

Jesus' First Sign: Water to Wine

Do you believe that God exists and that Jesus is Lord? If so, what answer would you give somebody who asks you the reason for your faith? Here's a list you may want to choose from. These are some of the most common reasons given by Christians for believing in Christ. See which one is closest to your own: 1) His answers to prayer; 2) Teaching of the Bible; 3) Wonder of creation; 4) Seeing changes in lives of believers; or 5) Sensing His presence in worship. I ask you that question because that's the topic of this study. In John chapter 2, we come to a turning point in John's Gospel.

The purpose for everything he wrote in his Gospel, I remind you, was to prove that Jesus is God. He states that clearly in John 20:31 where he says, "These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing you may have life in His name." For it is only by believing in the Deity of Christ that you gain the eternal life He offers. For that reason John has called witness after witness in chapter 1, each one testifying to the Lordship of Jesus. First, it was John the Baptist, then Andrew and John, Peter, James, Philip, and Nathanael in that order. Six ordinary guys who became the greatest men who have ever lived because, out of everyone in their generation, they were willing to believe! Don't get confused about that. The reason people go to hell is not for lack of evidence. There's always more than enough evidence to believe if you're willing to believe. The reason people reject the Lordship of Christ is their hardness of heart and unwillingness to believe what God says about His Son.

But now in chapter 2, John moves on from the testimony of eyewitnesses to an even greater argument. He presents the first of 8 miraculous signs Jesus performed, each one of them something only God could do—walking on water, creating new eyes for a blind man, creating enough food to feed 20,000 people, raising a friend from the dead whose body had been decaying for four days, and in the passage before us—John 2:1-11, if you'll open your Bible there now—He turns water into wine.

Sometimes it helps to have a map of where you're going, so let me do that briefly as we get started with this study. Let me give you a brief overview of John's Gospel, which I believe can be broken into four sections—chapter 1 where he calls for several eyewitnesses to testify to the Deity of Christ, chapters 2 to 11 where he tells us about the public ministry and miracles of Jesus, chapters 12 to 17 where he describes the private ministry of Jesus to His disciples on the night of His arrest, and chapters 18 to 21 which describe His death for our sins and His bodily resurrection from the dead.

But tonight we're looking at the first sign of His Deity, described in John 2:1-11 where Jesus turns water into wine. To help guide us through our study, I've divided the passage into four parts—the feast, the faux pas, the feat, and the faith it inspired.

1. The Feast

Have you attended any weddings lately? I attended the reception of my niece and goddaughter a week ago Saturday, and it was beautiful! Beautiful bride! Beautiful decorations! Beautiful setting! They held it at her father-in-law's country estate with a beautifully manicured lawn and garden and absolutely delicious food! In my opinion, some of the partiers were enjoying the free beer and wine too much. And it lasted all night long, which was too much for us older folks who had to get up the next day. But that was nothing compared to weddings at the time of Christ.

Listen to verses 1 and 2 as John shares his memories with us. He says: "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." "Third day" means the third day since He met Philip and Nathanael in Bethsaida. So if that was a Sunday, it means this is now a Tuesday (Sunday, Monday, Tuesday), and everything we've read so far has happened in less than a week. They heard John the Baptist call Jesus God's Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, they spent the night talking with Him, they made the long trek from Bethany to Bethsaida with Him, where He met Philip and then Nathanael, and now after knowing Him for a week, they accompany Him to a wedding in Cana of Galilee. So if you think you're busy, don't imagine for a moment that you are ever busier than Jesus. For He was always busy about His Father's business.

Cana was also, according to John 21:2, the hometown of Nathanael with a population of maybe 100 at the time. So Nathanael knew the bride and the groom, as did Philip, for Bethsaida was only 9 miles from Cana. Nazareth, where Mary and Jesus lived, was even closer—just 6 miles away. Having lived in Romania for 5 years, I can tell you that in old world villages like that, you not only know the folks in your own town; you have family and friends in the next village as well. So Jesus and Mary were invited as friends of this family, whereas Joseph isn't mentioned here. He must have died sometime during the silent years of Jesus, after which He as the oldest son in the family worked in the carpenter's shop to earn a living and provide for His mother and younger half-brothers and sisters. We know that because later, when Jesus is dying on the cross, He commits His mother into the care of John, who is also her nephew. That wouldn't have been necessary unless she was a widow. And as you might expect, she is serving at the wedding feast, apparently as a wedding coordinator, because we'll read in a moment, she has no qualms telling the servants what to do.

But the most important fact is that Jesus was there and that He performed His first public miracle there as a way of accentuating the sanctity and supreme importance of marriage in God's eyes. So pay no attention to those who say that marriage is just a

piece of paper! They have no idea what they're talking about! Marriage matters and so do weddings beyond what this world is able to understand. Marriage is a holy covenant made between one man and one woman in the sight of God and the presence of family and friends, vowing that they'll be faithful to love one another as long as life shall last. For that reason no other relationship on earth is as important or wonderful as marriage. Peter for example calls it "the grace of life," meaning that of all God's common graces (by which I mean the graces He showers on all people whether they love Him or not) marriage is the greatest and that any society that honors marriage as the sacred union of one man and one woman will be blessed, and any society that fails to uphold God's view of marriage is headed chaos, judgment, and destruction. So watch out, America, how far you go! For God is watching and is not pleased with what you're doing!

For that reason, weddings have always been the most important events to take place on earth. Old world countries have always recognized this, celebrating a wedding as the most important event of the year. In Romania, for example, which was an old world country in many ways when we lived there, always made a very big deal out of weddings, which would typically begin in the late afternoon with a 2-3 hour ceremony at church, followed by a reception that lasted all night long. But again, that's nothing compared to a wedding in Galilee! Weddings would begin on Tuesday or Wednesday and last until the weekend, unless you were especially well to do, and then it might last a full week. And everybody came! Everyone had heard about the couple's engagement the year before, which was a binding legal contract that could only be broken by death or divorce, even though the marriage wasn't consummated until after the feast. What went on the year before the wedding arrived? That takes us to point #2—

2. The Faux Pas

All year long the bridegroom would work to prepare a place for his bride to live, often a room added onto his father's home. He was also responsible to pay the full cost of the wedding. All of this to prove to his future father-in-law that he had what it takes, that he was able to provide for his daughter once she became his wife! You get where the story is headed. The feast is in full swing and everyone is having a great time when the wine runs out. That presents a problem. John MacArthur writes, "Maybe he can't plan! That's what we fathers who marry off our daughters fear. Maybe he's all smoke and mirrors and doesn't know how to earn a living? I hope my little girl isn't going to be forced to bring home the bacon!" They ran out of wine in the middle of the biggest celebration this couple would ever have—a huge embarrassment and question mark hanging over the head of this young groom and his family. So verse 3 says: "When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, 'They have no wine.'"

Why do you suppose she'd say that to Him? Most preachers suggest that she was expecting Him to do a miracle. But why would she expect that? Had He ever done a miracle before? No! Not that He couldn't, but verse 11 says this was "the first of the signs" Jesus did. So there's no reason to expect Him to do something He'd never done before. The simplest explanation is the best. Whenever Mary had a problem, who did she always turn to? Jesus, of course! He became the head of the household once Joseph died, and He never had a bad idea or made a wrong decision in His life! He always led her in the right direction and had the perfect solution to every problem. If anything ever went wrong in their household, He always knew exactly what was wrong and how to fix it. He was the smartest, wisest, most resourceful person who ever lived. And He lived right there in her home. He was also the most caring and compassionate person who ever lived! So who else would she turn to with this problem?

But wait a minute, is that how a son ought to talk to his mother! Listen to what He says to Mary in verse 4. "Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.'" Why such harsh words to the mother He loved? First, they weren't nearly as harsh as you think. For one thing, He said this to her in private, not publicly to embarrass her. Remember that the next time you have something hard to say to someone you love. Wait until you're alone with them to say it instead of out loud for the whole world to hear. That was Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18:15. Go to them in private and try to resolve things between the two of you before you let anyone else know about it. Tone of voice also makes a difference, and I'm sure He said this as gently as could be. And He was polite! The word "woman" is the same word He used at the cross to entrust His widowed mother into John's care. Pointing to John, He said, "Woman, behold your son!" We have no equivalent in English but what He was gently saying was, "Dear Lady, what does your concern have to do with Me?"

Why didn't He call her "Mother?" To remind her that their relationship has forever changed! For 30 years Jesus has been about His mother's business, submitting to her authority in His life. But now, with the cross looming before Him, He has just 3 years to be about His Father's business. His disciples, including His mother, didn't get that until after His resurrection. But He had to let her know that from this point on, His only concern was the mission on which His Father sent Him and that nothing, not even familial relationships—could stand in His way. He gave her an early warning of this in Luke chapter 2, you'll remember, when He was 12 years old and they lost Him in the Temple. She scolded Him for worrying her. But He reminded her, "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

Later He had to remind her again when she and his brothers stood outside a home where He was teaching, wanting to talk with Him. To which He replied, “Who are My mother and My brothers?” Then pointing to His disciples, He said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in Heaven is My brother and sister and mother.” Isn’t that good news? We who love Jesus and do the will of His Father in Heaven are His brothers and sisters and mother. So He wasn’t being unkind, but it had to be said. “I’m the Son of God and I’m on a mission and I can’t let anything (not even love of My mother) get in the way.” And thank God He didn’t, for if He had, He wouldn’t have gone to the cross and we wouldn’t be saved!

Nor was Mary offended. She may not understand the implications of what He said, but she knows who her Son is and she trusts Him. For what does she immediately say to the servants? Verse 5: “Whatever He says to you, do it.” Wise counsel! Don’t you think? Whatever Jesus tells you to do, do it! You know how much grief we would save ourselves if we took that advice? So what does Jesus tell them to do? That’s the third chapter in this drama. We’ve been to the feast. We’ve witnessed the social faux pas. Now let’s watch as He performs His first miraculous feat.

3. The Feat

Notice first how gracious this miracle was! Even though it wasn’t his mother’s place to give Him ministry advice—by the way, you’ll never see Jesus take the advice of anyone when it came to ministry. Why not? Isn’t a humble person always supposed to seek the counsel of others? Not in this case! Jesus was humble. No doubt about that! More humble than you and I have ever dreamed of being. Try dying on a cross for a crime you didn’t commit without defending yourself or trying to get even! The reason He didn’t seek the counsel of sinful human beings of course is He couldn’t trust us and didn’t need it. For this is no mere mortal before us. This is the Holy and Infinite God become Man whose name is Wonderful Counselor. He didn’t need anyone’s advice! Nor do I think she was telling Him what to do. Women’s intuition may have told her He was about to do something happen wonderful. If so, she was right! By God’s grace her concern, the need of this young couple, and God’s will all came together in one miraculous moment of time leading to one of the greatest feats He ever performed.

You see contrary to popular belief, this miracle was not an unexpected event interrupting God’s plan for His Son, due to a well-meaning albeit interfering Jewish mother. This was Plan A from eternity past—for the first sign of His Son’s Deity to be a miracle performed at a wedding in Cana of Galilee to bless His mother, His family, and His friends. And here’s how it happened. Verse 6 says: “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.” This water wasn’t for washing their hands or taking a bath. It was for ceremonial purposes. Before a Jewish family ate a meal, they poured water over their pots, their pans, their plates, and their hands, not to get them clean, but to remain ritually pure. So for a feast of several days, you had to have a lot of water. But why did He have them fill the jars to the brim? So there’d be no question about something being added to the water. Skeptics always try to explain away the miracles of God. Remember how Pharaoh’s magicians tried to copy the miracles of Moses? So they filled the jars to the brim. That ought to be enough to last till the weekend, don’t you think? But why so much wine! To picture the super abundance of God’s grace—“Give and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, it will be poured into your lap.”

“And,” verse 8 continues, “He said to them, ‘Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter.’ So they took it to him. When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine...” Wait a minute, you say! I missed it. When did He do the miracle? Between the lines in verses 8 and 9! But then that’s how the Bible always describes the miraculous—very matter of fact. You didn’t expect Jesus to make a big deal out of this, did you? Drum roll, please! “Tuh-dum!” No. But what a miracle it was!

Verse 9 says: “When the master of the feast (i.e., the headwaiter and master of ceremonies) tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew, (he) 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.” That’s true, isn’t it? When you invite guests to dinner, you get out your best china, put flowers on the table, cook your best meal, and serve them in style. But if they stay a second or third or fourth day, it’s: “There’s the fridge. Try your luck! I think you’ll find some leftovers in the back if you look really hard.” But in this case, it’s far different! The maître d says, “Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk too much, he serves the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” Good wine! This was the best wine anyone ever tasted—like new wine freshly squeezed from the grapes of Eden!

4. The Faith

But we can’t leave it at that. We need to take a step back before we finish and ask the question: Why does John tell us the story in the first place? The answer is to help us relive the experience with him and discover with the disciples who Jesus is. Remember they’re only a week into following Him and this walking by faith thing is new to them. So Jesus performs a miracle, and John tells us about it, so that both we and they will believe. We’ve been to the feast. We’ve witnessed the faux pas. We’ve seen the feat He performed. Now it’s time to solidify our faith in Him. That’s what this miracle did for

them and should do for us. Verse 11: “This, the first of His signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.”

Remember there are only 6 of them at this time: Andrew, John, Peter, James, Philip, and Nathanael—all of them good friends, fishing partners, and strong believers in the God of the Bible. But not one of them has seen a miracle. Nathanael witnessed the omniscience of Jesus when He said, “Before Philip found you under the fig tree, I saw you!” But not one of them has seen a miracle like this. Nor have you and I! We’ve seen amazing answers to prayer but nothing of this magnitude! 150 gallons of water instantly turned to wine! The impact was so great two things immediately happened. First, all six of His disciples believed in Him. I know. They already believed or they wouldn’t have followed Him all the way to Galilee. They called Him Rabbi. They called Him Messiah. And Nathanael added, “You are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel.” But Jesus said they’d see greater things than these. And this is the first and one of the greatest—seeing their God stand before them and create something out of nothing just as He had in the beginning. And for what purpose? So that they and we would never doubt.

Even more important, however, is the second thing that happened. John says they saw His glory! After all, isn’t that what we’re living for and what we’ve longed for since the day we met Him? I want to see His glory. And they did, at least in part! What glory? The eternal glory He shared with the Father before time began! You know the verse. So say it with me. John 1:14, “And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” And the best thing about is you didn’t have to be there to witness it. You can witness it this very moment if you have the faith to believe. As He said to Thomas the Doubter, who fell down at His feet in worship saying, “My Lord and my God,” when he saw His glory, “Because you’ve seen, you’ve believed. But blessed (That means happy, joyful, elated!) are those who have not seen and yet believed!” And so we believe without seeing, and we behold “His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

But someone will say, “I’d believe too if I saw a miracle like that!” Don’t be so sure. The Israelites witnessed the 10 plagues of Egypt and the Red Sea splitting in two before them, and they still didn’t believe and died in the wilderness as a result! And the people of Jesus’ day saw even greater miracles than that. In fact, nowhere in the Bible does anyone ever question Jesus’ power to do miracles. What His enemies claimed is that He did His miracles by the power of Satan, blaspheming the Spirit, committing the unpardonable sin, and earning a place in hell as a result. The truth is Jesus performed miracle after miracle, day after day, for 3 years until He eradicated virtually all disease from Israel. But the vast majority of the people still didn’t believe. In fact, only 120 believed enough to gather together for prayer in the Upper Room after His ascension into Heaven. Because faith isn’t about evidence! It’s about a willing heart.

That means, if your heart is willing, you can know Jesus this very moment through simple childlike faith. So if you've never believed before, open up your heart to Him now as I lead us in a closing prayer. Say these words or words like them with me in the quietness of your heart and, if you truly mean them, Jesus promises that He will come into your life this very moment and live with you forever.