

Come and See: Encounters with Jesus in the Gospel of John

Jesus and the Wedding Feast – John 2:1-11

September 17, 2023

By Pastor David Fields

“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.” – John 2:11

I. Jesus is God’s Glory on Display

Signs. In the other three Gospel stories – the biographies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke – when Jesus does a miracle the writers use the word *dunamis*. It’s where we get our English word “dynamite.” It could be translated “deeds of power” or “mighty deeds”, or simply “miracle.”

But John chooses a different word, *semeion*, which we translate as “sign.” John wants to highlight that these powerful deeds are a signal, a “signpost” to greater realities, and to what is yet to come.

In what sense does this “sign” reveal Jesus’ glory?

A. Ancient Weddings and God’s Kindness

Jesus’ mother says: “They have no more wine.” In that culture, this isn’t just embarrassing, it was a social disaster. The wine is the single most important part of keeping the party going. Scholars even suggest that the groom is opening himself up to a potential lawsuit from the bride’s family for this lack of provision.

Jesus is **doing something very kind – very generous**, to save the groom from the social disaster and shame that this would bring on him and his family.

Where does God show up? In the middle of life. With a couple, and their community, as they join their lives and hearts.

Take Home: Whatever you are going through right now, there is nothing too small to bring to him – to ask him about. God is very kind and present to those in hard spaces – those who are facing pressures.

“Cast all your cares on him, for he cares for you.” – 1 Peter 5:7

B. God is Sovereign and Free

When Jesus’ mother mentions the lack of wine, Jesus responds:

“Woman, why do you involve me, my hour has not yet come?” – John 2:4

"Woman" does not a disrespectful term here. So why this language? Jesus is distancing himself from his mom as *simply his mom*, as someone who might assume an "insider track" with him.

When Jesus says: "Why do you involve me?" it's telling us that in regard to the timeline of Jesus' revealing his glory – of his actions in history – there is no one, not even his mother, who has an "insider-track." Jesus is working on the time that God the Father sets.

The True God, revealed in Jesus Christ, the Living God is free to act according to his own will and own timing and will not be manipulated by anyone.

"[Jesus' disciples] will not find their petitions immediately granted, but as they go humbly and believingly along the path of obedience they are again and again "surprised by joy." Things happen which authenticate themselves as signs of Jesus' love and power. They have his signature. They manifest his glory." – Lesslie Newbigin

We see in Jesus the God who is kind, and free. We see the God who is powerful to act but will never be forced or coerced by anyone. He will act in our best interest, in *your* best interest, but not according to your plans or timing. He is master of the wine, and the time.

Take Home: Mary is showing us a beautiful kind of faith. She mentions to Jesus her concern and then just lets it rest in his timing, saying to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you."

Again, we bring our requests, but then trust his timing. He is no Greek-god who needs to be placated or could ever be muscled to do our will. He is good and kind, and totally free to do what is ultimately in our best interest.

C. From Purification to Party

In ancient Jewish culture, wine was a sign of God's blessing, and abundant, delicious wine was commonly used by the prophets as a sign that God's reign had come at long last. So, this "sign" signals that in Jesus, this time is now coming.

The stone jars here were for Jewish purification rituals. Jesus shows how what he's doing will 'replace' many of the religious aspects of Judaism. Because the True Bridegroom has not arrived, he's here, there will be a new way to relate to God with Jesus joy at the centre of it.

"Purification is a negative action. The water removes uncleanness but does not give the fullness of joy. What the law cannot supply, Jesus will give – in superabundance." – Lesslie Newbigin

Jesus has taken those pots that were used for purification – to clean the outside, to represent the "washing" away of impurity – and he's filled them with something that goes inside us and changes us, the wine of gladness and joy.

Extravagant Quantity

This is between 75-115 litres per stone jar. That number, times 6 = that's up to 690L, or roughly 950 bottles of wine. Why so much? Jesus is signaling, in line with the prophet Amos about the time of God's new creation will break in:

"New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills." – Amos 9:13

Highest Quality

And this wine is the finest. God has been revealing himself through his interactions with Israel, through the prophets, but he is saving his "best" for this moment. He reveals himself most truly through his Son Jesus (See John 14:8-9; Heb 1:1-3).

D. The Unique Identity of Jesus as God Incarnate

In the Old Testament, "glory" was the word to describe a physical manifestation of the very presence of God. This "glory" was shown as a "cloud."

But John is telling us that this radiant, divine presence of God with his people – it isn't just a symbolic cloud. That glory is now seen in **this person**. This one, Jesus, is God's own presence – God himself in human flesh and blood.

"In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God, and the Word was God."
– John 1:1

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." – John 1:14

Jesus is not merely a Rabbi, a teacher, a leader. This sign begins to unveil how Jesus is "God the Son," and shares the same "substance" with God the Father. It's drawing us into the mystery of how there is one God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

If Jesus is not just a good teacher, if this text of Scripture is telling us the truth about him, then we can't have simply a mild admiration for him, or to simply pick and choose those things he teaches that we like, but disregard what we don't. He's either God and King, or not. He is either *your* God and King or not.

II. A Picture of Our Future (the Kingdom of God is a Party!)

The people of God now live in light of the glorious future that is to come. And it changes how we live in the present.

“We [God’s people] are called to model and display that new creation in symphonies and family life, in restorative justice and poetry, in holiness and service to the poor, in politics and painting.”
– N.T. Wright

In this sign, Jesus is giving us a foretaste of what the future reign of God is all about. He’s pointing back to the promised future we read of in Isaiah 25:6:

“On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich foods for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines.” – Isaiah 25:6

Jesus has come to make this promise our reality. But how? The Isaiah text goes on to say:

“On this mountain he [the Lord Almighty] will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers the 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. The Lord has spoken.” – Isaiah 25:7-8

How do we enter this joy?

By the end of John’s Gospel, we’ll see that way Jesus invites us to experience his joy forever is that he came to climb this mountain, and then to give his life on the cross. He will suffer for us, in our place, and on the **third day**, to rise and defeat death forever.

I don’t think it’s an accident that our text begins with: “On the **third day** there was a wedding...” – John 2:1. The “third day” language is picked up all over the New Testament as a reference to the day of Jesus’ resurrection.

And right in the next scene of John 2, Jesus will say: “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again **in three days.**” And everyone is confused. But then the text tells us: “But the temple he had spoken of was **his own body.**” – John 2:19; 21

So, what’s our response?

The Psalmist says to “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” – Psalm 34:8

Belief is something you do with your mind, and your life.

Life Group Discussion and Reflection Questions

Open Up: Consider a time that you went to a great wedding celebration. What made it so good? Or talk about a wedding party that flopped. What was that like?

Dig In: Read the story of Jesus’ first “sign” in **John 2:1-12.**

1. What features of the story surprised you? Made you think? Confuse you? Why?
2. Verse 11 tells us that this sign is a way of Jesus' revealing his glory – of demonstrating how God's presence is "breaking in" and now centres on the person of Jesus himself. How does the fact that Jesus makes an enormous amount of high-quality wine to keep a party going, to help a couple celebrate their love at a wedding – how does that enrich, challenge, or connect with your image of what God is like?
3. In **Revelation 21:1-5** we read of what is coming at the end of history as we know it. Read that passage and notice the language of a wedding (and the reference to Isaiah 25:8). Now, read **Revelation 19:9**. Notice that the blessed ones are invited to the "wedding supper of the Lamb," that is, of Jesus. Jesus' first sign in John 2 is signaling that he has come to make that dream a reality – that this is the future that awaits all who trust in him; a time of feasting and joy that is unending.
 - a. In what ways does this fill you with hope?
 - b. How might knowing that this is our future lead you to live in the present?

Prayer: Let these images of who God and the good future he is bringing lead you into a time of praise and thanksgiving. Ask the Lord of the wedding feast to fill you with the joy of knowing his party has a place for you at the table. Ask that God would stir your heart to invite others to join in – to come to know the True God who is revealed in Jesus.