



A Wedding in Cana

Series: John – That You May Believe

John 2:1-11

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Pastor Nick Shaffer

In the last few weeks, beloved, as we have worked through this first chapter of the Gospel we have had a foundation laid for us of who Christ is, what He came to do, and why we should believe in Him. And over the remaining chapters of this book we are going to see, if we have eyes to see, the unsurpassed, intrinsic and fundamental glory of Jesus Christ displayed. These next few chapters are filled with some of the most memorable moments in Jesus' ministry – His cleansing of the Temple, His meeting with Nicodemus where He Christ informed the teacher of the Jews, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”** And, **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”** (Cf. John 3:3–16, ESV), and His meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well, leading to His statement, **“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.”** (John 4:23, ESV) But these next few chapters begin with a wedding in Cana, where John tells us, Jesus worked the first of His signs.

I want to talk about that for a moment before we look at this text, because it is important that we understand what a sign is. This is the first of seven signs that we are going to see in this gospel that point to the glory of Jesus as the Son of God. Now, there are a number of miraculous things that Jesus did that John could have recorded for us. The very last verse of this book reads, **“Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”** (John 21:25, ESV) There is much that John could have chosen to include in this gospel, but his purpose, as we have seen before, is deliberate and focused. John said, **“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”** (John 20:30–31, ESV) His goal is well-defined, that we would believe and keep believing that Jesus is the Christ – the Messiah – the Son of God.

So what is a sign and how is it different from a miracle? There are several words in the Bible that can be translated as “miracle.” One of the most common, *dynameis* (mighty works) is not found in John; another, *terata* is found only when linked with *semeia* (signs), as in “signs and wonders; but that is found only once in this book. John deliberately uses the word signs. All miracles teach us something about Jesus, His power and deity, but a sign is a kind of miracle with a specific purpose or meaning, intended to convey spiritual truth, deeper realities, that can only be perceived with the eyes of faith. They point beyond themselves and beyond the moment to something deeper and which authenticate Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah. They reveal His glory in a special way. That is the idea behind the word “signs.” And the first sign that Jesus works is at a wedding in Cana. Let’s look at the scene of this sign.

The Scene (1-2) Pick it up with me in verse 1, **“On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples.” (John 2:1–2, ESV)** Now, we don’t know whose wedding this is. A lot of people have offered a variety of ideas, even that this may be the wedding of one of His brothers. We don’t know, but what we do know is that a Jewish wedding in those days was a big deal, much bigger than today, even in an obscure little village like Cana. Although we have some historical documents that describe a Jewish wedding, still we don’t know exactly everything that took place. But let me give you a little background as I best understand it from what I have read.

The actual wedding began with a couple of parades, if you will. First, on the evening of the wedding, the bridegroom with some of his friends would, sort of, march through town to the home of the bride. Then, the bridegroom and his posse, along with the bride’s father would lead the bride back through the streets of the town to the groom’s house so that the folks in town could congratulate her and wish her well. The whole town would join in, it was a huge celebration. When they got to the groom’s house, the marriage ceremony would take place right at the front door. After the wedding ceremony, it was back out in the streets for a parade, this time as husband and wife. Under the light of flaming torches, the new couple would parade with attendants holding a canopy over their heads, treating them like royalty and then it was back to the groom’s house for the feast to begin. The wedding feast would last as long as seven, sometimes eight days. There was no immediate honeymoon, instead the new husband and wife would have an open house with plenty of food and wine and music and dancing. It was a week-long celebration, but it didn’t get out

of hand. No, the Jews viewed weddings as times of joy and celebration, and even a symbol of the future Messianic kingdom.

And for that reason, wine was important. It was associated with joy and gladness and the blessing of God and His Messiah. The Psalmist offers praise to God saying, **“You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man’s heart.”** (Psalm 104:14–15, ESV) Isaiah 25:6 looks to the deliverance of God and promises, **“On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.”** (Isaiah 25:6, ESV) In Joel 2 we read, **“The Lord answered and said to his people, “Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations... The threshing floors shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.”** (Joel 2:19–24, ESV) The prophet Amos spoke of a great day of salvation saying, **“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.”** (Amos 9:13–14, ESV) So wine was an important part of the wedding celebration, and not so people could get wasted and act a fool – people don’t need a wedding for that – but as an emblem of joy, gladness, and the blessing of God and His Messiah. And the wine at this wedding ran out. That was a big problem – and here’s why. The family, and especially the groom, would be disgraced and there is even some evidence that in those days, the family could even be sued. It’s a problem that sets the stage for the first of Jesus’s signs.

The First of Jesus’ Signs (3-11) Look at this with me, starting in verse 3, **“When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.””** (John 2:3–4, ESV)

Somehow Mary knows that they have run out of wine and so she comes to Jesus for help and we read His response. Now, what is going on here, because there must be more than meets the eye. We know that Jesus is going to change water into wine, so what’s with this exchange?

A couple of things. It is pretty easy to infer that Mary is coming to Jesus for help, right? Why would she come to Him? It could be that she was used to Jesus being resourceful, that as her first-born, she was coming to him expecting Him to help, but by Jesus' response it is obvious that there is more at hand. Here's what I believe is going on. No doubt, she had heard about Jesus' baptism by John, even about the announcement by John the Baptist that He was the Lamb of God, the Messiah, and of the beginning of His ministry. She knew the promises that were associated with His birth, how she had conceived Him by the Holy Spirit while a virgin, His identity as the Son of God, the words of the angel Gabriel, **"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."** (Luke 1:32-33, ESV), all of this better than anyone else. Here is the opportunity for Jesus to display His power publically. Here is the opportunity to display Himself as the Messiah. And no doubt, there was some personal motivation as well. Here was also the opportunity for the accusations and rumors of her sexual immorality to be put to rest.

Jesus clearly understands what she is after as we see in His response. **"Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come."** Let's deal with this back to front. First, what does Jesus mean when He says, **"My hour has not yet come."**? Jesus speaks several times about His "hour" in John's gospel and what He is referring to is the hour of the open and public revelation of Himself as Messiah, as the Son of God, ultimately culminating in His crucifixion and resurrection to save the souls of sinners like you and me. It was not the time for Him to openly reveal Himself as the Messiah. Not yet, and that explains the heart behind his words to Mary, **"Woman, what does this have to do with me?"**

To our ears, that sounds rude, but it isn't. It is abrupt but it isn't rude. By calling her "woman" instead of "mother," a term of respect in the culture of that day, something like "Ma'am," Jesus is gently rebuking Mary to show her that there has been a fundamental change in their relationship. Yes, he was her son according to the flesh, but He is the Son of God eternally, and He was no longer at home under her authority but under the authority of His Father in Heaven alone. What that meant was this: everything, including family ties, were subordinate to His mission as the Son of God. Neither she, nor His family, would have any inside track to serve as His council or His cabinet to debate how best He should go about revealing Himself as Messiah. That was His Father's place and He was bound to the Father's will and not to the advice, agenda, or manipulation of anybody on the earth, including her. And what is more, she, like every other person on earth must come to Jesus as the promised

Messiah, as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Her relationship to Him as mother has no special weight or salvific merit; faith in Him does. In fact, in the gospel of Mark, this is made even clearer as we read of this exchange. ***“And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.””*** (Mark 3:31–35, ESV)

No doubt, this was hard to hear but we see Mary’s godliness and response of faith in what she says next. She doesn’t presume to argue with Jesus, instead she trusts Him and leaves it in His hands to do with as He sees fit according to the Father’s will. ***“His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.””*** (John 2:5, ESV) That is no throwaway line. That is the greatest of counsel. So what does Jesus do?

“Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty 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.” (John 2:6–8, ESV) Let’s just be honest here. These instructions from Jesus seem a little strange, even ridiculous. Fill up some water jars and draw some out and take it to the master of the feast. This doesn’t seem like a recipe for success, does it? Not to faithless eyes. But the servants do just as they are told.

“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 when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.”” (John 2:9–10, ESV) What happened? A miracle, that’s what. Jesus turned ordinary water into wine, but not just any wine, the best wine, the finest wine, 120 – 180 gallons of fine wine. Now look, I am not going to waste time getting into the debate as to whether or not this is real wine or grape juice. It’s a dumb debate for several reasons. One, the word is wine, not grape juice, wine. The master of the feast says so and points out the usual custom of the day. It’s pretty obvious. Two, some people get all upset that Jesus would actually make this much wine at once because He would be encouraging drunkenness. That is an entirely false presumption. Wine is a gift from God to be handled responsibly and morally, just as food is.

God gives us all the food of the earth, but we aren't supposed to eat it all. God gives sex as a gift to humanity but it is to be enjoyed only in a faithful marriage union. Now, I am not saying this to justify going home and getting wasted. Drunkenness is a sin and we should be careful to limit our liberty for the sake of weaker brothers and sisters. Scripture is abundantly clear in that regard. We can talk about this personally if you would like. But three, that debate misses the point altogether.

The point of this miracle, what we should be talking about, is found in verse 11. ***“This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.” (John 2:11, ESV)*** This miracle manifested Christ's glory. The disciples saw this sign and believed in Him as a result. What was there in this miracle that confirmed and strengthened their faith? Notice that I said, “confirmed and strengthened” their faith, not originated their faith. Their faith was originated by the Word of God, preached by John the Baptist, that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and by Jesus' personal testimony and authority as we read about last week. What was it about this sign that revealed His glory in such a way that it confirmed and strengthened their faith in Him?

How Does This Sign Manifest Jesus' Glory as the Son of God? That is the chief question, right? So what do we see of Christ's glory in this sign. Let me give you four things to consider.

This Sign Manifests the Glory of Jesus' Love and Grace Think about this. One of the most striking things about this first sign is the unremarkable place in which it occurs, a miracle that directly benefits a couple who are unnamed precisely because nobody would know them if they were. Jesus doesn't work his first miracle among the rich and famous, not around anyone who could benefit Him in any way or put His ministry “on the map.” He works this miracle among the most common of people in the most common of places. What makes this more amazing is to think about the contrast between the glory of Christ in eternity past and His willingness to mingle with the ordinary and seemingly insignificant on the earth. Jesus performs His first sign among the obscure.

Add to that the thought that Jesus had just returned from the wilderness where He had refused to use His power for His personal benefit, when He was tempted by Satan, to turn

stones to bread so that He would have bread to eat, a necessity, and then to turn around and use His power to make wine for a wedding. What kindness, what generosity, what grace. Never moved by selfishness, always moved by love and grace. **“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** (Romans 5:6–8, ESV) Jesus loved me and gave Himself up for me when I could give Him nothing and deserved nothing but judgment, and that is the essence of love and grace, love and grace that we see manifested in a miracle at wedding for some couple unknown to us, unknown to history, could add nothing to Jesus’ fame or stature.

This Sign Manifests the Glory of the True Power and Humility of Christ This miracle, this sign, puts on display the glory of what true power and humility look like. Consider the power of Jesus in changing this water into wine. He does it simply by an act of will – no long prayer, no calling upon angels, much less some magic words. By a sheer act of His will, easily and majestically, He wills the water to become wine. Here is One greater than nature, the One with all power over creation, it’s very King, demonstrating the power to create, to fundamentally transform water into wine as easily as He can transform our own souls from dead to alive, from faithless to believing, from lost to found, from cursed to blessed. **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”** (2 Corinthians 5:17, ESV)

But this sign also demonstrates His humility. Jesus is so unlike us. Think about it. If any of us had the power to do something like this, to turn water into wine, we would make a production out of it. Like a Las Vegas magician, we would make it a big show. We would make a big deal out of it, turn it into something theatrical to draw attention to ourselves. We would make sure to put it on Instagram and Twitter, to hashtag the dog out of it, maybe put it on Facebook Live. We would promote ourselves and our miracle so that no-one would miss it. Look at me! But not Jesus. There is no need for self-promotion, no need to self-advertise, to need for self-flattery, boasting, or bragging. You know why that is? False glory, imagined glory, is irresistibly self-compelled to promote itself. True glory needs no self-promotion. It is evident to everyone who sees it. True glory has no need to advertise itself. True glory is self-evident. As John said earlier, **“We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”** (John 1:14, ESV) There was no way for them to miss it.

This Sign Manifests Jesus' Glory as Ultimate Purifier It is no coincidence that Jesus uses the six stone pots used for Jewish purification rites when He performs this miracle and fills them with wine. Mark 7:1-4 describes the Jewish obsession with purification rites and the traditions that they had developed to make themselves "pure." ***"Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (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.)" (Mark 7:1-4, ESV)*** For all of their traditions, they had lost sight of the true purpose of God's Law, to point to a coming Messiah, to point to an ultimate sacrifice for their sins. They added to God's Word and established all of their religious traditions that they thought made them holy, but which could never accomplish inward cleansing and transformation. The emphasis was only on outward acts of religion that purified no-one.

But Jesus came to actually accomplish what the water of those stone pots could barely symbolize. He came to bring real purification from the uncleanness and corruption of sin, real cleansing from the guilt and filth of sin. Jesus took the purification rituals of Israel and turned them on their heads, replacing them with a decisively new and real and final way of purification, namely His blood offered on the cross as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. As John says in 1 John 1:7, ***"the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses (or purifies) us from all sin."*** (1 John 1:7, ESV) That word for "cleanses" is comes from the same root as the word "purification" in verse 6. Jesus deliberately chose these pots, used for purification, and made them obsolete.

It is Jesus, who by the shedding of His blood, not coincidentally symbolized by the wine of the cup in the Lord's Supper, that brings true purification from sin. I love the way the Charles Spurgeon says this, ***"See how red your guilt is. Mark the scarlet stain. If you were to wash your soul in the Atlantic Ocean, you might incarnadine every wave that washes all its shores, and yet the crimson spots of your transgression would still remain. But plunge into the "fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins," and in an instant you are whiter than snow. Every speck, spot, and stain of sin is gone, and gone forever."*** Fill the pots with wine, they are no longer needed for what they could not do in the first place.

This Sign Manifests Jesus' Glory as the Only Source of Abundant Joy If Jesus had not been present, if He had not provided the wine of joy, this wedding would have come to a shameful and terrible end. How much worse the life absent Christ? He alone is the true source of real and abundant joy. Where and in what does true joy consist? Is it not in peace and fellowship with God, the real forgiveness of sins, the sanctifying work of the Spirit in the soul and true holiness, real fellowship with other sinners brought into the joy of fellowship with God? That is where joy is found. No Jesus, no joy. Now listen, that is an absolute truth and that is why we are always striving, always vigilant to keep Christ as the heart of all that we are as His church.

Christless religion is joyless. You see that in the Judaism of Jesus' day that did not recognize the Messiah in their midst – all the rules, all the washings, all the traditions – Jesus described the ministry and life of the scribes and Pharisees saying, ***“They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others.”*** (Matthew 23:4–5, ESV) That brings no joy. None.

You see it in many churches today that keep the outward forms of Christianity but are absent its truth, its power, and its joy. They offer the lifeless water of secular humanism, that man is the ultimate measure of things, some of them without even knowing it, setting themselves against the clear teaching of the Word of God, jettisoning the truth of things like God’s holiness and judgment, our sinfulness, the atoning blood of Christ, His triumphant resurrection, and the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit. There is only water and no wine of joy in Christ.

You see it in the churches whose main focus and fixation is on pragmatism and self-help. The exposition of the Word of God, the glories of Christ is traded for such things as five steps for personal growth, getting a handle on your finances, characteristics for a health marriage, habits for work success. They take the Word of God and reduce it to a self-help manual with which to make your life better. What is with that? And the answer is that there is no Christ. There is no explicit, deliberate preaching of the cleansing of our sin by His blood, the work of the Holy Spirit to make us new creations in Christ, no change from sinner to saint, no water into wine. Christless religion may make us happier, better, and even more

successful people, but it offers no answer to our true need – a Savior – and no eternal life, no abundant life in Christ. Martin Luther described this sort of thing back in the 1500's. He said that this is nothing more than turning the gospel into a “new law” and Christ into a “new Moses.” He said, “To preach the Bible without seeing Christ is not to actually preach at all and where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit to create, call, and gather the Christian church and outside it, no one can come to the Lord Christ.”

But if Christless religion is bad, no religion is no better. There are so many who see this life as a pursuit of experiences, one fleshly pleasure after the other -- the wine of the world -- and for a while they can numb themselves and their conscience, but ultimately it ends in emptiness. Jonathan Edwards wrote, “The carnal soul imagines that earthly things are excellent; one thinks riches most excellent, another has the highest esteem of honor, and to another carnal pleasure appears most excellent; but the soul cannot find contentment in any of things... they think that if they could attain them they would be happy; and when they attain them and cannot find happiness, they look for happiness in something else, and are still upon the pursuit.”

But Jesus, and Jesus alone, brings ultimate joy, eternal happiness, and perfect satisfaction because He is the one that accomplishes what makes for peace with God, forgiveness of sin, fellowship with the saints and with the Savior. He brings joy. And you know else? It is no coincidence that Jesus works this first sign at a wedding, because it makes us think about the coming age of consummate blessing, the wedding that is yet to come, the best and finest wine of joy in Christ that is saved for last, when the Christ and His church will enter into marital union forever. Revelation 21, starting in verse 2, **“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.” (Revelation 21:2–3, ESV)** This is the ultimate wedding, one flowing with joy of which this wedding in Cana offered the slightest glimpse.

“This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.” (John 2:11, ESV) This sign strengthened and confirmed the disciples' faith. They began to see the glory of Jesus, a vision that would have a lasting effect, an eternal effect, in their lives. And so I'm asking you this morning,

Have You Seen His Glory? Do you see the glory of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God and believing, do you have life in Him? Has the glory of Christ, is the glory of Christ making a difference in you? Because real faith does.

Have you been; are you right now amazed at the love and the grace that Jesus has shown to you? The infinite God has condescended to come to this earth, to meet us in our need. Does that truth grip your soul like it should? You who had nothing to offer Him, He offers everything? Have you seen His glory?

Are you astonished at the matchless power of Jesus Christ, who by a simple act of His will, can transform even your life, your circumstances, your very soul? And He does it with such humility, without the need for fanfare, supremely confident in His glory, a glory that is real and self-evident. Have you seen His glory?

Have you experienced, by faith, the purifying power of His blood, His supreme sacrifice to pay the debt of your guilt and sin before God, His power to raise you to the newness of life, to ***“redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”*** (Titus 2:14, ESV)? Having beheld His glory, is this your pursuit, is He your only boast? This is what faith, strengthened and confirmed by a vision of His glory looks like. Have you seen His glory?

Have you beheld the glory of Jesus in such a way that you know, and you live, as if the only true source of lasting and eternal joy is found in union with Him? Are you finding the joy of your life in Jesus Christ or are you still looking where joy can never truly be found? Jesus alone, the glory that is in Christ, is the only source of real and lasting joy.

The disciples saw this first sign of Jesus in Cana, they saw His glory in a new and fresh way, and it strengthened and confirmed their faith in Him in such a way as it changed them in eternally lasting ways. Have you seen His glory?

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