



The Gospel of John

Session Four: The Wedding at Cana

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

In today's text, we see Jesus performing His first recorded miracle by transforming more than a hundred gallons of water into wine at a wedding feast.

Many of Jesus's miracles had a life-or-death impact—healing the lame, raising the dead, and providing food for the hungry. But His miracles started with one that at first glance does not seem to have had the urgency of the others—He turned water into wine at a wedding celebration.

And yet in that act also, Jesus showed nothing is impossible with God, and that through the abundance of what God gives, there is always enough to go around. The focus today is Christ's transforming power in the world and our lives.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

John 2:1-12

THE MAIN IDEA

At the start of Jesus's public ministry, He and His disciples were invited to a wedding in Cana. A shortage of supplies threatened to ruin the festivities. Jesus's first miracle, turning water into wine, demonstrated His authority, showed His power to transform, and revealed His glory to the disciples, who put their trust in Him.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What evidence is there in my life that Christ's transforming power is at work in me?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

John 2:1-5 Followers of Jesus submit to His authority. Even Jesus's own mother, Mary, recognized His authority to solve the problem at the wedding feast. She told the servants to do what Jesus said. When we submit to Jesus's authority, we demonstrate our faith in Him and recognize His Lordship over every part of our lives.

John 2:6-10 Followers of Jesus experience His power. When the servants obeyed, walking through the arduous task of drawing more than a hundred gallons of water, they became firsthand witnesses to Jesus's transforming power. We experience Christ's transforming power in our own lives as we follow and obey what He calls us to do.

John 2:11-12 Followers of Jesus behold His glory. Jesus performed His first miracle at a wedding in Cana, and the text says the disciples beheld His glory and put their faith in Him. When we behold Christ's glory, we want to align our lives with His purpose. Our desire should be to follow Him closely every day of our lives.



START HERE

How do people know that you follow Jesus? What evidence is there that Christ's transforming power is at work in your life? Today, as we study the wedding at Cana, reflect on how Jesus's transforming power not only changed water into wine, but it transformed people who were curious about Jesus into sincere followers. Jesus's power makes men and women into disciples. When we behold Christ's glory, we want to follow Him with our lives. As we are transformed by His love and grace, our lives should reflect our identity as disciples of Jesus.

DISCUSS

Can you think of a time you experienced Jesus's power at work in your life or in the life of someone you love? How did that experience help grow your faith?

ADDING CLARITY

Jesus's first miracle was at a wedding at Cana of Galilee where He turned water into wine. A wedding feast during this period of history might last as long as a week, with poor hospitality treated as a serious offense; and this celebration had run out of wine. The symbolism of this event should not be lost on the reader, for the water used for purification was replaced by wine, that which would come to symbolize the blood of Christ. The blood of Christ did indeed supplant the Jewish ceremonial system in regard to the predicament of sin in light of a holy God.

That Jesus was aware of His "time" and the progress of His mission is evident throughout this Gospel (7:6, 8, 30; 8:20). The cross was ever before Jesus, and His movement toward that inevitable moment was to remain on God's timetable (12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:32; 17:1). As is the pattern of this Gospel, miracles are referred to as "signs" (*semeion*), intimating that they served as authentication for Jesus's nature and mission. In the Synoptics, the most commonly used word for miracles is *dunameis*, which refers to mighty works that demonstrate the power of God.

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. Followers of Jesus submit to His authority.

John 2:1-5: *On the third day a wedding took place in Cana of Galilee. Jesus's mother was there, and Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding as well. When the wine ran out, Jesus's mother told him, "They don't have any wine."*

"What has this concern of yours to do with me, woman?" Jesus asked. "My hour has not yet come."

"Do whatever he tells you," his mother told the servants.



Unpacking John 2:1-5

You've probably seen a movie or two where a wedding almost falls apart because of an unforeseen obstacle. The officiant doesn't show up, the bride and groom are stopped from arriving at the location, or the rings go missing. While it makes for an amusing wedding scene, the reason these make for good stories is they are significant obstacles that would create embarrassment and delay on a wedding day.

As Jesus began His public ministry, He performed His first public miracle at a wedding. Weddings in the ancient world were community celebrations, and a wedding in a small town like Cana would have been no exception. While scholars debate the exact location of Cana, it was in the foothills of Galilee, less than ten miles from Nazareth, where Jesus grew up. It's not surprising that Jesus and the disciples, along with Mary, were invited guests.

Weddings were multi-day events, and during this particular celebration, the wine ran out. This faux pas would have embarrassed the host and signaled a lack of hospitality for the guests. It certainly wouldn't have been the first impression the bride and groom wanted to make among their friends and neighbors.

Interestingly, Mary, the mother of Jesus, was the first one to act. Without the modern options to make a quick grocery store run, or send for Door-Dash, Mary looked to Jesus. While He had not yet performed any public miracles, Mary knew He could resolve the situation. She called Him over and said, *"They don't have any wine"* (v. 3).

"What has this concern of yours to do with me, woman?" Jesus asked. *"My hour has not yet come."* Jesus' response could also read, "What does this have to do with you and I?" It is important to note Jesus was not speaking to His mother disrespectfully. "Woman," or *gynē*, was a polite form of address that could mean a woman of any age, whether virgin, married, or widow. It is also used in John 19:26 and 20:15. Jesus gave attention to His mother's concern.

Notice the subtle shift in authority in this passage. Though Jesus was Mary's Son, He did not automatically yield to her request. He acknowledged God as His ultimate authority, and He would do what the Father wanted (John 14:31). Likewise, Mary demonstrated her understanding of Jesus's Lordship when she replied to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you," (v. 5). Mary's assumption was Jesus could and would act in His own authority. These last recorded words of Mary demonstrate her submission to Jesus as Savior and Lord.

According to John MacArthur, *"Mary's words to the servants—'Whatever He says to you, do it'—remain the wisest counsel ever given. She knew her role was not to command Christ, but to point others to His authority."*

True discipleship begins when we submit to Jesus's authority. When we recognize His ultimate authority and sovereignty over all things, the appropriate response, modeled by His own mother, is *"do whatever he tells you."*



DISCUSS

- Have you ever experienced something going wrong at a wedding? What happened?
- Why do you think Mary petitioned Jesus to intervene? What do her actions reveal about her character and her faith?
- What did Jesus mean by “My hour has not yet come”? When would His hour come? (See John 17:1)

2. Followers of Jesus experience His power.

John 2:6-10: *Now six stone water jars had been set there for Jewish purification. Each contained twenty or thirty gallons.*

“Fill the jars with water,” Jesus told them. So they filled them to the brim. Then he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the headwaiter.” And they did.

When the headwaiter tasted the water (after it had become wine), he did not know where it came from—though the servants who had drawn the water knew. He called the groom and told him, “Everyone sets out the fine wine first, then, after people are drunk, the inferior. But you have kept the fine wine until now.”

Unpacking John 2:6-10

Lots of brides look for the perfect wedding dress, hoping to transform into a princess on their special day. However, something far more transformative happens at a wedding. The exchanging of vows and the sharing of rings symbolize the most important transformation of all—two separate individuals form a new family unit where there wasn’t one before. As a man and woman become husband and wife, individuals transform into a family right before the congregation’s eyes. As God’s Word says in Genesis 2:26, “This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh.”

At this particular wedding feast, it was not only the bride and groom that were transformed, but also water into wine. Jesus created something of greater substance than it had been, and through it illustrated important principles about God’s Kingdom on earth.

Throughout the Old Testament, God used language of a bride and groom to describe His covenant with Israel. When the prophet Isaiah wrote about the time when God would send the Messiah, he described God as a faithful husband. *“Indeed, your husband is your Maker—his name is the LORD of Armies—and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer.”* (Isaiah 54:5) But He also said Israel had become like an unfaithful spouse: *“For the LORD has called you, like a wife deserted and wounded in spirit, a wife of one’s youth when she is rejected,” says your God. “I deserted you for a brief moment, but I will take you back with abundant compassion.”* (Isaiah 54:6-7).



Though Israel had sinned repeatedly against God, breaking their covenant vows, God in His righteousness and mercy would forgive and restore. Though the Old Testament prophets looked to the day when God would bring them back from captivity and renew His covenant with them, their words also pointed toward a greater day, when God would send Jesus as the Bridegroom of the church to save and betroth her to Himself forever. As Isaiah looked forward to the day of Christ's arrival he wrote, *"You will no longer be called Deserted, and your land will not be called Desolate; instead, you will be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land will be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so your sons will marry you; and as a groom rejoices over his bride, so your God will rejoice over you"* (Isaiah 62:4-5).

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus repeatedly told parables about weddings and likened Himself to a bridegroom and the Church as His bride. In Matthew 22:1-14, He compared the kingdom of a heaven to a king giving a wedding feast for his son, and in Matthew 25:1-13, Jesus compared the coming kingdom of God to ten virgins waiting for the groom to come for His bride. In John 3:28-30, John the Baptist echoes this betrothal imagery by declaring himself the joyful friend of the groom, and he rejoiced at the arrival of Jesus. Finally, the book of Revelation is full of pictures of the bride of Christ, the church, resplendent in glory and prepared for Him:

"Hallelujah, because our Lord God, the Almighty, reigns! Let us be glad, rejoice, and give him glory, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has prepared herself. She was given fine linen to wear, bright and pure. For the fine linen represents the righteous acts of the saints" (Revelation 19:6b-8).

"Now six stone water jars had been set there for Jewish purification. Each contained twenty or thirty gallons" (John 2:6). At the wedding feast, it would have been expected that each guest wash his or her hands upon arrival. These jars had likely already been used for that purpose, as Jesus instructed the servants to fill them up again. *"Fill the jars with water," Jesus told them.*" (v. 7a). Imagine what the servants might have been thinking in that moment. They were in the middle of a large wedding banquet, and now they were tasked with drawing 120-180 gallons of water from a nearby well. Though Jesus had not yet performed a public miracle, taught openly, or assembled a following, there was something about His request that prompted them to obey. Perhaps their desperation to save their master from public humiliation made them eager to try anything. Whatever the reason, the servants obeyed: *"So they filled them to the brim"* (v. 7b).

Our desperation should also draw us to Jesus. When our insufficiency meets His ability to provide, we, like the servants, often have a front-row seat to Christ's work on our behalf. *"Then he said to them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the headwaiter.' And they did"* (v. 8). Obedience precedes transformation. What if the servants responded, "Who is this guy? Why should we go through all that effort?" Instead, they obeyed and then they experienced transformation. Often, God will ask us to do something that doesn't make sense to us in the moment. Maybe it's to take a particular job, forgive someone who has hurt us, or say "yes" to a new ministry opportunity. When we hear His voice and walk in faith, we get the opportunity to see His transforming power at work in our lives.



“When the headwaiter tasted the water (after it had become wine), he did not know where it came from—though the servants who had drawn the water knew. He called the groom and told him, “Everyone sets out the fine wine first, then, after people are drunk, the inferior. But you have kept the fine wine until now” (vv. 9-10). Somewhere between “fill the jars” and “take it to the headwaiter” Jesus transformed the water into wine. It is also noteworthy that the ones who obeyed were the ones who witnessed the transformation, even though the whole crowd benefited. Jesus could have performed the miracle in front of the headwaiter or even the bridegroom. He could have done it in front of the whole wedding feast and gathered a crowd of followers right away. Instead, the servants were first to receive this initial demonstration of His transforming power. Jesus set the tone for the kind of “upside down” kingdom He was ushering in—one in which servants get the front row, the weak are made strong, and the foolish become wise. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:27, “God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong.” When it comes to Christ’s transforming power at work in lives, even the lowest of servants are invited to receive it.

When the servants drew the first glass, they took it to the headmaster of the banquet. This person was not the groom or a part of his family, but a hired person in charge of the entire multi-day event, akin to a wedding planner today. He was astonished at the quality of the wine and remarked that the groom and his family had saved the best for last. Most people served the best at the beginning, and the quality declined as the guests partook. This miracle, however, was a symbol of the arrival of a new covenant for God’s people (Hebrews 8:6).

We, like the wedding guests, are the happy recipients of Christ’s transforming power. When we follow Christ, we witness His transforming power at work in the church, but we also experience Christ’s transforming power at work in our lives. Transformation is evidence of new life and growth. In Matthew chapter 9, Jesus also used the image of a bridegroom at a wedding and wine. *“Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests be sad while the groom is with them? The time will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one patches an old garment with unshrunk cloth, because the patch pulls away from the garment and makes the tear worse. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. No, they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved” (Matthew 9:15-17).*

New wine needs new wine skins to transform into something better. The wedding host needed water to be turned into wine to meet the needs of the crowd. We need the transforming power of Christ in our lives too. When we look to Jesus to meet and supply our needs, and we listen to and obey His commands, His transforming power will be at work in our lives as well.



DISCUSS

- *How did this miracle point forward to other symbolism related to the new covenant of Jesus?*
- *How did Jesus's miracle impact more than just the servants and the headwaiter? Can you think of a time when God worked in someone's life in a powerful way and you indirectly benefitted from it?*
- *What evidence can someone see that Jesus's transforming power has been at work in your life?*

3. Followers of Jesus behold His glory.

John 2:11-12: *Jesus did this, the first of His signs, in Cana of Galilee. He revealed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.*

After this, he went down to Capernaum, together with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples, and they stayed there only a few days.

Unpacking John 2:11-12

After a modern wedding ceremony, guests move into the reception hall and the DJ kicks things off by presenting the wedding party. As bridesmaids and groomsmen enter the room in pairs, sometimes to silly music or slick dance routines, all is leading up to the big reveal—the first time the bride and groom are presented as husband and wife. Once they take a spin around the dance floor to raucous applause, everyone in attendance knows this signifies the party has begun. Soon the meal will be served, the cake cut, and the dance floor will open. The guests of honor have arrived, and now the festivities can really begin.

At the wedding in Cana, something more than the bride and groom was presented. The text says that Jesus used the miracle of turning water into wine to reveal His glory. You might recall that some of these disciples had first followed John the Baptist. They followed John's belief that the Messiah was about to be revealed. As Jewish young men, they had studied the Torah and had waited, along with generations of Jews, for God to send the promised Savior. On this night, the Messiah was revealed.

Think back to how the Messiah was first revealed to you. Maybe you first heard about Jesus as a young child, but one year at VBS the good news of Jesus touched your heart for the first time. Or maybe Jesus revealed Himself to you in Wednesday night youth group or a college Bible study. Or perhaps you met Jesus as an adult. Christ reveals Himself to people at many different times and in all kinds of ways. As Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3, *"The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit"* (John 3:8).

The common denominator for all believers is at some point in their story, Jesus revealed Himself to them, and they believed in Him. Knowing that Jesus is working to reveal Himself to



people on His time and in His way can give us confidence when we think about friends or loved one who do not yet know Jesus. We can trust His timeline. We can trust that Jesus reveals Himself for His glory, and so that people will put their trust in Him. Don't lose hope as you pray for others to come to know Christ. As Jesus said in John 5:17, *"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working"* (NIV).

Jesus also transforms the lives of those who put trust in Him. No longer did Andrew and the other disciple (presumably John) call themselves "John the Baptist's disciples." John the Baptist may have been the path God used to bring them to faith, but the transforming work of Jesus changed them. From the wedding of Cana on, they were *"his disciples"* (v. 11). Their experience with Christ made them altogether new people with a new identity. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!"*

When the disciples beheld Jesus's glory, not only did they have a transformation of identity, but they also had a transformation of purpose. After the wedding, Jesus, Mary, his brothers, and the disciples traveled to Capernaum and ministered there. When we say yes to Jesus, we are giving Him permission to rewrite the story and trajectory of our lives. The disciples were brand new to faith, but they had seen Jesus's glory, and where He went, they would follow.

Once we behold the glory of Jesus, we are not the same. Suddenly, our heart's desire is to follow Him and align our life's purpose with Him. For the disciples, this meant leaving behind home, as well as their first teacher, John the Baptist. For disciples of Jesus today, God's call on our lives could be to follow Him to any number of places and minister in any number of ways. The closer we walk with Jesus, the more we will see His transforming power and behold His glory.

DISCUSS

- *How was Jesus first revealed to you?*
- *The disciples believed in Jesus, and they immediately followed Him. What does that reveal about what should happen in someone's life when they put their faith in Christ?*
- *Is there someone you are praying will put their faith in Christ? How can this text give you encouragement as you wait and pray?*

DEEPER FOCUS

Warren Wiersbe says, "In this miracle, our Lord brought fullness where there was emptiness, joy where there was disappointment, and something internal for that which was only external." If someone were to examine your life for a week, what picture of Christ would they see reflected in you?



REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

At a wedding, two individuals are transformed into a new family unit, yet they remain unique individuals. How is that like or unlike what happens when we come to faith in Jesus?

Have you ever been surprised by Jesus's generosity in providing more than you needed? What can you share about that experience?

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

When was the last time you “beheld His glory”? What could you do this week to spend time worshiping Christ for who He is and for His transforming power at work in your life?

APPLY

How closely are you following Jesus today? Is there something that needs to shift to turn your attention to Jesus and His plans? Is there a specific work you sense Him calling you toward?

REFERENCES

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