

# Water into Wine

## John 2:1-11

John's majestic Gospel serves as a magnificent gallery which displays the glory of Jesus as no other literature on earth can. As you enter in chapter 1, John gives convincing testimony of the deity of Jesus and declares Him to be the Son of God. Jesus is shown in all the majesty of His place in the Godhead. Verse 14 said, "**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.**"

In chapters 2 through 12 through his narrative John will focus on seven miracles that he calls signs. Remember that in John's purpose statement in chapter 20 he writes:

30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these 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. (John 20:30-31)

A sign points to something beyond itself. John chose these particular signs because they show who Jesus is and what He came to do. The signs are almost like a parable in that there is a spiritual meaning behind the story. These miracles are actual historical events in the life of Jesus. If you had been at the wedding in Cana you could have tasted the wonderful water that had been turned into wine. Yet, because it is a sign, it also has a deeper lesson to teach us. These are signs call us to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. They call us to behold His glory and to experience His fullness and His grace.

The last verse of today's passage confirms this purpose. After the story of the wedding of Cana in John 2:1–10, John says in verse 11, "**This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.**" So the focus is on seeing the glory of Christ and believing in Him. His disciples saw his glory, and they believed in Him. That's why John is writing this Gospel. He wants to reveal the glory of Christ to us. And he wants us to receive the grace of believing.

So it would be appropriate for us to ask today: what is the significance of the sign of Jesus turning water into wine? How does it show His glory? Why should we believe in Him?

With some of the other signs that John reports, the significance is clearly stated or is obvious from the context. In chapter 6, Jesus feeds the 5,000 and then proclaims (6:35), "**I am the bread of life.**" In 8:12 He claims, "**I am the light of the world,**" and then in chapter 9 He opens the eyes of a man born blind. In 11:25, He declares, "**I am the resurrection and the life,**" and then He raises Lazarus from the dead. But here there is no explanation to tell us the significance or deeper meaning of the miracle. To determine the intended meaning, we need to consider the context as well as some clues in the account itself.

Borrowing from Steven Cole ([The Joyous Salvation that Jesus Brings](#)) I'm going to explain this narrative by looking at the situation (2:1-2); the sign (2:3-10); and its significance (2:11).

First, let's read the text, John 2:1-11:

- 1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.**
- 2 Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding.**
- 3 And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."**
- 4 Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come."**
- 5 His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."**
- 6 Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece.**
- 7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim.**
- 8 And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it.**
- 9 When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom.**
- 10 And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!"**
- 11 This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.**

First, let's look at,

### **1. The situation: A wedding in Cana of Galilee (2:1-5).**

"**On the third day**" (2:1) probably refers to the third day after Jesus' encounter with Nathanael who was from Cana of Galilee (1:43). Cana was probably just a few miles from Nazareth, where Jesus grew up. John doesn't tell us what connection Mary had to the wedding party, but it must have been significant. Verse 1 says "**the mother of Jesus was there.**" Mary was already at the marriage feast and may have had something to do with helping to cater the food and drink. She seems to be one of the first to recognize the problem when the wine is running out and she takes charge of the situation.

Verse 2 tells us "**Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding.**" The disciples at this point would probably be just the five or six men

mentioned in chapter 1. John doesn't mention "the twelve" until chapter 6 and he never tells us how the other seven came to be disciples. In fact, only seven of the disciples are mentioned by name in John's gospel.

Jewish weddings had three stages. First was the betrothal, which took place at least a year before the wedding celebration. The families of the bride and groom entered into a legal covenant that could not be broken except by divorce. But the bride and groom did not yet live together, the groom went back to his father's house to prepare a home for his bride. The bride continued to live with her parents. The second phase was the procession, where the groom and his friends would go to the bride's house and joyously lead her and her friends back to his house. The third stage, which is described in our text, was the wedding feast, sort of a prolonged reception which could last for as long as a week. It was a major social event for the community.

Verse 3 tells us the problem that arose at the wedding, "**And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."**" To run out of wine at a wedding was a major social blunder that would have been very embarrassing and even could have led to legal action against the groom's family, which had failed to provide the proper wedding gift. It may mean that they were poor. But in a shame-based culture, this social mishap would have been hard to live down.

Why did Mary approach Jesus with the groom's problem? What exactly was Mary expecting Jesus to do?

Was she expecting Him to perform a miracle? John tells us in verse 11 that this was the first miracle that Jesus did. Was she simply depending on Him as her oldest son? Joseph does not appear in any of the Gospels after the episode in Luke 2 when Jesus was 12 years old. Many Bible scholars believe that is because Joseph must have died by this time, making Jesus the head of the family.

But even though Jesus had not yet performed any miracle, Mary knew that the angel had announced Jesus' virgin birth. She knew He was the Son of God (Luke 1:32-33). She treasured in her heart the miracles and prophecies surrounding His birth (Luke 2:41-51). Surely she knew John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus and that He had begun to gather followers. May be she thought it was time that Jesus do something to demonstrate that He was the Messiah. Mary is very careful not to tell Jesus what to do, but it seems clear that she hopes He will do something.

Jesus' reply to His mother strikes us as abrupt and rude (2:4), "**Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.**" To call someone, "woman" was not rude in that culture. Jesus used the same word to speak tenderly to Mary from the cross (John 19:26). So it was a term of respect, but it certainly wasn't a customary way for a son to address his mother. It seems to put some distance between Jesus and Mary.

The next phrase puts even more distance between them. **“What does your concern have to do with Me?”** is a Hebrew idiom, literally “what to me and to you.” This expression is found a number of times in the Old Testament (Judges 11:12; 18:24; 2 Sam. 16:10). In the gospels, on several occasions the demons speak word like these to Jesus (Matt. 8:29; Mark 1:24; 5:7; Luke 4:34; 8:28). It serves to put some distance between the two parties. Jesus uses this same expression to ask Mary just what has caused her to think the problem she has identified is His problem as well as hers.

The reason for this distancing from Mary is clear when Jesus said, **“My hour has not yet come.”** As we read through the Gospel of John we will come to see a great significance in that statement. What is “his hour”? Jesus will use this phrase several times in John referring to the hour of his death, resurrection, and ascension.

(John 7:30) **30 Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come.**

(John 8:20) **20 These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come.**

(John 12:23, 27) **23 But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. ... 27 "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour.**

(John 13:1) **1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father,** having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

(Jhn 17:1) **1 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You,"**

Jesus' hour was the hour of his death when the Lamb of God would take away the sin of the world. Jesus' timing was His Father's timing, not His mothers. Jesus was indicating to Mary that there was now a new relationship between them. He is under the authority of His heavenly Father, not her.

Jesus will make this clear in the Gospel of John. Jesus was absolutely bound to his Father's will in heaven and to no one on earth. John 8:28: **“I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.”** Jesus is entirely in the sway of his heavenly Father.

Nevertheless Mary is not put off by these words of Jesus. She must have taken some hope from His answer, because she tells the servants (2:5), **“Whatever He says to you, do it.”** By the way, that's not bad advice for any situation: Whatever Jesus tells you to do in His Word, do it!

That is the situation. Now let's turn to the miracle itself,

## **2. The sign: Jesus turns water into wine (2:6-10).**

**6 Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece.**

**7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim.**

The six stone waterpots were there for the "**purification of the Jews.**" They were large, twenty or thirty gallon pots. Together they would have held between 120-180 gallons. The Jewish purification rituals were extensive. Later these oral traditions would be written down in the Jewish Mishnah. That work contains 126 chapters with 1,001 separate items of purification. There are over 30 chapters with instructions about purifying hands and vessels. Judaism had become a religion that emphasized external cleansing and rituals, but often their hearts were far from God (Mark 7:6-8). One time when Jesus failed to do the ceremonial washing at a Pharisee's house, Jesus said to him, "**Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness,**" (Luke 11:39).

John notes that the servants filled the waterpots to the brim, just as Jesus had instructed, so there would be no room for wine to be added. Up to this point I doubt that either the servants or Mary, or our Lord's newly-acquired disciples have a clue as to what Jesus is about to do. When the six stone pots are filled, Jesus instructs the servants to draw out some of the "**water**" from one of the pots and to serve it to the master of the feast. Here is where Mary's words to the servants are put to the test.

I am not sure we can understand just how difficult an assignment this was for these servants. It was one thing to fill the stone waterpots, which was probably a part of their responsibilities. But who would ever think of someone drinking this "water"? How many of you drink dish water or bath water, let alone serve it to your guests?

Not one of those servants could have ever imagined what Jesus would say next:

**8 And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it.**

We're not told exactly how Jesus did the miracle. He simply told the servants to draw some water out of the pots and take it to the master of the feast, who was somewhat like a head waiter. Somewhere in the process, the water had become wine.

**9 When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom.**

**10 And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!"**

The master of the feast didn't know where this wine had come from and we're not told whether he (or the bridegroom) ever did know. But he attests to its superb quality. It was better than the good wine that the host had served earlier in the wedding feast. Usually, he notes, the trick is to save the inferior wine until last. When everyone has had their fill of wine, their taste will not be as discerning, and thus the inferior wine may not be noticed. But this wine is the best yet! The bridegroom has outdone himself, saving the very best until last. What looks like certain shame has turned to sudden fame for the bridegroom and the head steward.

So we have seen the situation and the sign. What does it mean?

**3. The significance: This sign manifests Jesus' glory so we would believe in Him. (2:11)**

Look again at verse 11,

**11 This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.**

The result of this miracle is that His disciples believed in Him. They had already believed, but for John faith isn't a "one-time and you're done" sort of thing. You believe in Christ at the moment of salvation, but you go on believing more and more as you see more of His glory. What does this sign show about Jesus' glory?

I see four markers that give us a clue to the significance of Jesus turning water into wine. The first one is the context and timing which points us to creation. And so we see,

**A. The glory of a new creation.**

In verse 1 John indicates that this sign happened **On the third day**. Going back to chapter 1 starting in verse 19 John records a week of consecutive days. Four days in chapter 1 and now three more until the wedding in chapter 2.

Now remember how John began his Gospel, "**In the beginning was the Word.**" It brings to mind the opening of the Book of Genesis: "**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.**"

Why is that significant? It is significant because on the seventh day, God rested from the work of creation. And now John might be saying to us, "On this seventh day, He performs a work of *new* creation." Think of it. Here in this chapter, He's going to make *new* wine. In just a few verses He's going to talk about building a new temple. In John 3, He's going to talk to Nicodemus about a new birth. In John 4, with the woman at the well at Sychar, He's going to talk about a new living water. So, what we have here is John's picture of 2 Corinthians 5:17, "**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have**

**passed away; behold, all things have become new.”** And in a way, that's the sign that John is giving to us. The new creation.

In Romans 8:17, this fallen creation is groaning and travailing in birth. It's waiting for what? The new creation. The new heavens and the new earth, and the miracles of Jesus are a bit like a foretaste, a little snapshot of that new creation. The end is bursting forth into the present, into the now in which we live. And here's the little taste of it.

That's one significance. The second is:

## **B. The glory of the obedient Son.**

We see this in the way that Jesus dealt with His mother. As I said, Jesus chooses His words carefully to reveal a radical allegiance to God's will above his mother's will—and above all human attachments and affections. Jesus' abrupt response to His mother indicate His obedience must be to His Heavenly Father.

What makes this so significant is that Jesus goes right ahead and takes care of the problem by doing a miracle. So he could have said very gently, “Yes, Mother, I know. I'll take care of it immediately.” That's what he did, but that's not what he said. That makes us ask why he spoke to her this way.

John Piper writes that it is like Jesus is saying to Mary, “*Your relationship with me as mother has no special weight here. You are a woman like every other woman. My Father in heaven, not any human being, determines what miracles I perform. And the pathway into my favor is faith, not family.*”

Part of Jesus' glory is his radical freedom from family partiality and his radical allegiance to his Father in heaven. “**We beheld his glory, glory of the only begotten of the Father**” (John 1:14).

## **C. The glory of the ultimate purifier.**

There is a reason Jesus chooses to use water jars that were appointed for “purification,” not for drinking, when he performs his miracle and fills them with wine. And the reason is that he means to point to his own death as the ultimate purification for sins that would nullify and replace the Jewish purification rituals.

Even though Jesus rebuffed his mother's request by saying “**my hour has not yet come,**” that is, the hour of His glorification in death and resurrection, nevertheless he goes ahead and does the miracle. So it seems to me that what Jesus is doing here is saying, “*No, the climactic hour of my death is not yet here, but I will give you a sign of my death. I will give you an acted out parable of my death and what it will mean.*”

It seems that Jesus wants to say that this is what “my hour” will be like that He will take the purification rituals of Israel and replace them with a decisively new way of purification—namely, with His blood. Later in John 6:55, Jesus said, “**My blood is true drink.**” “**Unless you . . . drink [the] blood [of the Son of Man], you have no life in you**” (John 6:53).

There is one way to be clean before God. John says it plainly in Revelation 7:14, **“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”** The glory of Jesus is that he alone, once and for all, made purification for sins. You don’t turn to ritual. You turn to Jesus.

#### **D. The glory of the true bridegroom.**

In John 3:29–30, John the Baptist speaks one last time about the superiority of Jesus. He says, **“He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.”**

The last thing John the Baptist says about Jesus in this Gospel is that He is the bridegroom who has the bride. And the first miracle Jesus does is to complete what the bridegroom at a wedding could not do.

Wine is a symbol of joy, especially of joy in the coming Messianic kingdom. Isaiah 25:6 promises, **“And in this mountain The LORD of hosts will make for all people A feast of choice pieces, A feast of wines on the lees, Of fat things full of marrow, Of well-refined wines on the lees.”** Joel 2:19, 24, promises, **“19 The LORD will answer and say to His people, “Behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil, And you will be satisfied by them; I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations. ... 24 The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, And the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil.”** (See, also, Jer. 31:12; Joel 2:19, 24; Amos 9:13-14.) The wine is a symbol of the Kingdom of the Messiah.

Jesus is the Son of God who brings the transforming joy of salvation to all that believe.

This miracle emphasizes the abundant provision of Christ for our needs. The wine had run out. There was no way to get more to supply the need of the guests and to save the groom from social disaster. But it’s when we come to the end of ourselves that the Lord displays His power. He is the true bridegroom who provides for His bride.

Therefore, as John says in Revelation 19:7, **“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.”** Have you made yourself ready? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?