avoid this, and I don't want some of that. You know, I want the sweet, I want the soft, I want the tasty, but I don't want the spicy. You get the picture.

You've got to understand and know and love our God in all His fullness. He is perfectly just. He will judge perfectly. Justice will be done. Wickedness will be punished. He's also perfect in love. He is both perfectly just *and* perfect in love *and* perfect in grace *and* perfect in mercy *and* perfect in His righteous anger. All of God is to be expressed. All of God will be made known.

When, on the day of judgment, we who are the saved are worshipping and glorifying God, He will be revealing Himself to us in judgment. And we will be understanding just how good and holy and pure and just He is in judging, just as He was good and pure and holy and just in saving. The whole universe, all of creation, is a stage in which God intends to reveal Himself to His creation. He intends to reveal all of His glory.

This glory is revealed in so many different ways, and we as people become so terribly ignorant and casual about the lives that we live. Glory is revealed because God blesses marriage. And we forget that. Glory is revealed because God brought together a man and a woman to form a one-flesh union. We forget that, and we treat marriage as something casual, and we don't see the glory of God revealed in it. We try to use worldly wisdom to supposedly enhance or improve marriage, or to destroy marriage.

You know, the world tries to tell us that this whole idea of one-man, one-woman is a terrible imitation, and how could anyone be happy with such a system? Well I'm telling you, in Christ, with the love of God, with true holy, pure love, it is glorifying to God. It is a good thing. And God blesses us and is glorified in the food that He supplies.

We get taken up with secondary causes, what the theologians call secondary causes or secondary means. We think about how something is grown or how something is processed. We think about the weather. We think about all of these things, and we assume that they're all operating separate from the will of God. No, they're operating according to the will of God, and according to the purpose of God.

The reason that the seasons keep coming in their order is because God ordained that they will. The reason that a seed germinates at a certain time and grows into a certain plant to produce a certain food is because God ordained that it will. The reason that certain animals provide meat that is good to eat is because God ordained that they do. And the reason that you get it on your plate in the end is because God has blessed you with good food.

God is to be glorified in all things, even the small things. And we forget it. And we get caught up, as I said, in little ideas and worldly things, and we think we're taking a scientific and intelligent viewpoint when we cut God out of the world and out of our world view, and we cut God out of the things that we see.

No, my friends. What we have, we have because God gave it to us. What we have, we're supposed to be glorifying God for it. God is gracious, God is loving, God is generous. In all things, God is to be glorified. It seems to be just a small thing. Jesus went to a wedding, Jesus made the wine, everybody was happy—get on with your life. It's not. Jesus was revealing Himself. Jesus was revealing Himself to whom? To those whom He willed to reveal Himself, and His disciples believed in Him.

It's always been the way that God can do many things. God can do all things in the eyes of all the world, and yet many see nothing—blinded. They see nothing, they know nothing, they understand nothing. There's a lot of people just like the governor of the wedding feast who see the works of God before their very eyes, and are completely unaware of what is happening—the transformation that's required. When we get to John chapter 3, the Lord willing, “You cannot see the kingdom of heaven lest you be born again.” You cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, lest you be born of water and the Spirit, God granting life, and in that life that God grants, receiving the blessings of God and growing thereby.

That's what we're being told in this wedding—the first of the signs that Jesus performed, we're told, the first of His signs. A sign carries built into it information. You know, all those signs out there on the street have writing on them. A sign without writing, what is it? It's not a sign. It's many things—it's a piece of metal, or a piece of wood, or whatever it is, but if there's no writing on it, if there's no words in the sign, it's not a sign.

When Jesus performs a sign, He's communicating the grace and the glory of God to us. There's lettering on that sign. There's a purpose. There's a reason why He's doing this. The first of His signs that He performed was a revelation of the glory and the goodness of God—God blessing all things, God blessing marriage, God blessing people, God blessing disciples. We should be thankful. We should be thankful and glorifying God. I say it one more time. If our theology doesn't lead us to glorifying God, our theology is wrong. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do indeed thank you for your word. We thank you that from your word we may know you through Jesus Christ, through His person and through His works. Father, I pray that you would help us in all things to give glory to you. In Jesus Christ's name. Amen.