

John 2:1-11

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[0:00] Do turn to John chapter 2. If you've got a church Bible, it's page 886. And let me encourage! If you didn't hear me at the start, do stay around afterwards. There's no need to rush! You're off this tea, and we'd love to get to know you. And so we're going through John's Gospel, and we come this morning to John 2, 1 to 11, to the wedding in Canaan of Galilee, Canaan of Galilee, where Jesus turned water into wine. As I was working on this passage this week, I took one of the commentaries that I don't normally look at on John from a top shelf, and as I pulled the book down from one of the top shelves, a whole collection of little pieces of chocolate fell onto my head. I'd obviously been hiding them up there.

They were Toblerone. It was delicious. It wasn't what I was expecting. It wasn't what I was expecting. And I think that nicely sums up John 2, 1 to 11. It's so familiar, isn't it?

So, so familiar. Jesus turning water into wine. But there's something completely wonderful going on here. I think unexpected. Why would Jesus choose a wedding as the first place to do a miracle?

I mean, it's not saving people from death, is it? It's not saving people from disease. It's saving them from embarrassment, maybe, and turning water into wine. But it seems so commonplace. Seems so domestic, undramatic. What's the point of this miracle? And you can hear sermons on all these kind of themes. Is Jesus the best guest to invite to your wedding? Is John 2 pro-marriage?

So let's have a sermon on marriage. Is this passage pro-wine? Or is it anti-wine? As one of the commentators incredibly says. Or are we meant to be like Mary, Jesus' mother, speaking words of wisdom?

[2:15] And I hope you'll be grateful to know that it's none of those things. And John actually teaches something, asks something about the reason why he includes the sign. Look at verse 11. Look at verse 11, what it says.

This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. So by the time we get to the end of the Gospel of John, John tells us, listen, if I'd written everything that Jesus did, all the books in all the world would not be able to contain them.

And so I've had to be really selective. I've selected the different signs. He selects what he reports to us. And there are only seven of these miraculous signs that John writes.

This is one of them. And so the basis on which John chooses the signs is so that you would see that Jesus is the Son of God, and that today you might believe in Jesus, and you might have life in his name.

And so turning water into wine is not just some big power miracle. It is a sign that points you to something. It shows you something else. It's not a party trick.

[3:26] And when John says it's the first of his signs, he could mean it's the first chronologically. It's the first one that he did. And that he'd not done any miracles before this.

But the same word is used at the start of the Gospel, in the beginning. And so the word, it can mean first, not just chronologically, but in primacy.

As in primary, that the sign of water into wine is actually foundational. The sign of John 2 is the basis on which all the other signs are built.

And I think John is saying to you and I that the turning of the water into wine is actually a doorway sign to all the others. That you won't really understand all the other signs unless you understand this sign.

And I know it's so obvious, isn't it? It's so obvious that this miracle is a miracle of change. It's a miracle of transformation from one thing into another, of water into wine.

[4:33] And that is the sign of the great change that Jesus has come to bring. Of what it means to have life in his name. And so do you remember last week, the second last verse of John chapter 1, said you will see greater things.

You'll see greater things than these, who was it? Nathaniel. Well, what are these greater things? You go straight into chapter 2, verse 1, here they are.

Jesus has said, isn't he, I am the connection between heaven and earth. But you will see greater things than this. Well, what does it look like? In the ordinary, common circumstances of our lives? Well, it's complete transformation. It's water into wine. That's why this passage starts on the third day. Do you notice that in verse 1? Chapter 1, do you remember where that starts? It starts in eternity.

In the beginning was the Word. Do you remember that? And it comes right down to earth. It moves from cosmic to practical, personal. From cosmic right down to individual.

[5:42] And so chapter 2, verse 1, it's a new week. It's a new week. The third day.

This new week, because what Jesus is doing is nothing short of new creation. We've spoiled the old creation. And Jesus has come to restore, to recreate, to transform.

And this sign is a demonstration showing that. And the reason that this is important, the reason that we're even talking about that today, is that what Jesus did then, he is able to do now.

And he is more than able and willing to do that for you now. And so I want to look at this passage around two surprises. There are two surprising things. And the first surprise is, he shows us the basis of the change.

That's the first surprise, the basis of the change. And he points to Jesus' death. The second surprise shows us the result of the change. And it points to Jesus' life in us.

[6:52] So here's the first surprise. The basis of our change. And I think the surprise is this interaction between Mary and Jesus. I don't know whether you picked it up when Chris read it to us. It's so abrupt, isn't it, that little interchange?

Despite the best attempts of commentators to smooth it over, Jesus' words to his mother are sharp. Verses 1 and 2. On the third day, there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee.

And the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus was also invited to the wedding with his disciples. And the event is played out like a perfectly normal Saturday afternoon wedding.

You get the date, you get the occasion, you get the place. You get the guest list. It's a family wedding. It's in a little place not far from Nazareth. And it may well be a relative of Mary's.

Mary is invited. She certainly seems to be involved in the wedding. And Jesus is invited. And five very big eating disciples are invited too. And it's likely Mary is related to the family.

[7:56] She seems to be in close touch with the kitchen staff. She may be helping. And before we go on, it's worth pointing out, isn't it, that Jesus is very different from John the Baptist. Jesus had a social life.

Jesus is not an ascetic like John the Baptist. Jesus is not anti-marriage. He's not anti-parties. And often in the Gospels, we find him going to a feast, at a feast, or coming from a feast.

And then early on, just at the beginning of verse 3, there's a catering catastrophe. The wine runs out. It's a perfectly normal crisis. It's the kind of thing that happens to you and to me on a regular basis.

And it's the perfect context for Jesus' first sign. Because just like the wine running out, we are always running out. Everything in our lives, every natural joy and pleasure we have runs out.

I mean, this happy wedding couple on their wedding day, with their wedding guests, even those people are not going to last. The bride and groom, they might have children, but they will grow old and they will eventually die.

[9:07] Their health will run out. Their capacities will run out. Their time will run out, just like yours and just like mine. And that's what makes this interchange between Mary and Jesus so surprising. If you just look down at chapter 2, verse 3, Jesus' mother says to him, they have no

wine.

Whether she said it through gritted teeth, not out loud, they have no wine. To which he says in verse 4, and it's even sharper in the original, woman, what does this have to do with me?

What are you to me, woman, literally? And then Mary says, not to Jesus, but to the servants, do whatever he tells you.

And I've got to say, honestly, I don't know what to make of it. I really don't. Because you can read it all the way from a very positive example of faith, that Mary is being this wonderfully faith-filled woman, or you can read it in being a meddling, manipulative mother.

And I can line up the books along that divide. However, it is a surprise, isn't it? Jesus' words, they are not rude, but they are unusual.

[10:27] What are you to me? And then he says this, my hour, literally, has not yet come. And he's clearly pushing back on Mary, isn't he? He is putting a line between himself and his mother.

He's placing a bit of distance between him and his mum. He's establishing a distance, which I think is a bit of a surprise for Mary. And it's a surprise for us. And then when you read John's Gospel, you'll see that Jesus does this again and again.

As somebody comes to him in desperate need, and they ask for Jesus' help, and Jesus says no. And then he goes around and he does something more wonderful than the miracle they asked for in the first place.

So, for example, in John chapter 4, an official comes to Jesus, whose son is at the point of death, and asks for Jesus for help, and Jesus' response is a strong rebuke. Because, you see, the official is in danger of just believing in Jesus' power, and not believing in Jesus himself.

And he wants to give him the greater gift of believing in himself. And when the man goes, Jesus heals the boy, even from a distance.

[11:45] I think of John 11. Lazarus, Jesus' friend, his close friend, is very sick. The sisters send off to Jesus and say, Come, the one you love is sick, Lord. And they think that Jesus could help before Lazarus died.

They've got no idea that Jesus has power over death itself. So Jesus waits, doesn't he? And he waits until Lazarus has been in the grave three days. And we're told he raises Lazarus from the dead, and he gives him a greater gift to show them that he is the Lord of life and death.

And so each time Jesus does this in the gospel, the key to it is, why is he saying no? Why is Jesus saying no? Each time he says no to the person, he is trying to move them, isn't he?

Out of their spiritual danger, into faith in him. And here at the wedding feast, Jesus is indicating to his mum that there's a change in their relationship.

That he is no longer, if I can put it like this, primarily Mary's son. He is primarily the son of God.

[13:01] That he does not belong to anyone. He's not going to be there for anyone's agenda. And so what is the greater thing that he's going to do?

Well, he says, my hour has not yet come. And if you've read John's gospel, you'll know that when he talks about the hour, he is referring to his death on the cross. It's used seven times, and each time when Jesus speaks of my hour, he's referring to the cross.

And so can you see right here, at the start of his ministry, in this foundational sign, Jesus has his death in mind. That the essence and pivot of his ministry is his death.

And I think that's really helpful to us, because if he hadn't talked about his death, then we wouldn't really be able to understand this sign. Because what you see Jesus is trying to do by turning water into wine is a sign of his transformation.

The sign of transformation that he will bring through his death. Now, if you've fallen asleep, as some of you have, come back for a moment and listen, all right?

[14:18] It's not, is it, that Jesus does lots and lots of wonderful, magical signs, and his life is tragically cut short. That is not the message of the gospel.

All his power and all his work run through the nexus of the cross. Everything goes through the cross. And it is because of his death that his power is available to us.

Otherwise, we are just spectators looking at this miracle. If you separate Jesus' death from the signs, in the end, we just want to use him for what we want.

He becomes a tool for our agendas rather than us being drawn into the plan and agenda of God. And Jesus keeps warning you about this all the time.

He feeds the 5,000 and he says something like this. You are after me because of the signs, not really because of what they point to. I filled your bellies with food and that's the only reason you're following me.

[15:26] So here's the first surprise. That Jesus connects this transformation with his death. Water into wine is a sign of his death.

That is the basis for change. Secondly, what's the result of the change? And the result of the change is that the life of Jesus comes to us.

The gospel is all about life. That is the great theme of John's gospel. He's writing these words so that you might believe in Jesus and have life in his name but we need pictures, don't we?

We need pictures to see what is that life going to be like? What is that life all about? And the basic picture of somebody who was without God and without hope who begins to follow the Lord Jesus Christ is that they are changed.

They are transformed. They are transformed. They are transformed. It's like being changed from ordinary plain water into something that is living and fermenting, if you will, and changing.

[16:35] It's not just ideas we're talking about. It is not just spiritual change that is confined into my inner experience. It is a miracle of power with a particular date and an occasion and a guest list.

Here is a change in the material world showing what the Lord Jesus Christ will do for us if we'll put our trust in him. And John so wants us to get this that he doesn't even show you the miracle happening.

Did you notice that? He only shows you the results. Have you noticed he does that all the way through the Gospels? There's no razzle-dazzle. The miracle itself is narrated.

The actual changing of the water and wine happens in between verse 7 and verse 8. Look at verse 7. Look down there, please. Jesus tells the servants to fill in these stone water jars with water.

They fill them to the brim the end of verse 7. The next thing he tells them draw out, verse 8, some of the water and take it to the MC. But it's already been changed. The master of ceremonies.

[17:44] He loves it. And in case we missed it verse 9, John tells us the water has now become wine. So where did the miracle happen?

It happened somewhere between the end of verse 7 and the beginning of verse 8. We don't even get to see it. But the effects are very big. What are the effects? There's three of them. There's three effects.

Number one, newness. Number two, goodness. Number three, fullness. First, this change that Jesus makes, it's newness.

And what were the water jars for? And what were they for? They were for the Jewish rite of purification. They are connected, aren't they, to washing on the outside.

But by filling them with water and turning them into wine, Jesus creates, doesn't he, something completely new. Something completely different.

[18:43] It's not the old with a bit of cordial mixed in with a bit of squash in it. It is de novo. It is a new creation. It is a different thing.

He has transformed stuff that was used for ritual, formal practice into something which is brilliant and alive and will meet ordinary human needs and will bring joy.

It's what God promised in the Old Testament. That when the Messiah would come, the mountains would drip sweet wine and all the hills would flow with it and I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel.

Jesus is not just shuffling around the different elements in the world. He's not like a clever cook that goes to the cupboard and says, I'll see what I can do with a little bit of this and a little bit of that.

No, he says, I will create something new. He's not just taking natural life and lifting it to a new level. He is creating a different order of things.

[19:49] And so if you make wine, some of you have made wine and you home-brewed it, it is a carefully controlled process of decay and fermentation for flavor.

And there's a need for an aging process to bring out the flavor, so I'm told. And it depends, doesn't it, on the bottling and the storage and the casks and the corks. Some of you will remember that Graham used to home-brew the wine Chateau Weeks, as it was known, that we used in communion.

And we're very grateful he did that for many years. But, it could have probably done with a bit more of a process, that wine, but there was a process to it, wasn't there, you know?

And there are some very expensive bottles of wine about, aren't there? And the most expensive bottle of red wine in London at the moment is a 1987 Henri J. Richberg.

Rieschberg. Henri J. Richberg. Grand Chew, as they say in Wales. It'll cost you £31,200. That's a bottle of red. The most expensive bottle of white ever sold in London was a 200-year-old bottle of Chateau D'Kiem.

[21:06] It was purchased in 2011 for a whopping £75,000. What Jesus does in these two verses, in between these two verses, is completely different from all of that.

It is instantly perfect. It's not 200 years old. It's not in 1987. It's instantly perfect. The MC says it's the best wine I've ever tasted.

What vintage is this? Jesus says it was made about a minute and a half ago. It's what Jesus has come to do, isn't it? Jesus has come to give newness of life.

To make you new. To bring you into a new creation. Jesus has come to give you a taste of what heaven is like.

Something that is constantly renewing. Newness. The second word is goodness. Growing goodness. I love the MC in this wedding. You've got to love his honesty.

[22:14] He's probably a semi-pro, isn't he? He's been hired indicator for weddings, make sure the guests are happy, the food keeps coming, that the wine keeps being serviced. He knows a thing or two about wine.

And when he tastes the wine, he is utterly gobsmacked. He's got no idea where it's come from, but he's astounded by the quality. He's never tasted wine like this before. And so he calls the groom over and he smiles at him.

And I think he winks at the groom and he says, you crafty devil, you've done the exact reverse of what normally happens. Every other wedding I've ever done, they've served the good stuff at first, and when the people have drunk quite a lot, they bring out the rubbish.

Poor old groom doesn't know what he's talking about. But he's smiling as well. The MC says, you've done the reverse, you've saved the very best to the last. You see, the normal way it is in our lives, the normal direction is the head into decline, isn't it?

We go from life to death. We decay. But the order of Christianity is the opposite. We go from death to life.

[23:27] And when Jesus makes water into wine, he is reversing the normal order of things. And that is the direction of growing goodness. It means that for you and I today, if we'll trust in Christ, we don't have to live in the past.

You don't have to wallow in regret. But Christ has come for me. He has entered into this world to give me life, which means the best is in the future.

And he's not just fixing up the old. He's not even replacing it. He's not just adding good things into our declining lives. He is transforming our lives with his own life, with a growing goodness.

He's taking the old waters of purification, if you will, and turning them into fermenting wine, bringing life and abundance. When you think about those jars, those jars that we used for purifying yourselves, for cleaning yourselves up, it's really important you see that the change that Jesus is bringing is different to that.

It's different than just purification. Let me be really clear about this. When Jesus gives us his life, it is more than purity. When Jesus gives us his life, it is more than forgiveness.

[24:49] It is more than cleansing, as important as they are. Jesus hasn't just come to take away your sin. He comes also to give us what we don't have.

Because removing the dirt and the stains is essentially, isn't it, a negative act and can never really restore something to being new. It can't bring fullness.

It can't bring joy. But what Christ has done and what he has come to do in you and me is not just to remedy our defects, but he has come to make a new creation, a new life.

And it begins in this life. It is broken into this world right now. And it grows and it increases in hope and joy and fullness. So the life of Jesus means newness.

Goodness. Newness. And finally, it means fullness. What does life in Jesus look like? I don't know if you've done the maths, but each of the water jars contain about 20 to 30 gallons.

[26:01] They're massive. It's mind-boggling. It's something like 700 litres of the best wine. wine. The Old Testament says God gave wine to gladden hearts.

That's why it's important at the Lord's table we have wine. It's to gladden hearts. It's a picture of fullness. And here, with 700 litres of the best wine, there's a lot of gladness.

I need to say, don't we, that we spoil this with our excess. Like all of God's good gifts, we use it for evil. It's really easy to become enslaved to God's good gifts. Just to be clear, I need to say to you, of course, getting drunk is a sin.

It is something that Christians don't do. But here, clearly, wine stands for joy and gladness and fullness. And the point I'm making, and John is making, is that Jesus does not provide the bare minimum, does he?

he gives ridiculous provision. Jesus doesn't just cover the embarrassment of this young couple, he gives over the top lavish satisfaction.

[27:17] It's like the miracle we'll see with the feeding of the 5,000. Do you remember that? And he doesn't just give enough for the 5,000. He leaves baskets and baskets and baskets and baskets over.

over. And that's what verse 16 of chapter 1 is all about if you just glance there. This is what it's all about.

John says, from his fullness we've received grace upon grace. And John is talking about the fullness of Jesus filling us. We all know, don't we, what it is to be filled with self-pity.

I certainly do. Or with pride. Or to be filled with anger. or bitterness. Or to be filled with envy. Or to be filled with self-entertainment.

And when you're filled with self-pity it pushes everything out, doesn't it? So you can't really think about anything else. You've got no room for anything else. Well, Jesus' deepest desire for you is that you would be filled with all his fullness.

[28:25] Because his fullness is the only thing that can overwhelm our fears and our pride and our self-preoccupation. And this is the character of the life that Jesus comes to bring.

It's not just free his grace. It is free. But it is full and it is extravagant and plentiful.

The Lord Jesus doesn't give you scraps of himself. He brings himself with all of his fullness to us. I spoke with an older man recently who said to me that he had made a list of the advantages of growing old.

These are some of the things that he had on his list. These are the advantages that he as an older man as a Christian he said this is the advantage of growing old. Number one was I've got more time to pray for others.

Number two I've got more time to go back over my life and see God's good hand of sovereign kindness to me. Number three I've got more time to volunteer to help others both near to where he used to live and in his church.

[29:42] Number four I've got more time to give specific thanks thanks for specific things. That is fullness. That's what the Apostle Paul prayed for the Christians in Ephesus that they would be filled with all the fullness of God.

And I'm aware, I'm not fully aware but I'm aware a little bit as your pastor of some of the difficulties of your circumstances and some of you who are suffering greatly.

And the Lord Jesus has not come into this world to give us a free pass from suffering. He doesn't airlift you out of your difficulties but what he does is he so fills us with his life that in those difficulties we know his plenty and we know his joy in the midst of our difficulties.

And my experience has been that those Christians who suffer most when they are abiding in Jesus are those who are most filled with joy.

And so this is the first and the foundational sign. It is about the change that Jesus has come to bring. And I wonder if you know this change.

[31:06] Longingly, inwardly, personally, really, the basis of his change is his death. The effects of his change are newness of life and a life of goodness and a life of fullness.

And you might wonder why in verse 11, just look there, there's the last surprise, Jesus tells us that the disciples believed. But didn't they believe in chapter 1? How come they believe in chapter 2, verse 11, when we're told that they believe in chapter 1?

And I think it's this, I think that believing is a process. It's not a one-off sign on the dotted line. Every single one of us here are somewhere along that process, I hope, of believing.

The disciples believed in Jesus and began to follow him. And as they followed him, Jesus showed more of himself to them, and as he manifested more of himself to them, so they trusted and believed in him more.

And that's exactly how it works for us today. Let's pray together.