

Behold: Who is Jesus?

Water to Wine

John 2:1-12

Mark Vroegop

“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.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, 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 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. 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.” This, 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 for a few days” (John 2:1–12).

One of the reasons that I’m a Christian is because I believe that Jesus changes people’s lives.

I’m a Christian because Jesus changed my life. I personally experienced the difference a relationship with him made in every part of me. I placed my trust in Christ when I was young, and I had the great benefit of being raised in a Christian home. My relationship with Jesus has indelibly shaped how I think about key questions in life: Who am I? What’s really important? What is worth living for? What happens when I die? I’ve seen Jesus deeply affect the answer to each of those questions.

I’m a pastor because I want to be a part of seeing Jesus keep changing people’s lives. I love having a front-row seat on the miracle of what God is still doing in the hearts and lives of people. I was thrilled to hear about two high schoolers who gave their lives to Christ last week. It never gets old hearing about people being set free through our counseling ministry. And I love knowing the backstory of Small Group members’ care for each other through deep and difficult waters.

I’m a Christian and a pastor because I still believe that Jesus miraculously transforms people.

One of the reasons we love baptism is because it reminds us how Jesus transforms people. And the act of water baptism is a visual representation of what happens spiritually when a person receives Jesus. It gives us an illustration of the transformation that takes place when a person receives Jesus and is “buried and raised with Christ.”

The apostle John loved Jesus. His life was transformed by Christ, and he saw the stunning things that Jesus did during his earthly ministry. John wanted people to know who Jesus was and what he did so that they might believe (John 20:30-31). John wrote an inspired book to help us see (behold) the things Jesus did and said.

The endgame of this book is simple and proud: to see who Jesus is so that you too will believe and have life in his name.

A Miracle and a Message

Next week we'll take a one week pause as we launch one of our most important weeks of the year: Prayer Week. We have multiple events planned throughout the week for you to renew your commitment to prayer and learn some new skills. You can find out more [on the Prayer Week webpage](#).

However, our text for today is John 2 where Jesus turns water into wine. It is his first miracle, and John is not merely writing a historical record. What he wrote was true. However, John uses this account to introduce very important themes that we'll return to as we make our way through this book.

Chapters 2-4 are particularly critical. In the same way that John introduced major themes in the first eighteen verses, these chapters are designed to show us some foundational truths from Jesus's actions and words.

In a few weeks, we will study what may be the most known verse in the Bible beside "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."—John 3:16.

Over these chapters, we see the theme of the new overcoming the old. Today, we have old wine replaced with new wine. When Jesus cleanses the temple, he'll talk about himself as the new temple (2:18-22). When he talks to Nicodemus, he'll introduce the new birth (3:1-8). And when talking to the Samaritan woman, Jesus will speak about living water and new worship (4:7-15; 21-26). So, this is quite a section of the Bible.

John introduces this theme of old to new with the story of the new wine. And I want you to see this story in the context of the broader message of the gospel—that Jesus is still doing the miracle of newness.

Let's follow the plotline of this story, looking at the problem, the miracle, and the glory to see what we can learn and apply to our lives.

The Problem

The first miracle or sign that Jesus performs takes place when a problem emerges. To understand the importance of the miracle, you have to know the issue behind the scenes.

Chapter two begins by identifying the setting. Three days after his calling of Nathanael in the region of Galilee, Jesus attends a wedding in the city of Cana. That requires some additional explanation.

Weddings during the time in which Jesus lived were large and lengthy festivities. The wedding service began as the groom and his friends made their way to the bride's home, often with a torchlight procession. From there the entire bridal party traveled to the groom's home where the wedding feast was held.¹ It wasn't uncommon for a wedding celebration to last several days or even a week.

The text tells us that the mother of Jesus, Mary, was there. We can infer from this that this wedding is connected to Jesus's extended family or relatives. Given Mary's role later in the story, it may be that she was involved with serving as a host or at least she had an emotional connection to the wedding hosts.

We also learn that Jesus and his disciples were invited to the wedding (v. 2). The disciples may have known the bride and groom, or this wedding may have been a community event such that invitations were given broadly. We are not entirely sure. But you need to know that this was a major event with far more public implications than what most of us are likely used to. It would have the weight, in our context, of a famous person getting married.

Verse 3 tells us the problem: the wine ran out. Mary finds Jesus to tell him what has happened. In Jesus's time, wine was a vital and critical part of the wedding celebration. It would have been different than our wine since it was diluted with water to about one-third or one-tenth of its strength.² This kind of wine would have been as common as water or coffee in our contemporary setting.

Running out of wine would have been terribly embarrassing. Think how you would feel if you were hosting an important and public party at your house only to learn that the water was turned off, there was no heat, or if all the bathrooms had broken. All the work and preparations would have been ruined. You would hardly be able to stop thinking about what other people were thinking. And we don't have the same kind of "shame culture" present during the time of Jesus.

But there's even more here. New Testament scholars tell us that the responsibility for the wedding feast lay with the groom, and a failure to adequately provide for the relatives could result in a sizable financial issue between families. Gifts may have been taken back. And there were even times when a lawsuit would take place.

So, this is not a small issue. This is a major problem, and that is why Mary seeks out Jesus. We are not completely certain why she turned to him. Jesus had not yet performed any miracles. She may have been appealing to him because of what she knew he could do. Or, as D.A. Carson suggests, Mary was turning to him because he was her oldest son, and she was looking for him to help in any way.

Jesus responds by saying, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come" (v. 4). I know it sounds a bit disparaging to us, but Jesus's words would not have that kind of tone during his day. That's why the NIV translates this as: "Woman, why do you involve me?" Calling his mother

¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 157.

² D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 169.

“woman” would not have been disrespectful, but it would have identified that Jesus would not merely solve this problem under pressure from his mother. Jesus has another agenda.

When he says, “My hour is not yet come,” Jesus is referring to the fact that the time for the full display of his glory has not yet arrived. John uses this theme often throughout his gospel (see 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). Jesus is going to use this problem to do something amazing, but it will be on his terms and for his purposes.

There are a few things to note here. First, there is rich symbolism here as Jesus performs his first miracle at a wedding since a wedding has such profound spiritual implications both now and in the future. The Bible tells us that a marriage between a man and woman says something powerful about Christ’s relationship with the church (Eph. 5:31-32). Second, the miracle that takes place happens in the context of a human problem. We’ll see throughout John’s gospel that Jesus enters the mess of humanity identify himself as the solution. The problems and the miracles he did were designed to point people to himself.

Most of us came to Christ that way. A problem stared us in the face, and we realized that we needed help. In our setting, it may be a health issue, a marriage conflict, infertility, an employment challenge, a relationship break-up, the consequences of a bad decision, a substance addiction, or some other problem that shows us, “Man, I need Jesus’ help.”

John wants you to see how a potentially volatile wedding issue became a moment where Jesus intervened.

The Miracle

Now that you know something about the nature of the problem, let’s see what happens and how Jesus intervenes.

Mary leaves her conversation with Jesus and tells the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” This seems to be a moment of faith and belief. Even though Jesus responded with a mild redirection, she gives instructions to do what Jesus commands.

Verse 6 tells us that there were six stone water jars for Jewish purification. These were more than just large clay pots. The water held in these containers would have been used for holding the water in which small pitchers would have been dipped to wash the hands and feet of the guests as well as the utensils for the wedding celebration.

Most families had at least one stone jar like this. The rest may have been borrowed from others due to the size of the wedding since there are six stone jars. The jars were cut of stone, and they held between 20-30 gallons. So, there would have been 100-150 gallons of water spread over six jars.

The use of these jars is not by accident. Jesus is about to solve a problem and make a statement. The water in purification pots is connected to the old order of Jewish law and custom.³ Jesus's message throughout John will be how he came to fulfill the hopes of the Old Testament and was leading people to something even better. Remember "grace upon grace" from 1:16? The use of purification jars at a wedding feast sends a strong message.

Jesus tells the servants to fill the jars to the brim, and then they are to draw out the water and bring it to the master of the feast, a man in charge of the hospitality. They followed his instructions (v. 8).

The response of the master of the feast is telling. According to verse 9, the master is stunned at this new wine, and he had no idea where it came from. The servants knew its source, but Jesus's role is not widely known. The master of the feast calls the bridegroom and commends him:

"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 2:10).

Now you may not realize how miraculous it was to turn water into wine. But it is profound. One of our former elders, Dr. Jim Williams, who teaches at IU medical school, sent me this wonderfully helpful blog which he wrote. For those of you more scientifically inclined or for those who are more skeptical, listen closely:

In thinking about this miracle, in changing from water into wine, the liquid had to go from chemically simple to chemically complex. In order for the flavor, color, and even texture of the liquid to be sensed by the steward as 'good wine' there must have been present a substantial concentration of complex molecules in the new wine.

But the change is really even more dramatic than just complexity. I confess that I have always thought of this miracle as being one of rearranging the atoms of the water to get wine. That, admittedly, would be quite a miracle, but for me it still would involve to some extent the 'conservation of matter' law that was drilled into me in my chemistry classes.

*But when I listed out the approximate composition of first-century wine, I discovered something that surprised me: **Water, even rather dirty water, does not have the correct atoms to make wine.** Those sugars, alcohols, aromatic compounds, and colors contain much more carbon and nitrogen than would be in water. In order for the water drawn by the servants to become a liquid recognized by the steward as 'good wine,' **new atoms would have to be formed within the jars.** That is, the miracle of water-to-wine must involve the creation of new carbon atoms, new nitrogen atoms, and a number of other elements (such as a rather large amount of potassium).*

To drop away from the chemistry for a moment, let me say it this way: In changing the water into wine, Jesus did a miracle that was more than just a rearrangement of the stuff of the water into

³ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 173.

something else. It was the making of new stuff. The formation of new atoms is really just like the old lead-into-gold idea that the alchemists are said to have pursued. In modern science, this kind of transformation can be done, but only in giant particle accelerators or special systems like that. It is never something that can be pulled off in the chemistry lab. Atoms always stay the same in the lab. They can be rearranged into different molecules, but they never change into something else. Oxygen never becomes carbon. Hydrogen never becomes nitrogen. Such things cannot happen.

The miracle was, in one sense, not very different from the initial creation itself. Creatio ex nihilo is the Latin phrase used to describe God's creation of the universe: Creation out of nothing. Something from nothing. Matter and energy where previously there was nothing at all.

Jesus' first miracle thus ranks with Genesis chapter 1, the creation of matter out of nothing. Water into wine. Creatio ex nihilo.⁴

This is a stunning miracle where Jesus makes something completely new, changes the molecular structure of water, and makes aged wine from plain water. That should encourage you if you doubt the Genesis account of creation, wonder how Noah's ark could really have been built, or doubt other miraculous moments in the Bible.

But there's more to consider here. By turning this water into wine, Jesus lavishly blessed the groom and rescued him from a crisis. He not only saved him from shame and a potentially huge debt, but he provided for him beyond what he could have even dreamed. The majority of the people just thought that the groom was being generous. But behind the scenes, it was Jesus who blessed him.

Think of what it would have been like to be that groom. Suddenly you learn that there are 150 gallons of the finest wine, and you had nothing to do with it. When I read this story, I hear the words of the Apostle Paul:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places . . . In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight" (Eph. 1:7–8).

If you are a Christian, do you feel the lavishness of his grace in this story? Do you sense it in your soul when you consider what Jesus did for you in saving you from your sins? There's more to this story than just water to wine.

This miracle is more than just about the provision of wine and sparing of someone social embarrassment. If you know the rest of the story of the gospel, and if you believe in Jesus, this account makes your heart leap for joy. You know that water is not the only thing that Jesus can change.

And that leads us to the final point.

⁴ <https://jwillia33.wordpress.com/2014/08/31/water-into-wine-a-bigger-miracle-than-you-might-think/>

The Glory

Remember that John is not simply recording an historical record. These “signs” are pointing to something. In verse eleven we see the effect on the disciples. The first miracle involved the manifestation of Jesus’s glory, and the result was that his disciples believed.

If you’ve been tracking with this series, this should sound familiar. In 1:14 we heard John say, “the Word became flesh . . . we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth.” And John 20:30-31 tells us that John wrote his gospel to show you what Jesus did so that you might believe.

The disciples saw the miracle, but even more—they saw and believed in Jesus. You see this miracle points to the fact that in the same way that Jesus filled the ceremonial jars, he also fulfilled all the Law and the Prophets (Matt 5:17). Jesus is introducing a new era, a new cleansing, a new heart, with the hopes of the New Jerusalem.

This miracle gloriously communicates that the old is gone and the new has come. And that from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace (John 1:16). And I can’t wait to show you what else John wants us to behold about Jesus.

From Old to New

Do you know, however, that Jesus still makes the old into the new? That’s the entire message of this book and, for that matter, the entire Bible. If you are a Christian, can I merely remind you of that fact? Jesus is still making you new. And there is nothing too difficult for him. You can trust him—“Do whatever he tells you.”

If you are not a Christian, it may be that some crisis in your life woke you up to some of the needs in your life. I’m here to tell you that the Jesus who turned water into wine is the same Savior who wants to make you new! Jesus does this by making us new people from the inside out—by forgiving us of our sins and giving us new hearts.

Jesus creates the new wine in you with new desires, longings, and a power to obey that you didn’t have before. And if you find someone who has experienced this transformation, they’ll tell you that it was miraculous.

To be a Christian means that Jesus changes your life.

Behold: the old “you” is gone and new “you” has arrived because of Jesus.

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