

Celebration

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[0 : 00] I would like if you would turn with me for a reading this morning to John's Gospel chapter 2, it is on page 887 of the Pew Bible.

As I mentioned at the beginning, we are going to look today at our last time at the miracles of Jesus. We have been looking at why miracles over the summer period and this is a very well known medical wedding at Cana, John chapter 2 from the beginning and we will read to verse 12.

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.

When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, they have no wine. Jesus said to her, women, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come, his mother said to the servants, do whatever he tells you.

Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding 20 or 30 gallons. Jesus said to the servants, fill the jars with water and they filled them up to the brim.

[1 : 15] And he said to them, now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast. So they took it. And the master of the feast tasted the water now, become wine and did not know what it had come 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.

The first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee and manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him. After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and his brothers and his disciples and they stayed there a few days.

Now like us to look at this passage this morning and this miracle and see what God is saying to us from this great passage of Scripture, one that I'm sure we know quite well.

Usually in the Bible, the Bible says the last shall be first, but we're turning it round today because the first miracle shall be last in the sense that it's the last study that we're doing and in no other way is it the last miracle.

[2 : 28] But we're going to look at this miracle today. And when we're looking at the miracles or when we're looking at the Bible or when we come to God's word and we come to preaching, there's always a fear that the preacher has or that I have, maybe other preachers don't have it.

But a fear that somehow we don't give God the glory, that Jesus Christ doesn't receive the worship, the praise and the glory that is due to him, that we trivialise the word of God and the importance of Jesus Christ or that we're untouched by it, that it kind of goes over our heads and that it doesn't really affect us at any level in our lives, that it doesn't break into our ordinariness.

And we mentioned that last week about the fact that our lives, generally speaking, we're kind of ordinary people. We're not extra special people in society's eyes and maybe even in each other's eyes.

There's an ordinariness about our lives, but the danger is that we somehow disconnect the ordinariness of our lives from the miracles of Jesus and think, they can't be relevant to my life, to my ordinary life.

These are telling me about Jesus, but they can't break into my own life, into its ordinariness and I hope that that's not the case. Nor that we trivialise either the word of God or this miracle in particular to having a little kind of ditty message, you know, a little kind of shallow message that, hey, Jesus loves a party because he went to the wedding at Cana.

[4 : 10] Nor that Jesus is great, he endorses that we drink lots of alcohol because he turned the water into wine. Or that Jesus is revealing himself as some kind of big shot celebrity who comes and changes this people's experience.

And I think that is to trivialise the word of God and to trivialise the message and the sign that is coming from this miracle because we're told here as we are throughout John that this is the first miracle that he did, the first of his signs that were to tell us about himself.

So can we look at the miracle which is self-explanatory, although it's miraculous, barely self-explanatory, and then look at the bigger picture which gives us the message, the sign, the teaching for us and then apply that to our lives.

This is a big wedding at Cana, okay? Watch and I tell you these, well, I personally don't, of course, but some of you may, if you don't have anything better do your time, these big fat gypsy weddings.

But this is a big wedding at Cana, okay? This is a wedding at Cana that's a big, important and significant one. And the one thing I wanted to say about this wedding was, and you may have lots of other things to note about it, the bridegroom blew it big time.

[5 : 28] That's one of the most important things that we take from this miracle, not in terms of application, but in terms of understanding the situation into which Jesus worked.

You know, weddings were, they're a big deal now, but they were a bigger deal then. They were hugely significant and they came after a period of very serious betrothal, we call that engagement.

In the Middle Near East, betrothal was kind of more like marriage, it was more significant, it was a more committed, it was a more legally binding union.

And the wedding was a kind of apex of that. And it was a significant event where the bridegroom was to reveal by his provision at the wedding, and it would sometimes go on for as long as a week.

He would reveal by his provision and by the kind of celebration he had that he was a worthy suitor for the bride, that he could keep her, that he would look after her, that he would protect her, that he had the wherewithal to do that.

[6 : 35] And that, the whole village would be invited along to kind of see that seal of approval on his abilities and on his commitment to his bride.

It was a disaster to run out of wine. It's not some kind of meaningless, organizational failing. It's not, oh, I forgot to order.

This was a major and significant thing to run out of wine. He was, by so doing, he was giving out the signal that he's not fit to be a bridegroom.

He's not fit to look after his bride. He hasn't got the wherewithal. He's let down his family. He's let down the community. It's a great stigma to not provide for all the guests, even to the point of being open to legal action.

It's not just an oversight that we think about, oh, and a wedding, there's so many things to organize. I forgot a wine. It wasn't like that. It was much more significant. And that is the context into which Jesus was working.

[7 : 41] Now, it may be, and this is just an aside, it may be that they were relatives of Jesus. It certainly seems that Mary, Jesus' mother, was very involved behind the scenes when the disastrous news becomes clear that they can't provide.

And she's almost there. You feel on our organizational level, it may be that this was relatives of Jesus. It may not be. But nonetheless, the bridegroom has blown at big time here.

But in the wedding, Jesus steps in. That's what happens in this miracle. Jesus steps in. It's on the third day.

It's not yet his time, as he says, but there's hints, even in what he's saying, that there's something greater, something more significant in what he's doing. But he steps in as the substitute for the bridegroom.

He steps in, and he's the one who is going to, as it were, take the debt that the bridegroom can't pay here. And he is going to provide the wine for the wedding. And it's going to be abundant wine.

[8 : 41] And it's going to be a great provision, and it will transform the day. It will. There will be a huge sigh of relief in the bridegroom's side and the bridegroom himself.

And the whole celebration, the whole emphasis, the whole direction of the day is changed because Jesus intervenes and saves the day. At a kind of, we're using kind of ordinary everyday language.

He transforms that wedding and, presumably, the bridegroom and the bride's experience and their future hope. So that's kind of the context of this big wedding at Cana.

But as I say, it's a sign. That's not the end of the story. That's not where we just come away and say, hey, Jesus is the kind of guy that steps in and does things and answers my prayers and makes life great for me.

It's much, much more significant and much more fundamental. There's a big spiritual picture here. There's an important spiritual picture in this event, in this miraculous event that unfolds.

[9 : 48] And the important, the significant, the one where you need, and I need to plug into this story, is that you and I are the bridegroom. That's the key.

We are the bridegroom. We are bankrupt before God. We don't have the answers to the situation we're in. We have no provision to offer to God.

We are people who have fallen short as the bridegroom had done. We are people who can't meet the demands of the marriage between ourselves and our God because we have broken love with Him and broken love for one another.

He is not our Lord. And I don't want just to say that in a kind of vague, general, human, the whole of humanity kind of way, which is true, but within that, there's a personal liability.

You know that the bridegroom is in this story, he's sweating. It's a bad situation he's in. And spiritually, there's that personal liability we have before God because we can't meet his demands.

[11 : 01] We can't meet his standards. We are broken as a humanity and as individuals without Jesus Christ. We are morally bankrupt.

Just as this bridegroom was unable to provide, he couldn't do anything to put the situation right. So we morally can't do anything to put our situation right, ourselves before God.

We're morally, our efforts in an opposite. And I think this remains extremely relevant to us as Christians. Don't switch off if you're a Christian and say, well, this isn't a message for me.

I think this remains extremely important because of the danger we have of reverting either to good works or legalism in our lives. We are morally bankrupt and I'm scared sometimes as we grow as a church and as things, you know, on the surface are going well as the church.

We love coming along and we love meeting with one another and we enjoy being part of the worship and we enjoy learning and everything else that goes with it and we get on with our lives that we lose sight.

[12 : 09] That you lose sight and I lose sight of our spiritual bankruptcy before God because we're nice. We're nice people.

And it's a nice kind of congregation and we have spiritual relationships. We're nice and are shallow but are going okay in our lives so that the reality is that we can just be skimming along the spiritual surface before God.

And with that, there can be, and I'm not saying there is, but I want to challenge you because I have to challenge myself on this, that there's a fundamental dishonesty about our lives because we're giving the impression that we have it all together.

We're a brigham, the wine's in the back, it's all going to come out and it's all going to be fine. Where there's an emptiness and there's a cost that we still need to face up to about our own bankruptcy ongoing before God.

Now some of you here know Mez, McConnell. Mez has been part of the gospel partnership that we're involved in and he works out in the Nidra Community Church.

[13 : 23] Nidra Community Church is very different from St. Columbus. It's in a socially deprived area and there are people who come to that church who know all about spiritual bankruptcy and everyone else knows about their spiritual bankruptcy because they come from backgrounds of physical, alcoholic, drug abuse, not all of them, but some of them.

And there's a palpable brokenness that Jesus Christ comes in and palpably heals for them. Now in their ongoing lives and in their ongoing ministry, there's problems there.

There's difficulties, there's trials, people stumble and fall back and then are rescued again and are forgiven and are brought back into the fellowship.

But the one thing that, one of the things I know and I appreciate about that congregation is the searing honesty of them and their leadership.

The searing honesty, honesty that they know who they are, they know exactly from where they've come and who has saved them and the brokenness that is no more than a minute away from returning.

[14 : 34] And it's very, it's surface, it's very obvious, it's very open. They wear their hearts on their sleeves because that's the kind of congregation they are. That's the kind of people that they are.

But you know the reality is we are no different spiritually before God. The temptation for a congregation like us is to pretend that we are spiritually rich, to pretend that somehow we've got it together, but that we are riddled with what I've called first world sins, sins of ambition and snobbery and pride and materialism and private sinfulness that we can come and together we're all together spiritually and we've got it made and we don't want to appear that everyone else seems to have together.

So I have to be together as well and I have to seem to be getting on well spiritually. But we have private lust and private abuse and private brokenness and private doubt and private sin which we're embarrassed to bring out in public.

They're not embarrassed in the dreary because there's a searing honesty and part of the work we, I'm not saying this is the case, I'm saying there's a temptation in our kind of community to that.

And the battle we have is honesty and is getting beyond the surface, is being involved for example in the city groups where we're not just kind of looking at Bible texts and trying to be better than other people at our interpretations or have amazing kind of knowledge, it's about taking God's word and applying it into our hearts and exposing our, confessing our sins to one another and saying we are needy, we are bankrupt without Jesus Christ.

[16 : 26] That's the message of the gospel and that's what levels us with everyone else and that's what keeps us from looking down our noses at anybody at any level, anywhere.

That's one of the things I said on the service this morning on Radio Scotland which I didn't listen to at half past six but which I listened to by iPlayer later and the message goes out. What has happened to the Christian church that the world outside gives the caricature of the Christian church as being holier than that, as being better than other people?

Why is that the case? Because we are people surely who recognise our spiritual bankruptcy and the emptiness and the inability of us to provide like this bridegroom, could not provide the responsibility that he had to provide which was to give wine to the people.

But also and I believe this to be the case clearly and not taking more out of this passage in this here that that is what Jesus is also saying as he takes the six ceremonial jars that were used for the washing under the Judaistic religious laws, the external washing.

He takes the emptiness of these jars and he fills them and the water of these jars and he fills them with the wine of the gospel and he's giving a sign.

[17 : 49] He's giving a sign saying not only is your morality bankrupt but he's saying your religion is bankrupt. Our outward works, our religious efforts, the efforts of Judaism outwardly could not change a heart, could not bring someone to washing and cleansing and salvation.

And he is giving that sign. Ultimately it's fruitless because there's no heart change and if your hope is in coming along at St. Columbus, if it's in being religious, if it's in doing religious ritual that never touches your heart but allows you to say everything's good, everything's fine, I'll stand before God on that day and I'll say I was a member in St. Columbus, I went along to church.

Jesus says that will not cleanse you, our religious ritual and our moral efforts leave us absolutely bankrupt and it's important for us to be reminded of that because it doesn't change in the sense that our hope and our salvation is not based on our efforts.

How many of us this week, how often have I this week saying God will bless me because I've done this? I've tried my hardest so I will be blessed, quid pro quo.

That we still launch back into I'm worthy because of what I've done rather than because of what Jesus has done for me. So we come to the ongoing deeper spiritual meaning, not just that Jesus in this miracle reveals our bankruptcy but it's always a great, great corollary to the bankruptcy, isn't it?

[19 : 40] That Jesus writes the check. Jesus writes the check for us spiritually. That's what this miracle is about as in the form of 150 gallons of the finest Cabernet Sauvignon.

That's the check that he writes. That's the check that he gives here and he says, this is your salvation to the bridegroom and it's abundant and it's beautiful and it's rich and it's far better than they could ever have expected.

And so the marriage proceeds with all the visible assurances that the bridegroom can look after the bride, that he has got enough resources to be a good husband to his bride.

Now there are many lessons in that, far too many for one service and far too many for one sermon. The Buddha's one main sign, isn't there?

There's one main sign here that the Bible itself refers to, that Jesus gives us, it points to his glory. Jesus did this at Cana of Galilee and manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him.

[20 : 57] So there's many other lessons we can take but surely we can't ignore this main lesson, that it reveals his glory and it's pointing to the fact that there's going to be another third day, that there's going to be a time to come, it might not have been yet, but there was a time to come and there was another third day.

And it's pointing unmistakably towards his salvation provision. It's pointing to his death and to his resurrection where on the cross he pays our unpayable, moral and spiritual debt on our behalf before God.

He takes our guilt and our sin and our death and in his power he satisfies divine justice and he is raised in his power on the third day to eternal life again with the Father as we will be.

That is what this miracle is pointing to. It is a miracle where Jesus is saying, I'm the one who comes to sign the check over the spiritual bankruptcy of my people.

It's signed and what's it signed in? It's signed in his blood. It's signed in other words in his death. In the wine we go on and we celebrate the Lord's Supper and we drink the wine.

[22 : 17] This is my body, this is my blood which is for you. There's connections there. It's signed in his blood, not your blood, not my blood, not anyone else's blood.

His blood, it's signed in his blood which means that the miracle of salvation just as the miracle here is his work.

It's he who changed water into wine. Nobody else, it wasn't the servants, it wasn't a tablet that he put in the water, it wasn't anything, it wasn't a trickery.

This was a great and powerful miracle pointing forward to what he does. He breathes life by his death and resurrection into our ordinary failure.

He justifies us so that he says, paid in full. That's what the bridegroom must have thought when he's hauled that wine. I don't even need to pay for this.

[23 : 14] This would have cost years of wages. I don't need it, it's been gifted to me and it's the very best and it will provide, for everyone will be provided by it.

And so Christ is paid in full not only is the guilt taken, we are declared innocent before him because of what he has done for us. That is a miracle.

We are greater than turning water into wine. If you're a Christian today sitting here in church, your life, your transformation is the greatest miracle that we will experience and it is all of Jesus Christ, signed in his blood to his glory.

But also surely salvation as a revelation of his glory is to be, we are to remind ourselves that salvation is a celebration of life now. Yes, on into the new heavens and the new earth, but now also it's a wedding he's at.

And I've mentioned this before, it's significant that it's a wedding that Jesus is at to declare the significance of salvation. It's not a funeral he goes to and changes it.

[24 : 25] It's not a wake that he provides wine for. It's a wedding, it's a celebration because it speaks of the glory of Jesus Christ and also the future imagery of the relationship between Christ and the church, where the church is his bride and where he is the groom and he is the providing groom and he is the one that is provided perfectly for us.

And our relationship one is with him is to be one of love because that's what marriage speaks of. In this situation, maybe unusually, it speaks about the tremendous need of the bridegroom that he is completely mucked up representing really the whole of humanity in me.

And we can enjoy the celebration of Christ and of salvation, but we need to admit our need. We can enjoy his divine love is pure and just and good and secure and transforming and promissory love.

You know, we take vows at a wedding, but Christ has vowed for his people to be relationally for them and with them throughout life. No forsaking, no darkness to him, no hopelessness or despair and a place where there is the proper understanding of joys in this life and gratitude for him.

And that is something that should mark our lives. There should be a celebratory joy, not a slapstick humor, but a celebratory joy that this fundamental and important relationship has been put right by Jesus.

[26 : 07] There probably was hard times in that marriage ahead at Cana, but there was this tremendous beginning that they had when they knew of Christ's provision.

But the other reference to his glory that surely must come from this, and you know, they're just, you know, I haven't really touched on it, is the best is still to come.

The best is still to come. That's a hugely significant part of this miracle, isn't it? You know, the master of the ceremony said, look, usually it's the cheap wine now because people have had sufficient so that they can tell the difference.

But you've kept the very best to last. The best wine and the best, and I think that the glory of Jesus Christ that is revealed, the sign of this miracle, part of it is that the best is still to come.

The symbolism speaks of that at last. You know, Jesus is the first born over all creation because we will be resurrected. The reality and the significance and importance of salvation for us is that we will be resurrected to live with Him in this gloriously recreated heavens and earth.

[27 : 33] It will be shockingly and surprisingly good. You know, the master of the ceremony hears, he's really surprised by what's happened. And I think there's a parallel there between what it will be like for us in 1 Corinthians 2.9.

It says, no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him. And there's a shockingly great future for us that we can't even begin to imagine.

And that sometimes we live our Christian lives with our heads down and with our whole mindset looking down and looking disastrously hopeless.

But as we've got this great future of resurrection that we don't stay dead, that we don't stay separated body and soul that we're renewed and that we will be celebrating and the Bible uses this imagery itself of the New Heavens and New Earth as being like at the marriage feast of the Lamb.

It's a marriage feast. Christ is there. Christ is at the center in His bodily resurrected glorious form and we will share that with Him and there's this great future of wholeness, of belonging, of excitement, of exploration, of learning, of enjoying.

[28 : 48] The best for us is still to come. So when we're getting older and we're getting weaker externally, yet inwardly we're being renewed. We're being renewed because we know the best is still to come.

That when we die, that's a temporary condition that we go to be with Christ which is far better but yet there is resurrection. Glorious future.

We're going to be with just one big challenging insight I hope having looked at this big spiritual picture and probably the simplest and the best and the easiest advice that was ever given by anyone.

It's given by Mary, the mother of Jesus in this miracle. Do what He tells you. I used to use this story quite often at weddings but I stopped using it because I think people over and thought I was telling the bride to do everything that the bridegroom told them, do everything He tells you but I was trying to make a spiritual point in that and we must and recognise this great reality of Mary here, her holy boldness.

My time, woman, my time's not yet come. Do whatever He tells you. There's confidence in the Christ who would redeem this bad situation and you know that's the best advice I can leave with anyone.

[30 : 10] Here do whatever He tells you. What does He tell you to do? What does He tell me to do? Constantly, religiously, what does He tell? He says believe.

Believe trust. Trust in the darkness. Trust when you can't see. Trust when you don't understand. Trust that what He has done and His resurrection proves that His word is true and He will return to take us home, put our faith in Him and believe in His message and believe in our bankruptcy with all the beauty of that truth which exposes our need and our vulnerability.

And be honest, be honest as a people, be honest in our city groups, be honest about our vulnerability, be honest about our struggles spiritually, be honest that we don't know where we're going in human terms and what we're doing and we struggle with lots of things about Jesus Christ, be honest and confess our sins to one another and repent and turn to Christ.

Believe in His way and live for His glory and live for His glory now. Why do we live for His glory now? Because in kind of drawing it all to a conclusion and drawing it all together and why miracles?

Because we are. I mentioned this earlier, we are His miracles. You know, if we look at all the different miracles that are, you're a miracle of grace. I'm a miracle of grace.

[31 : 48] You didn't save yourself. It's not about your knowledge and your insight. It's about Jesus Christ's choice and about Jesus Christ's power and Jesus Christ's glory to raise us spiritually from a place of guilt and bankruptcy and brokenness to a place of eternal life and hope and a future.

You're a miracle of grace. I am a miracle of grace. Let's be a sign. The miracles all are signs pointing toward Jesus and His Word.

Be your life in your life, in your workplace. It ennobles your workplace. It ennobles your calling. It ennobles your home life.

It ennobles your relationships. It ennobles your past times. Everything that you are, everything that you do, you're a sign of Jesus Christ. Your responses, your reactions, the way you deal with anger and temptation and lust and pride.

Live for Him. Ditch the pretense of being a coping Christian that is independent and doesn't need the help of Christ and the help of one another.

[33 : 00] Praise God and give hallelujahs to your bankruptcy because He's written the checks and because we are covered in His righteousness, which is far better than our own.

And it's that kind of stripping back and exposing and emptying, which is costly but in order to be clothed and to be full and to be provided for by Jesus Christ.

Live in the bounty and in the provision of being a confessing Christian, a repentant Christian. And in the ordinariness of our lives, may we be miracles.

Go back through all the miracles. They're all in ordinary situations. People are ill, people who are dying, people who are broken, people who are sinful, people who are struggling, people who are in a mess, in the ordinary things of life.

And God works miracles into that. You and I are very ordinary. But let the miracles of His grace work in our lives. And as we are forgiven, what we must be is forgiving.

[34 : 10] And that works out first here in this community with your fellow Christians that we forgive because we have first been forgiven.

We love because we have first been loved. There's no alternative. There's no soapbox on which you can stand and look down at others and expose their failure and rejoice in your perfection.

There's just a lot of beams that stick out of all of our eyes that we need Christ to take and forgive that. So may we be a forgiving, grace-filled people of miracle.

That's what these miracles speak of. They speak of Jesus. Let's bow our heads and then pray. Father God, we ask and pray that you would help us to be a people who are evidently miraculous, not in some kind of spooky or strange or bizarre way, but just as ordinary people whose lives have been taken and lifted up and transformed and healed and redeemed and forgiven so that we take the battles that we face every day, the bleakness, the searing injustice, the sadness, the misery that sometimes we face, the confusion, all the internal sins and battles that we wrestle with, the external rejection and the difficulties that we face at being different, of walking a different road, of swimming against the tide, of not being like everyone else.

Take all these things and take the demands of religion which sometimes just break us down and expose us and take the very wind out of ourselves, take them Lord and put them in the sea of your forgetfulness and help us to be covered in your righteousness and in your grace and in your accepting love and goodness and may we identify ourselves with you and then as people who are identified with Christ identify each other in the same way, may we be really long and forgiving others and may we be short with our own feelings, may we keep short accounts with God, may we deal with our own weaknesses and therefore help us then to walk a mile in another man's or another woman's shoes and to understand them and their situations and live as a miraculous people, not just as an ordinary people but as a miraculous ordinary people, a people who put into practice their salvation and who don't leave it on the pews or who don't leave it in their souls as if their souls are sometimes or as if our souls are different from our beings, may we take our Christianity into our homes, our marriages, our parenthood, our individual lives, our workplaces, our studies and everything that we are, we commit to you and ask for your provision and like

[37 : 19] Mary that we would look to Jesus Christ in every part of our lives. Amen.