

# Sign 1: The Good Wine

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[ 0 : 00 ] Amen. Well, I'd like you to try to imagine for a moment that we are here at church for a wedding. The place is beautifully decorated with flowers and lights and candles. Everyone's dressed up in their best clothes. There's a hubbub and then a waiting, anticipation, excitement.

Now, where would Jesus be standing on a day like that? What part would Jesus have in a wedding day?

Perhaps we would picture him here at the front, maybe doing the marrying, presiding over the event. Or perhaps he'd be a guest, maybe depending on how you see Jesus, perhaps you imagine him as the guest who's the life of the party. Or that one guest sitting in the corner, frowning.

What would Jesus be doing? Where would we put him on the wedding day? Well, in the passage we've got open in front of us, we see Jesus at a wedding in a town called Cana. And here we see what he does.

It's probably a family wedding because we're told Jesus' mother was there. And verse 2, Jesus and his disciples had also been invited. But as the scene unfolds, we see Jesus has a bigger part to play on the day. Now, it's easy to think of this passage as the passage of the miracle where Jesus turns water into wine. And he certainly does do that. But notice, John doesn't call it a miracle.

[ 1 : 50 ] What does John call it in verse 11? He calls it a sign, the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory. This passage actually begins a new section in John's gospel, sometimes called the book of signs. Because Jesus did lots of signs, says John. Not all of them are written in this book.

But chapter 20, verse 31, these ones are written that we might believe that he is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing might have life in his name. And so from chapter 2 to chapter 11, we see seven signs that point us to the glory of Jesus. They're all what we'd normally call miracles.

But John calls them signs because he doesn't want us to stop at what Jesus did. Without going on to Jesus himself. When you're out on a walk and you come across a signpost, you don't stop at the signpost and say, well, that's the end of the walk, do you? No, you follow the signpost to where it's going. And so the water into wine is a sign, says John, that points us on to Jesus himself. And so the question for us this morning is, what does this sign say about Jesus?

As the wedding party celebrates and dances and cheers out the front, John takes us backstage, so to speak, for us to see why Jesus is really here.

And as we see, Jesus steps in to save this wedding day, he is setting himself up as the one at the heart of the wedding day, the high point of world history, the coming of God's kingdom. And so today he invites us to see him for who he truly is. And as we see him to put our trust in him and have life in his name, we see three things then this morning. Firstly, the problem that the sign fixes, the problem the sign fixes. See, the whole scene is brought about by a problem of catastrophic proportions. There's no wine left. Verse three, when the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, they have no more wine. Now, this would be pretty bad news at a wedding, wouldn't it? You can imagine the celebrations are underway, the best man gets up to give a toast, and there's nothing to fill the glasses with.

[ 4 : 27 ] We would probably laugh it off. But back when this wedding happened, running out of wine on the wedding day was a serious offense. See, it was the groom's personal responsibility to lay on the wine for the day.

And in a culture where hospitality and honoring guests was way up here in importance, well, not laying on enough wine on the wedding day was a sign of huge disrespect to your in-laws. In fact, it was such a dishonor that the bride's family could take the groom to court over it, as if getting new in-laws wasn't stressful enough. So the worst has happened. And Mary, Jesus' mother, comes to

Jesus to let him know.

Now, there's something very true to life about this mother and son conversation, isn't there? Mary says, there's a problem. Jesus says, what can I do about it? Mary leaves him to it.

It's not airbrushed, is it? It's a normal, ordinary family conversation. And it's wonderful to know that Jesus knows what being part of a normal family is like.

Perhaps that's a relief for some of us to hear today. He is truly human. He had a family. So he can put himself in our place. He can sympathize with us when our own families aren't all we wish they could be.

[ 5 : 58 ] But he is also truly God. Now, it's not clear what Mary thought that Jesus could do about the wine, but clearly she thought that he could do something. There's a song played at Christmas time, Ad Nauseam.

Maybe you could sing it. There's a question asked again and again. Mary, did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy will one day rule the nations? Well, the short answer is yes, she did know. Because she was told by an angel that her child would be the Son of God.

And she clearly knew that she could come to him in a crisis. Whatever she thought that Jesus could do about it, it's clear that her first thought was indeed, Jesus, he can redeem this wedding.

He can step in and save the day. But whatever it was that she wanted, Jesus clearly thought that his mum had crossed a line. Woman, why do you involve me?

[ 7 : 05 ] Jesus replied. Jesus is blunt here, but he's not rude. His words certainly give the sense that he was not impressed at what he was being asked to do.

But it's not because he didn't care. Clearly he did care enough to do something. And it wasn't because he was being disrespectful to his mother. No, what does he say? It was because, verse 4, my hour has not yet come.

It's not time yet, he said. Well, time for what? Well, the hour, Jesus' hour, sort of hangs over Jesus in this gospel.

And as the hour comes closer and closer, we see that his hour will be the hour of his glory. But the time wasn't here yet. Jesus was working to his father's timescale and not his mother's.

One writer suggests that part of the pain that Mary had to come to terms with was that she couldn't come to Jesus as her little boy. She had to come to him as we all come to him.

[ 8 : 16 ] As the son of God who came to show us his glory by dying for the sins of the world. So whatever it was that Mary was asking of Jesus, it was too soon.

And yet she knows he can redeem this wedding day. Do whatever he tells you, she says to the servants. And indeed, Jesus was not willing to let the wedding fall to pieces.

He does do something. But it's in his way. And on his terms. So secondly, what does he do? Well, we see here the story that the sign tells.

The story the sign tells. What does Jesus do next? Well, look with me at verse 6. Nearby stood six stone water jars. The kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing.

Each hoarding from 20 to 30 gallons. Jesus said to the servants, fill the jars with water. So these were not plastic jugs for drinking out of.

[ 9 : 19 ] These were big, huge stone jars set aside for ceremonial washing. They were for getting people ready for worship. And so the servants do fill them to the brim with water.

Now, says Jesus, draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet. What must have been going through these servants' minds when Jesus told them to do that?

Is this some kind of cruel trick? They knew it was only water because they had just put the water in there. Imagine their fear and anxieties.

They took plain water to the wedding organizer. But they did so. And verse 9. The master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine.

Out of the jars filled with water comes wine. And not just any wine. The emcee calls the groom straight over, verse 9, and says, everyone brings out the choice wine first.

[ 10 : 24 ] And then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink. But you have saved the best till now. This is superior, vintage, taste the difference wine.

This is the good stuff. And it's come seemingly out of nowhere in vast quantities. Our translation tells us each of these pots held 80 to 120 litres of fluid.

I did the math. That's about 800 or 900 bottles of wine. That's a serious amount of wine for any wedding day. So what is going on here? What did Jesus do? Well, John clearly tells us it is a miracle. There's no secret stash. No sleight of hand. No trick of the mind. No, it was, verse 9, water that had been turned into wine. You're stepping back for just a moment.

[ 11 : 29 ] What are we meant to think of that? This miracle probably sounds really strange if we were to tell some of our friends what Jesus did. Perhaps if we're honest, it doesn't sit quite right with us ourselves.

But the Bible's starting point with miracles is that life in this world is a miracle. The God that we meet in the Bible isn't a distant deity far off who wound up his world like a clockwork toy and let it go.

No, the God of the Bible personally keeps everything going all the time. Hebrews 1, verse 3 tells us Jesus upholds the universe by the word of his power.

And the one who does that can do all things. He does keep his creation going consistently and predictably. That is what underpins science and engineering and medicine and maths.

But he is also free to do things that are out of the ordinary. As C.S. Lewis puts it, each miracle writes for us in small letters something that God has already written or will write in letters almost too large to be noticed across the whole canvas of nature.

[ 12 : 48 ] So the Bible's position isn't that miracles are something that only God can do. It's that everything is something that only God can do. And miracles just come as part of the package of what God does for his world.

But I said earlier that the focus here isn't really on the miracle itself but what it points to. And so stepping back into the text then where does Jesus want to point us with this sign?

Well notice that the focus isn't on how much wine there is but actually where the wine came from. Six stone water jars used for ceremonial washing.

You know I guess there are lots of ways that Jesus could have produced wine on that day but his instructions were very specific. It's out of ceremonial washing pots that he brings the best wine.

See the sign is pointing to Jesus bringing the best out of something old. It's something that John's hinted at already in chapter 1 verse 16. That out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.

[ 14 : 03 ] The stone jars were for the old grace of ceremonial washing which in the law pointed out our uncleanness before God. But there was so much washing and it never washed away the sin problem but now grace has come in place of grace.

Grace upon grace and the new grace that Jesus brings points to our sin problem being dealt with because the kingdom of God has come.

Listen again to the way that Isaiah points us to that day in chapter 25. On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich foods for all peoples a banquet of aged wine the best meats and the finest of wines.

On this mountain he will destroy the shower that enfolds all peoples the sheet that covers all nations he will swallow up death forever. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth.

See there aged wine finest wine the best wine at a feast where the glasses will be raised to the end of death and sin and tears and to the end of disgrace.

[ 15 : 25 ] It's a picture of the kingdom of God and by turning the water into the very best wine here Jesus says to us that kingdom has come and it is here now through him.

The master of ceremonies spoke better than he knew when he said you have saved the best till now. Ceremonial washing was good but it left everyone hungry for the best and now Jesus has brought the best.

See the water into wine isn't here to show us what a fun loving guy Jesus was. We can enjoy ourselves but becoming like Jesus doesn't turn life into one long party.

We know that it doesn't. No the water into wine points us to a deeper and longer lasting joy in life because it points to sins forgiven.

Shame lifted death defeated sadness ended. The sign says the good stuff is here and it's here to stay.

[ 16 : 39 ] Notice he hasn't kept the best till then he's kept the best till now. The kingdom of God will flood the earth fully and finally one day but Jesus is giving us a taste of that day today.

He's already popped the cork so to speak of the stuff that we will be drinking in in his kingdom forever. With him our sins are forgiven and death is defeated.

He's removed our shame. He's given us the Holy Spirit the guarantee of our inheritance until we take possession of it. What the ceremonial washings of the law promised Jesus has delivered. So if we have tasted the best already we know that the rest is soon to follow. Whatever we go through between now and then we can taste his goodness and grace each day in his word in prayer in worship on Sundays where the table is laid we physically taste of his kingdom and every time we hear him say there's more where that came from there's more where that came from this is Christian joy not never being sad or weary but when we are sad and weary to be able to stay still the Lord is my shepherd therefore I shall not want the best is coming because the best is here it's all coming from our Lord Jesus he gives us life to the full and he has started right now that is the story that the sign tells but ultimately we need to follow it all the way to the one that the sign points to the one the sign points to you

Jesus has just produced the very best wine but remember who was meant to bring the wine to the party who does the master of ceremonies call over when he tastes the wine he did not realize where it had come from though the servants who had drawn the water knew then he called the bridegroom aside see the MC instinctively thinks the newlywed groom has done it he had us all going there for a minute he said but you had it all planned I'm sure the groom was glad to take the praise but in the end he was still none the wiser himself as to where all the wine had come from we know of course that it wasn't the bridegroom who supplied the very best wine that day or was it or was it what part did Jesus play at that wedding he was invited as a guest but he ends up filling in for the groom in fact this is one of the ways that John loves to look at Jesus listen to how John the Baptist puts it in the next chapter people come to him saying no one's coming to you anymore they're all going to

[ 19 : 57 ] Jesus well he says verse 29 the one who has the bride is the bridegroom the friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice the bride doesn't go home with the best man he says the bride belongs to the bridegroom and when the best man sees the bride on her husband's arm he can't help but smile and now the bridegroom has arrived says John if you listen carefully you can already hear the wedding bells ringing in the distance where would Jesus be standing on a wedding day he would be standing here waiting turning to see his blushing bride come towards him washed clean dressed in dazzling beauty he would lift her veil so she could see him face to face he would promise to love her and to hold her so that not even death could part her from him we don't often imagine

Jesus as a groom but if we followed the story of the bible up to this point we know that that's how God has long pictured his love for his people here's God speaking of his unrequited love for his bride in Hosea chapter 2 rebuke your mother rebuke her he says for she is not my wife and I am not her husband so what does God say he'll do about that therefore I am now going to allure her I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her in that day declares the Lord you will call me my husband you will no longer call me my master I will betroth you to me forever I will betroth you in righteousness and justice in love and compassion I will betroth you in faithfulness and you will know the Lord see the story of God's love is the story of a husband clinging to his unfaithful bride not letting her go calling her back coming to win her love again and again and John has written Jesus into that story as the bridegroom come for his bride his love is unrelenting and tireless he will not let her go because he is the faithful husband God himself come to reclaim his sinful bride his church from heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride with his own blood he brought her and for her life he died that's still all to come in this gospel but here we are given a taste of the glory that we will see when he went to the cross when his body was broken and his blood poured out to save his precious bride his church sinners like me and you for in verse 11 we read what Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him so having seen the sign this morning the question for each of us is have we followed the sign to where it points have we tasted the wine of

God's kingdom have we come running to the groom you perhaps this morning you're stuck on the sign how could that happen how could it be true that's okay as long as you know that there's more to see here than a miracle there's a man you need to know who not only has power over the

physical world but who came in love to save us so that we could have life to the full now and forever drinking in the goodness of his kingdom and his life without end so if that's you don't stop at the sign for long yes think about it wrestle with it but follow where it leads and come to rest on the one who loved us and laid down his life for us but perhaps you are there this morning trusting in Christ thanking him for his love living in his kingdom well if that's you then in a moment we get to share some signs together right here in a moment we're going to eat bread that reminds us of his broken body drink wine or juice that reminds us of his blood and those are signs that point us back to him as we share in this time of communion together as you taste the bread and the wine

I also want to encourage you to follow the signs forward because just like the wine at the wedding was a taste of God's kingdom to come so this table gives us a taste of future glory a taste of the unending communion that we will have with Christ of his wonderful bodily presence in a new world of our joy when we will sit at the table with him and eat and drink in his kingdom forever at the wedding feast of the lamb I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer he said for I tell you I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God the wedding feast of the lamb so let the bread and wine lead you this morning to the wedding feast of Christ even as they point us back to his sacrifice for he is the same yesterday and today and forever the one who came and sought and saved us has not changed his love for us has not faded he died for our sins but behold he is alive forever more and he will come again to seat us at his table in his glorious kingdom forever and ever let's pray together now

[ 26 : 37 ] God our father we can hardly take in the magnitude and the vastness and the faithfulness of your love for us that in Jesus that you have shown your love your undying love for us in his death we thank you for our Lord Jesus who came to seek and to save his unfaithful bride we recognize Lord that none of us deserve his love and yet it comes again and again we thank you that we can come to him even now Lord whatever we're coming from Lord however lost we have been for he welcomes us with open arms we pray Lord that you bless us now as we share in this meal together this meal that speaks to us of his love of the lengths to which he went to save us his body broken his blood poured out and and we pray and we pray for we ask in his great name amen amen