

Despite all the planning and preparation, things sometimes go very wrong at weddings. Have a look at this: [Video: Wedding fails](#)

When Jesus attended a wedding near the start of his public ministry, there was also a disaster. But in this case, the disaster provided an opportunity for Jesus to reveal his glory and show that God had saved the best till last.

John 2:1-11: “On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.”

⁴ “Dear woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.”

⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim.

⁸ Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.”

They did so, ⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realise where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ and said, “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.”

¹¹ This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.”

1. Seven Signs

Throughout the four gospels, there are something like 35 miracles of Jesus recorded. But in his gospel, John only records a fraction of these. And John doesn’t call them miracles or acts of power as the other three gospel writers do. Instead, John calls them signs.

We read this morning, “[This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee.](#)” John 1:11 Most people would see that John recorded seven of these signs – although the numbering of them is debated.

But however we number them, the clear truth is that Jesus didn’t just perform these signs to respond to a need or because he could. Instead, he performed them to point to somethings. They were designed to point to the reality of who Jesus is and what he can do, so we’ll put our trust in him: “[He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.](#)” John 1:11.

So we should see something here that reveals the identity and mission of Jesus so we will trust in him. But what did this miracle point to? What are we to learn from it?

2. Jesus and Weddings

Well, many people see Jesus’ attendance at this wedding as a sign of the importance and value of marriage. And certainly, marriage is a wonderful gift from God.

a) A Gift From God

God designed marriage to bless us. He created Eve and gave her to Adam because he recognised that “[It is not good for the man to be alone.](#)” Genesis 2:18

And God instituted marriage to provide us with partnership, intimacy, security and love. “[For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.](#)” Genesis 2:24

And Jesus emphasised this truth. When he quoted from this verse he added: “[So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.](#)” Matthew 19:6 And so Jesus was willing to attend this wedding because it was a celebration of something good, something God-given, something God-honouring.

And in the Jewish custom they knew how to celebrate. If you’ve ever attended a wedding that seemed to go on for ever, just be glad that you didn’t live in those days.

In the evening of the day fixed for the wedding, the bridegroom and his friends went to the bride’s house. There they would collect his bride and bring her back to his or his parent’s house in a noisy processions with singing, music and dancing.

At the house there would be the marriage feast, followed by the marriage ceremony itself, followed by a whole week of wedding festivities when the bridegroom was expected to provide all the food and drink!

b) We are his Bride

But Jesus wasn't just celebrating this marriage because it was a gift from God. He was also pointing forward to something greater.

The Old Testament described the relationship between God and his people as a marriage. For example, Isaiah 54:5 says: **"Your Maker is your husband— the Lord Almighty is his name."** That's why when the nation of Israel worshipped the false gods of the nations around them, they were accused of adultery.

But Jesus came to restore this relationship. The church is described as the Bride of Christ, and Paul wrote: **"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."** Ephesians 5:26

And so one day, Jesus is going to come back for his bride, to take her to be with him forever. And heaven is described as a great wedding feast: **"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready."** Revelation 19:7

So in performing his first miracle at a wedding, Jesus pointing to this amazing reality and calling us into this relationship with himself.

3. Jesus and his Mum

Secondly, other people focus on this miracle as a sign of the importance of Jesus' mum in God's kingdom. **"When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, 'They have no more wine.'"** John 2:3. I've heard people say that because Jesus performed this miracle in response to the request of Mary, then this means that we can ask her for the miracles that we need in our lives. But that's not what this passage teaches.

a) The Priority of the Father's Will

Yes, Mary did bring this problem to Jesus. Running out of wine at a wedding feast was a shocking and embarrassing social blunder. It could even lead to a lawsuit!

So Mary was so concerned about this, and it was natural for her to tell Jesus. Most people assume that Joseph is absent from the later part of the gospels because he had died. So Mary turned to her eldest son to see if he could do sort it out.

But she wasn't asking for a miracle. Why would she? For the past 30 years, her son had lived what looked like an ordinary life without any miracles. Do you remember what his neighbours said when he went back home: **"What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! ³ Isn't this the carpenter?"** Mark 6:2-3

And Jesus' response to his mum was far from positive. In fact there was a gentle rebuke: **"Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come."** John 2:4 There is no harshness here. Jesus addressed his mum in the same caring way that he did when on the cross. But his words show that he wasn't focused on doing what his mum asked. Instead, he was focused on his Father's mission and his Father's timing.

5 times this gospel says that Jesus' time had not yet come. Later, it says 3 times that the time had come. Each time it refers to his death on the cross – which was the reason why he came, the focus of the mission his Father had given him.

And so Jesus was saying that his actions were under God's direction and nobody, not even his own mum, could push their own agenda onto him!

And that's something that we all need to remember. When we come to Christ, we cannot dictate to him what he should do. Instead, like him, we need to submit to our heavenly Father's will and timing. We need to say with Jesus, **"Not my will, but yours be done."** Luke 22:42

b) The Privilege of Prayer

And Mary seemed to accept this. She didn't complain about what Jesus said. Instead she told the servants: **"Do whatever he tells you."** John 2:5 And it was in response to this, that Jesus then turned the water into wine!

So although Mary was involved here in bringing this need to Jesus, she wasn't unique in this kind of role. Throughout the gospels we see many people doing this.

- A royal official begged Jesus to heal his son.
- Four men carried their paralysed friend to Jesus.
- Jairus begged Jesus to come and heal his dying daughter.

So instead of this pointing to the special relationship Mary had to Jesus, this simply points to the privilege every believer in Jesus has. Listen to how Don Carson explains Mary's role here: "Mary approaches Jesus as his mother, and is reproached; ...she responds as a believer, and her faith is honoured."

And so we can follow Mary's example here and bring our needs directly to Jesus. As Peter said: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." 1 Peter 5:7

4. Jesus and Wine

But still we need to ask, why did Jesus change the water into wine? Yes, it was a deeply embarrassing situation. But why did Jesus chose this situation to perform his first miracle? What is this supposed to teach us?

a) A Dangerous Drink

Well, some people take this to prove that Jesus approves of their drinking habits. But that's not what Jesus was doing.

In Jesus' day, the alcohol content of wine was much less. It wasn't distilled, rather it was diluted with 2 or 3 parts water to 1 part wine. So it is highly unlikely that drunkenness was part of this wedding celebration. In fact one of the roles of the master of banquet was to ensure people enjoyed the party without getting drunk!

And the Bible warns again and again about the danger of alcohol abuse:

- It warns of the violence it encourages: "Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise." Proverbs 20:1
- It warns of the poverty it causes: "He who loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and oil will never be rich." Proverbs 21:17
- And it describes the disastrous consequence of drunkenness in the lives of people like Noah and Lot.

And so Paul wrote: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Ephesians 5:18
So Jesus was not encouraging drunkenness. Whether we believe that we can use alcohol in moderation, or whether like me, we believe that it is better just to stay clear of it completely, we need to be aware of its dangers and be wise about how we use it.

b) A Symbol Of Joy

But why, if alcohol is dangerous, did Jesus turn water into wine? Well it was because of the symbolic use of wine in the Scriptures. It is often seen as a sign of blessing and a symbol of joy:

- When Isaac blessed his son Jacob, he said, "May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness— an abundance of grain and new wine." Genesis 27:28
- And Psalm 104 praises God for the bountiful provisions that he has given. And one of these gifts is "wine that gladdens the heart of man." Psalm 104:15

So in turning water into wine, Jesus was showing that his ministry is about bringing the blessing and joy that we long for in our lives:

- Through Moses, God turned water into blood as a sign of God's coming judgement on Egypt.
- But Jesus turned water into wine, as a sign of God's coming blessing and joy to us.

Later on in this gospel, Jesus said, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." John 15:11 Jesus came to bring us real joy!

c) A Sign of the New Covenant

But there is something more here. Did you notice where the water was taken from to turn it into wine? "Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons." John 2:6

Whenever guests arrived, the water from these pots were poured over their hands. This wasn't for hygiene purposes, but instead it was a ritual act of cleansing. If someone ate with unwashed hands, they would be considered defiled before God. This was something the Pharisees accused Jesus and his disciples of doing.

But of course this water could never actually make anyone clean in God's sight. Like all of the rituals and ceremonies of

Judaism, it couldn't clean what mattered the most. It couldn't make anyone new on the inside, it couldn't bring fresh power into their lives, it couldn't wash away their sin.

The Pharisees focussed on these external rituals thinking that it purified them. But in the end they were still unclean on the inside. Jesus said: **"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees... on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."** Matthew 23:27-28

And so these water jars are a symbol of the powerlessness of the Old Covenant. Hebrews 10:1 says about the Old Covenant Law that: **"It can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship."**

But Jesus came to bring something better. Jesus didn't come to repeat the rules and rituals of the Old Covenant. Instead he came to bring a New Covenant, one that would bring real transformation from the inside out.

When the master of the banquet tasted the wine that Jesus had produced, he said to the bridegroom: **"Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."** John 2:10

In the past, God gave amazing gifts through the Old Covenant – the Law, the sacrificial system, the Promised Land, security and prosperity of the kingdom, access to God through the temple, identity as God's people.

But God had saved the best till now! Now through Jesus, we have

- A better law, written on heart and minds, not on stone tablets: **"I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts."** Hebrews 8:10
- A better sacrifice, as **"By one sacrifice he made perfect for ever those who are being made holy."** Hebrews 10:14
- A better promise of a place in God's house, as Jesus said, **"I am going there to prepare a place for you."** John 14:2.
- A better security and prosperity of **"An inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you."** 1 Peter 1:4
- And better access to God: **"We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus."** Hebrews 10:19
- A better identity, as **"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,"** Galatians 3:26

What Jesus was bringing was better than anything that had come before. God had saved the best till now.

And that is what we've celebrated this morning in our communion time. Jesus said that: **"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."** Luke 22:20 This cup of blessing and joy can only come to us, because Jesus willingly took the cup of suffering and death on the cross.

Conclusion

So this is the first miraculous sign in Jesus' ministry. This is the revelation of Jesus' glory:

- His attendance at this wedding pointed forward to the wonder of the day when Christ will come back for his bride.
- His rebuke to his mum pointed to the reality that Jesus came to finish the work that his Father gave him to do.
- His miraculous transformation of water into the best of wine, pointed to the fact that God had saved the best till now – that Jesus had come to release us from the rules, rituals and condemnation of the Old Covenant and bring us into the forgiveness, freedom and fullness of joy of the New!

And God's call to us today, is to respond as his disciples did, and put our faith in him!

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February 3rd 2019