

The Wine and the Wedding

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Preacher: Cory Brock

[0 : 0 0] Some books in the Bible are difficult to outline and some books are not. And John is one of the books of the Bible that is not hard to outline. Because John gave a pretty intricate way of doing it.

There are six I am statements in the book of John. These are the statements that Jesus offers something of his identity. I am the bread of life. I am the door. I am the vine. I am the way, the truth in the life.

And you can look at the book of John and see six separate divisions. But you can also outline the book of John through seven signs. So there are six I am statements and there are seven what John calls signs.

And we just read the first one. And John says it in verse 11 that this was the first sign that Jesus ever performed. And for John all he means by sign is miracle.

Seven signs or seven miracles that mark the major points of the book of John. But the reason John calls them signs is because they are miracles and they happened in history, but they are not just that.

[1 : 1 1] They are more than simple mirror displays of power. The reason he calls them signs is because they signify something. So while it is a display of Christ's power it also points away to something else.

To a deeper reality. In other words signs are symbols. And what John is trying to do is get us to see through these miracles to something else.

To something even bigger than the miracle. And so there are three signs I want to look at with you this morning within this first sign that Jesus did that helped make sense of it.

And the three signs in the sign are the wedding, the jars, and the bridegroom's wine. And as we look at this I just want you to remember that this is Jesus' first sign, his first miracle that he ever performed.

And the miracles, the signs, they tell us something about his identity, who he is and who he is trying to convey, what he is trying to convey to us about himself. And what was his first one?

[2 : 1 8] It wasn't controlling the chaotic forces of nature. It wasn't healing the sick. It wasn't giving food to poor people.

It was making a lame party cool again. That was his first sign. And you know what it says? It says that tells us something in verse 11 about his glory.

So what does it tell us about his glory? And I think you'll see that it tells us something very important as well about the Lord's Supper. So first the wedding, the first sign is the wedding.

If you look at verse 1 to 2, the third day there's a wedding at Cana in Galilee and Jesus and his mother Mary are invited. Now the context, it's a wedding.

And this is not the main point of the passage, but don't miss this. Jesus Christ was invited to a wedding and he went to it. And that's important.

[3 : 1 8] In the first century weddings are a big deal. Weddings are a big deal today, but they're not as big a deal today as they were then. They didn't have receptions after weddings in the first century.

They had feasts. And the feast lasted a minimum of four days, but typically six, all the way up to the Sabbath. It was a week-long celebration and it was a huge deal.

This is the social center of the whole society. This is what your year kind of revolves around. And your Jewish feast days, wine must be provided daily.

That was the rule. It was intricate, it was elaborate, it was important, it was serious. And this is a community that's built on a culture of honor and shame.

And it's very different from our modern individualistic culture. And so it's hard to kind of grasp how important this was for your honor for the rest of your life as a bride and groom, throwing an appropriate feast.

[4 : 20] It was a big deal. And if you were invited to the party, you would typically spend the whole week with the family. And that's more than likely what Jesus did. That would have been the custom.

Jesus goes and he goes to this party for a week with his mother and his friends. And you know what that means? D.A. Carson, one commentator on this passage, puts it this way.

And just listen carefully. The fact that Jesus' first miracle takes place at a wedding and that he prevents serious social embarrassment to the groom, and we'll come to that, means that Jesus is far removed from the monastic asceticism of hermetic communities.

Translation. Jesus went to a wedding and he was not a social killjoy. And that's important. It's not as if Jesus walked into the room at this wedding, at this feast, and all of a sudden the band stopped.

And people put their drinks down and slowly walked away. That's what happens to ministers, typically, when they go to places. But that's not what happened to Jesus.

[5 : 34] He's a human. He's human. And he had fun. And he laughed. And he was a man of sorrows and deep joy.

And he enjoyed people. And humans enjoy wedding parties. And friends and good food and feasts. And he enjoyed the wine.

And you know how we know that? Because he made 120 gallons of it at the end of this miracle. He's human. And he is God.

And God invented the feast. Parties exist because God made them. He created them. And so Christians, like every other human being that's made in the image of God, has a deep desire for the feast.

For the feast. It's built into who we are. And it's important to know that Jesus had that desire. He loved being there. Verse 3 to 4.

[6 : 36] This is something of the situation in verse 3 to 4. The situation is this. It's venturing on public shame for the bride and the groom. If you look down at verse 3 and 4, the wine runs out.

And the mother of Jesus says to him, they don't have any wine. And he said to her, woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come. Now we'll come back to the really puzzling statement that Jesus makes there in just a minute.

But the important thing to see here is what Mary says. They've run out of wine. And what you should hear when she says that is the groom is about to be publicly shamed for this.

He is going to lose all honor in our culture. That's what she's saying. And there's evidence now that in inter-testamental texts, these are Jewish, typically Jewish texts, that are written between the time of the Old Testament and the New Testament, that you could be sued for running out of wine at your feast.

And in some places there's evidence that you could get a criminal charge for this. Now this is hard for us to understand for sure. But in an honor and shame culture, things are very different.

[7 : 55] And it was your duty. And that duty was required of you, that you not run out of wine. It was a big deal. But there's something more here.

And the something more is that you have to understand a little bit about the Old Testament context surrounding the concept of wine and why wine is so important. The story of this wedding is that the wine runs out.

But the story of the wine running out is, according to the Old Testament, the story of humanity. And let me just give you three texts to show you what I mean. Isaiah 24, God is pronouncing judgment upon the nations, and particularly upon Israel.

And it's a very desolate passage. It begins by saying, the Lord will lay waste upon the earth because of its sins. And then in verse, but this is how it, this is the climax of the description of what it means to be in desolation.

Under the judgment of God, this is what he says, verse 10, the city has become desolate and in the streets, the people are always crying out for wine.

[9 : 06] The joyful harp has now become silent. In other words, wine in the Old Testament, and this makes sense, is the drink of joy. It's the drink, it's the drink of, it's the festival drink.

It's the drink of the feast. It's the drink of joy. In the absence of wine at numerous places, I could give you passage after passage. When wine goes down to the dregs, it's humanity's plight.

It's absence from God symbolically, and it ultimately points to death, the absence of wine at the feast. Genesis 14, the reverse happens.

Abraham defeats his enemies right after the covenant has been made, and he conquers his enemies. And Melchizedek, the priest king of Jerusalem, comes out to him and only brings him two gifts, the bread and the wine.

Why? Because of his victories. Because wine, bread and wine are the symbols of the feast. They're the ultimate symbols of joy in the Old Testament, the symbols of the feast.

[10:10] Thirdly and finally, Psalm 104. Psalm 104 is a description of the world and its created perfections as God created it. And it says that God gave three gifts to human beings in Psalm 104, and this is what the text says.

God brought forth first wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the human face shine and bread that sustains the human heart.

The three gifts of perfect joy, feasting, peace. God's presence, these are all part of the concept of wine. And so what that means is that wine runs out at this wedding.

In history, it happened, but it also runs out at this wedding because the wine always runs out. The wine always runs out for human beings.

In other words, we humans chase after ultimate, festal joy in this life. And we can never quite capture it.

[11:14] We are people who want the next thing in life, and we want the next thing to bring us that final bit of happiness. And it's always coming short.

It's always coming short. We talked about this two weeks ago in the book of Proverbs, Proverbs 14. Happiness always becomes sorrow because every feast has to end.

Every feast has to end. Why? Because in the order of sin and guilt and death, these feasts are shadows of a wine and bread that will never cease.

They're shadows. And so for that reason, we have to look at the jars, point to the importance of the jars, the second sign within the sign.

So to get what's happening here, you have to come back to Mary's interaction with Jesus. Mary tells the servants, she says to Jesus, they've run out of wine, and then Jesus says, what does it have to do with me?

[12:23] And she turns to the servants and says, just do whatever he tells you to do. Now, it's probably the case that Mary did not understand exactly what Jesus was saying to her at that moment.

And so it's a pretty good rule to follow what she did there. She just says, I don't know, just do whatever he tells you to do, which is a pretty good rule for us because you probably read the Gospel sometimes and have no idea what he's talking about.

Just do whatever he tells you to do. That was Mary's rule. And it's a good rule to follow. He is God. And she knew that there was something different about her son. In verse six, Jesus decides to act.

And he decides to rescue the bride and the groom from their shame. He decides to rescue them.

And the question is, how does he do it? And he does it by telling the servants to fill up six jars, stone jars with water, and that these are the jars of the purification rite.

So what's going on here? These stone jars are jars that would have typically been used according to the Old Testament law for cleansing from the loss of cleanliness.

[13:36] So in the Old Testament law, you could either be clean or unclean. And these are symbolic. You can be symbolically clean, symbolically unclean. And what that means is, if you're unclean, you cannot enter into the temple, into the presence of God as a place of purity.

And so if you symbolically become impure through all sorts of things, then you have to be cleansed. And there are all sorts of ways to be cleansed, but these jars were one of the parts of that process.

You filled them with water, you wash off with them, and it is a symbol of being washed of your impurities, of becoming clean again. And that's what they would have always been used for.

And they would have been at this wedding because typically at a wedding, they would have washed things like the utensils and the cups and all that kind of thing to make sure that they were clean, that they were ceremonially clean so that when it came time for the Sabbath day, people could enter the synagogues in the temple.

And so that's what they're used for. Jesus says, fill these things up with water and then verse 8, when the master of the feast, the master, he's like the master of ceremonies or the head waiter,

taste it, it has now become wine.

[14:50] It is no longer ceremonial cleansing water, it has now become wine. Now there are two levels at play with what this means.

At level one, the most basic historical fact of this miracle. In this very moment, this miracle is one of deep compassion.

In other words, the head waiter, the master of ceremonies at the end of the passage, he goes to the groom and he says, normally people serve all the good wine at the beginning of the feast.

And then when everybody's drunk a bit too much, they bring out the poor wine because it's cheap.

But you have not done that. You have brought out the choicest of wine at the end.

The groom, the man of shame, the one who has, who all the servants know, who the people behind the scenes know, is facing public dishonor for what is happening in that moment.

[15:56] Is the one publicly that gets the accolade entirely for what has happened. Jesus gets no credit for this. You see, nobody knows that Jesus is the one that's done this.

Jesus' very first miracle is one that he got no credit for. No one knew. Everybody thought it was the groom. The groom did it. The man of shame status was instantly reversed into public honor and he didn't do anything.

He didn't work a bit for it. Jesus had done it all. And you know what that means? That means at the most basic level simply Jesus is meek and he's mild.

He does not seek attention for himself. Only a handful of servants know the truth. The six people that filled up the jars. They did it.

There's no public notice. Why? Because he cared for the bride and groom. Because he loved them. That's all. He loved them.

[17:01] They were his friends. And so at the basic level this is simply a miracle of deep compassion for people that he came to love on during the wedding. But there's another level.

A deeper level. The sign signifying a broader reality. There's more going on here. Why does he use the ceremonial purification jars?

For centuries, centuries, these jars had been used to hold water. Not wine. Just water.

Never wine. And that water was used to be washed ceremonially from your sins. The water was an agent of cleansing.

That was the ceremony. It was temporary. Now the carpenter from Nazareth is saying this. The law gave you water to ceremonially wash away your impurities for a moment.

[18:06] I'm bringing something better. Not just water, but the drink of festal joy. The drink of wine.

The drink of the feast. The feast has come. That's what he's saying. Jesus is declaring these are no longer ceremonial washing jars. Why?

Because the true feast is at your doorstep. It's not a time for water anymore. The wine maker has come. And it's time to drink wine.

The feast is upon you. So that brings us third and finally to ask this question. What does the wine mean? What does the wine signify?

The third sign is the Bridegroom and his wine. What is the wine all about? And once more, to get this, you have to go back to Mary's interaction with Jesus and understand the full picture of what's happening in this passage.

[19:09] When she comes to him and says they don't have any wine, his response, first word, woman. And this has been, let me just say, a text of contention historically, and especially in the 20th century, because many have come to this and said, it seems to be rude here in the way he speaks to his mother.

Many interpreters have come and said, from the perspective of the modern mind, that he sounds almost sexist in the way he speaks to his mom by calling her the generic woman.

And it's a way we wouldn't speak today, right? But let me just say this. This is the exact same thing he says to her when he's being crucified.

At the moment of his crucifixion, he looks down and says, woman. And then he commends her to love John and John to take care of her for the rest of her life.

You see, in a moment of deep compassion and love for his mother, it's the exact same phrase that he uses. And so I think in modern idiom, it would be better, and this is a more literal way to look at it, to say this, dear woman.

[20 : 30] He literally says, what is this to you and to me, or what does this have to do with us? Dear woman. More puzzling than that phrase, though, is the next thing that he says, his response to her. He says, woman, what does this have to do with us? And then he says, my hour has not yet come. Now, every time in the book of John that the word hour appears, and you can see this as you read through the book of John more and more, it always refers to the moment of the crucifixion. The hour means the hour of his death, and he knows that. That's what it means for him, the hour. So let me just give you the logic of this conversation. It goes something like this, Jesus, they've run out of wine.

And then he says, but it's not time for me to die. You see, that's what he's saying. That's what he means by hour. They've run out of wine. It's not time for me to die.

What does this have to do with me? What in the world? I mean, why does he say that? What's happening here? Let me just offer you a consistent interpretation that's not original to me at all, but that many, many people have gone for.

[21 : 50] I think what's happening here in Jesus' mind while he says this is the exact same thing that happens to all of us, most of us at least, when we go to a wedding. When we go to weddings, we think about our own weddings.

When you go to a wedding, you can't help but think about your own wedding. Either you think about your wedding that might happen in the future, and you ladies, you look at the flowers, you look at the dress, you look at the tables that have been set out, and everything.

You look at the details, and you ponder, what would I do? What will I do? Or what did I do if you're married? Or what might I do if I get married someday? And the men do it too, believe it or not, even if they don't want to say. They do it too.

They think more about the band and the reception and the honeymoon and all that kind of stuff, but it makes you think about your own wedding. Everybody does this. And while Jesus is sitting at this wedding, it's making him think about his own wedding.

The wine is running out at this wedding, and that makes him think of the wine running out at his own wedding. And you say, Jesus was never married, but oh, the gospel say he was.

[23 : 13] In Matthew chapter 9, John the Baptist's followers and the Pharisees come to Jesus, and they say, why is it that we fast, and we look weak, and we're starving, and you're disciples, and you don't fast?

And he says this, can the wedding guests be in mourning while the bridegroom is with them? And what he's saying in that moment is metaphorically, I see my whole life as a wedding, working up to a wedding.

I am the bridegroom, and I've come to this earth to get married. That's what he's saying in that moment. My life is working up to a wedding feast.

And this is the very beginning of his ministry, and Edmund Clowney, one commentator, puts it like this. In Jesus' mind at this point, at the beginning of his ministry, he is starting to sip the cup of wine that is sorrow and bitter, so that his wedding guests can one day drink from the festival cup of joy. This wedding makes him think, in other words, of what he's going to have to do to grasp hold of his own bride. What must he do to get his bride? He must drink wine, he must drip wine, and he must give wine.

[24 : 52] In the Garden of Gethsemane, he knew the cross was coming, he knew it was right before him, and he was sweating and he was dripping blood from his pores. And what did he pray to his father? Let this cup pass from me.

And in the first century, you do not drink wine in a glass, you do something that we would not do today, you drink wine in a cup, in a wooden cup.

And so what he prays before his father, metaphorically, figuratively, is let this particular cup of wine, the bitter cup, pass from me, it's the cup of wrath.

He's saying, I don't want to drink it, it's bitter. And because he knew he was about to drink from that cup only moments before this, he could sit at a table, at a feast with his friends and offer them a different cup.

Not the cup of wrath, not the bitter cup of wine, but the wine of festival joy.

[26 : 00] The cup where he said, this is my blood for you. The sweet wine, the choice wine. And so at this wedding, at the very beginning of his ministry, his mind goes to the cup of wrath that he's going to have to drink the hour so that the wedding guests can one day drink from the festival wine

of blessing, his bride.

The blood of the covenant, it had to drip from his veins, the wine of the covenant on the cross. It's the only ticket to an ultimate wedding feast.

It's the only way. It's the point of the wine that we're going to drink today. Now, let me just ask in closing, why did he do it?

Why did he do it? And one way to get at why he did this, why he's sitting at this feast, and instead of being happy, he immediately becomes sorrowful thinking about the own cup of wrath he's going to have to drink.

Why did he do it? And one way to think about it is to take your mind back to the wedding that you've been to. Or maybe your wedding. When you go to a wedding and the back doors open and it's time for the bride to walk down the aisle, there's only one place that everybody in the room is looking.

[27 : 34] And that's at her, right? You stand up, you turn, you look at her. And no matter what she's looked like in the past, no matter the blemishes or whatever, today she is wearing the white robe, the white gown of righteousness.

That's why we wear white. And she is as beautiful as she'll ever be, right? In that moment, walking down the aisle. But the happiest face, the most joyful face in the room, where is it?

And it's the man, the groom, standing up at the front looking at her. And that's a great place to look at a wedding. Don't look at her, look at the groom's face. He's the most joyful man in the room.

Why? Because his bride is coming and he would do anything for her to get her in that moment. And so Hebrews 2 puts it this way about our groom, for the joy that was set before him, looking down the aisle at his bride, walking towards him, he endured the cross, he despised the shame.

He dripped the blood of the covenant from his very veins, you see. For us, for you.

[28 : 58] So, you know, the end of the world, did you know that the end of the world, the end of all of history will be a wedding feast, the marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19 and 21, the beginning of the new heavens and the new earth.

It's the feast of bread and wine. That is the culmination and climax of all of history. And that means that Jesus Christ is better than the groom in this passage.

He's better than the master of the ceremonies in this passage. He's more. He's the ultimate bridegroom. He is the Lord of the feast. He's the Lord of the feast.

And the Lord's supper that we're about to celebrate is a feast. It certainly looks back and remembers the cross and Jesus' death.

Yes. But Jesus is not dead. Jesus is not dead. And that's important for remembering when we come to the Lord's table.

[30 : 02] He's not dead. And we don't simply come today to participate in a funeral, but to look through the death of Christ to the resurrection and to the coming, festival joy of the new heavens and the new earth.

And that means that the Lord's supper is primarily celebratory because Jesus isn't dead. He's alive. He drank the bitter wine of the wrath of God so that we could drink the festival wine of joy and gladness and hope.

And that's what we're going to do this morning right now. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the gospel, for the covenant wine, the blood that dripped from Jesus' veins, for us, for the promise of drinking and eating with Him one day in a place without tears.

With your thanks, in the name of Christ, amen.