



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 2: 1-11

Winter 2021-22

"Joy In Cana"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, it's good to have you back. Well our text this morning is John chapter 2 and we're going to look at verses 1 through 11. The Lord has begun calling His disciples. One of them is Nathaniel who gave this great confession of faith in verse 49 of chapter 1, "You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel."

Now we read in verse one of chapter 2,

2 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; **2** and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. **3** When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." **4** And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come." **5** His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." **6** Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each. **7** Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." So they filled them up to the brim. **8** And He said to them, "Draw *some* out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it *to him*. **9** When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom, **10** and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first, and when *the people* have drunk freely, *then*

he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹ This beginning of *His* signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.

John 2: 1-11

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study together in it.

(Message) "Wine is a mocker", my grandmother told me that. The Proverbs tell us that; "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? ... Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger over wine..." (Pro 23:29-30). Proverbs 21:17 tells us also, 'Those who love wine won't get rich.'

So why did Jesus turn water into wine? It's been the subject of criticism. Some have dismissed it as 'trivial' and as 'a luxury miracle'. Others have just been troubled by it. So why did Jesus do it? And why did John include it?

Those questions are worth asking because this is how Jesus' public ministry in John's Gospel begins. In verse 11 John calls it, the "...beginning of *His* signs..." In fact, chapters 2 through 12 are called 'The Book of Signs'. There are seven in the Gospel, and that's very significant. At the end of the Gospel, (in fact the last verse of the Gospel), John wrote that Jesus did many other signs, "...which if they were written in detail...the world itself would not contain the books that would be written." (Jn 21:25). But John included only seven of that multitude of miracles; he was very selective in the ones that he recounted. And the fact that he chose this one, the first one, indicates that it wasn't trivial. —It's important; it was a sign. So this sign pointed to facts about Christ that is revealed in the miracle; truths about who He is and what He has done; truths about why He came into this world. In fact because it is the Lord's first miracle, it reveals the meaning of His ministry.

In journalism the beginning sentence, or the opening paragraph of a news story, is called *the lead*. It's the most important part of the story. It contains the essential information. It also sets the tone of the article and should grab the reader's interest so that they continue reading. Maybe John chapter 2, verses 1 through 11, functions like a *lead*—it gives important information on the Lord's mission.

And the meaning of it all is illustrated by wine, which while it is called a mocker, it's also considered a blessing when not abused: Psalm 104, verse 15, "Wine makes man's heart glad." Wine is a symbol of joy. In fact, the Rabbis said, 'Without wine there is no joy.' It's an important detail in the banquet of the kingdom age, described in Isaiah 25, verse 6, which will have wine; "refined, aged wine." "And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces." (vs8).

Now that's our future and it will be an age of great joy, blessing, and celebration. That is foreshadowed in this first miracle, the beginning of His signs. The joy of eternal life that Christ has gained for His people.

But that's true now. Christ came into this world of woe to give the joy of forgiveness, the joy of eternal life, through the shedding of His blood—which is represented by wine. So the greatness of His ministry, and the salvation it gained, is illustrated in the first miracle He did at a wedding—and the joy He gave to everyone there from the wine He made.

It happened in Cana, a little town near the city of Nazareth in Galilee. Jesus, His mother and disciples, were invited to a wedding there. Maybe it was the wedding of some relatives—or maybe Nathaniel invited them since he came from Cana. Jewish weddings were always festive occasions. Alfred Edersheim, in his work, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, describes all that was involved in one: How on the evening of the marriage the bride was led in a torchlight procession from her father's house to the house of the bridegroom. The people would join in the procession and along the way they would shout words of praise to the bride until she arrived at the bridegroom's house where the ceremony took place.

At the end, the couple would wash their hands ceremonially and the wedding feast would begin. Sometimes wedding celebrations could last as long as a week. And since Cana was a small town, it would likely have been a community celebration with refreshments provided for all of the guests.

The passage begins just as a crisis occurred—the wine ran out. That may not seem like a very serious problem to us, but in that day it was a social disgrace that would never be forgotten. It was considered a failure of hospitality and could, in fact, have made the bridegroom's family liable to a lawsuit. And if this was a poor family, it would ruin them financially.

So it was a crisis—and a major one. And when the Lord's mother learned of it, she discretely informed her Son, "They have no wine." (vs3). Now at this point in His life, He'd never done a miracle. She didn't know what He would do but she knew He could do something about it. And she knew that her Son was the Messiah, and perhaps was suggesting by this, that this would be a good time to reveal Himself as the Messiah.

But the Lord's answer to her was, "Woman, what does this have to do with us? My hour has not yet come."; which to our ears sounds a bit harsh; kind of condescending, calling His mother "Woman." It wasn't. He used the same word from the cross when He gave her into the care of the apostle John; He said, "Woman, behold, your son!" (Jn 19:26) Different explanations have been given for this use of the word. F. F. Bruce suggested its meaning is something like "woman dear," which is an expression that's used in northern Ireland; and is respectful.

Here it wasn't disrespectful; we can be sure of that. But it was deliberate. He avoided using the word *mother* in order to make an important point—that a new relationship had begun between them. He was beginning His public ministry and so things would be different. He had grown up as an obedient and a loving son—but now they must have a new relationship. Mary could no longer exercise her authority as a mother over her son. She had to come to Him now as her Savior.

That's indicated in the rest of His reply to her, "My hour has not yet come." And that word *hour* is used all through John's Gospel as a reference to the cross; the time of

the crucifixion. From the very beginning of His ministry, the cross was foremost in Christ's mind. And every step toward the cross was directed by His heavenly Father; He had to wait on Him.

Still, Mary knew her Son and knew that He could not ignore this problem. She knew that He was not indifferent to this young couple's embarrassment and He would not miss an opportunity to help. So she spoke to the servants and said, "Whatever He says to you, do it." (vs5). And moments later He moved quietly to do the right thing.

There were six stone water pots standing there that were used for the Jewish custom of purification. Each one had a capacity of 20 or 30 gallons of water. And so, the Lord instructed the servants to fill them with water, which they did, and filled each one "to the brim." Then He told them to 'Draw some and take it to the head waiter', the man in charge of the feast.

By now the Lord had turned the water into wine, not by any obvious act, but secretly, by divine fiat, by an act of His will, by His creative Word. It was done discretely. And that was, in itself, an act of love on the Lord's part—He kept the problem from becoming public. Only a few knew of the possible embarrassment for this wedding party.

Not even, it seems, the head waiter knew about this. When he tasted the 'water turned to wine' he was impressed with its quality. He had never tasted wine like it before. Not knowing what had happened, he called to the groom and he said, "Every man serves the good wine first, and when *the people* have drunk freely, *then he serves* the poorer *wine; but,*" he added, "you have kept the good wine until now." (vs10). And that statement confirms that it was actually wine that the Lord made.

Some who are embarrassed by this miracle have tried to find grape juice in it; something non-alcoholic. One interpretation eliminates the miracle altogether by suggesting that it was never changed from water. Jesus served it up, served water up in the name of wine, and in the spirit of good humor the head waiter accepted it in the

same spirit—and he made a witty remark about it being ‘the best wine’—and everybody had a good laugh.

But verse 9 refutes that. John wrote, the water “had become wine.” And the head man's comment confirms that when he said, ‘It was typical to serve the poorer wine when people have drunk freely’, (which actually means when they become a little tipsy, a little intoxicated), so they weren't able to discern: ‘It's all the same to them!’ This also confirms that I should say that, “wine is a mocker”, which is a caveat against drinking freely.

The Bible condemns drunkenness, just as it does gluttony. Paul told the Ephesians, "Do not get drunk with wine." (Eph 5:18). Paul used the same word for wine in that verse that John used here, *oinos*. This was a miracle that produced what the head waiter called “good wine”; which is typical of what I mean by, ‘If the Lord’s going to create wine, He's going to create “good wine”— the best wine.’ He does ‘the best’ —and that was the case here.

Now I should add: The fact that Jesus turned water into wine, and good wine, doesn't require anyone to drink wine—that's a personal choice. And for some I'm sure temperance is a wise choice: but in making that choice, we shouldn't censor those who take a glass with a meal. After all, Jesus turned water into wine, real wine, and good wine. It was a miracle. Neither should those who choose to exercise their Christian liberty criticize those who abstain. And so consider Paul's instruction along these lines in 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans chapter 14; use wisdom.

But having said all of that, (don't think I really needed to say that to you, but having said it), the point here is; This was a miracle! And it was a miracle, not only in the transformation of a substance from one thing to another, but it was a miracle as an act of kindness. It saved the wedding feast. It rescued the young couple from terrible social embarrassment and possible financial ruin. But also in verse 11, John adds that the miracle strengthened the disciples' faith, "This beginning of *His* signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him."

The chapter begins, "On the third day there was a wedding..." And that likely means the third day from the previous event, which was the call of Nathaniel who confessed, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel." (Jn 1:49). That was faith. They all believed that Jesus was the Messiah. But they witnessed a sign that confirmed their faith, strengthened their faith with a show of power, the like of which they'd never seen before. It was "glory", that's how John describes it. (vs11).

Now Moses saw that in Exodus 33, verse 18, and he asked the LORD to 'show him His glory'. And the LORD answered, "I will make all my *goodness* pass before you." (vs19). 'His glory', according to the LORD, 'is His *goodness*'. And that too, is what the disciples saw in Cana: The Lord's goodness; His grace; His kind and caring nature in helping this young couple. And the joy that He created for all of those who were there.

It showed that Jesus is for joy: Which gives the lie to the notion that "Christianity is a miserable sinner religion of the pale Galilean who has turned the world gray." as one of the poets put it. It's a lie! The opposite is true.

His life spreads joy and freedom; He gives the abundant life. In chapter 10, that's what's said; that's what the Lord states, His purpose; He came that "...they may have life, and have it abundantly." (vs10).

He did that here when He turned this married couple's loss into a gain—and really, a great gain. Six water pots with a capacity of 20 to 30 gallons, filled to the brim provided them with between 120 and 180 gallons of excellent wine. Far more than they needed at the feast. So it not only took care of their immediate need but it left them with a large supply that could be sold for a profit. It was a very nice wedding gift that gave this young couple a very helpful start on their new life together.

Also, the fact that He chose a wedding feast for the place of His first miracle indicates His approval of the divine ordinance of marriage. That point is often made. When I do a wedding ceremony, I follow the example of others who note that the Lord honored marriage and the family by performing His first miracle at a wedding feast. Since He so honored marriage, of course the application to us is, 'We ought to also.'

Christian marriages ought to be exemplary. They ought to be an example. The Christian home ought to be a place where joy is visible. It's not always, but if the Lord could give joy to this marriage when it was in a crisis, then He can give joy and fulfillment in yours— regardless of the difficulties. It is His nature to do that, to show kindness and to give the very best of gifts; to give help in time of need. As the author of Hebrews says, 'To those who draw near to the throne of grace, who pray and seek it.' (Heb 4:14).

That was, in some sense, the glory that the disciples witnessed. He is the Lord who cares. "The God of all comfort", as Paul wrote. (2Cor 1:3). He gives help that creates joy. That is the promise of the Christian life: Not a dour existence but a joyful one. It's "the abundant life". It's "the fruit of the Spirit" which begins "love, joy, peace, patience..." and the other virtues. That's the promise of God; and it's the gift of God. But also it comes by His Word. It comes by His instruction and obedience to it. Joy and obedience are connected. And we have that as we walk by the Spirit—and as we obey His Word.

We see that very clearly here at the wedding feast; something of the method that leads to the joyful life that the Lord wants for us. He gave instruction to the servants, "Fill the water pots with water." Now on the face of it, this didn't make much sense—not to these servants. They probably knew about the problem. In fact, they were the ones that discovered it and probably alerted others to it because they were the ones serving the wine. But they also knew that water wasn't what they needed. They needed wine.

But the Lord called for water and Mary was helpful here. She gave wise counsel when she told the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." In other words, 'Don't question Him. He knows how to fix things. Just do it.' And they did. They trusted Him. They obeyed and a great blessing followed. And the house was filled with joy.

It's that way with us. Joy comes through obedience to Him. It comes through a life with Him, living in fellowship with Him, learning about Him and following Him. As we do that, live by faith, walk with Him day by day, He not only fixes things, He fixes us.

That's sanctification. That's the work of sanctification, which is going on continually in the life of a believer. It is God's work. He changes us. The Holy Spirit does that, transforms us, like turning water into wine.

And this miracle, this beginning of His signs, was designed to show that—to show the meaning of His ministry and why He came. He could have done it without water as He, the Word, did in the beginning when He said, ‘"Let there be light", and there was light.’ He could have said, ‘Let there be wine’, and wine would have materialized. But He didn't do it that way. He chose to use water in this miracle because it illustrated what He does with us. And what He will someday do with this world, how He transforms us from one thing to another, how He takes something common, common people, with the commonest of gifts that we have, and transforms them, makes them useful in His service, makes us useful in His service, transforms us just like He did water to wine.

The Lord chose a wedding feast for this first miracle to show the divine approval of marriage and show that He can and He will transform, and even more broadly, that He will not only transform something like a wedding feast, but transform us, transform our lives in the broadest sense.

But there's another reason for this miracle being at the beginning of His signs, and that is a *typological* or *prophetic* purpose. It pointed to the New Covenant, and the age that He was bringing. That's suggested by the water pots that were filled up. They were used for ritual washings, “the Jewish custom of purification”, as it states in verse 6. And that represents the old order of Jewish law and custom, the age of the Old Covenant. Filling them up to the brim signified the Law had fulfilled its purpose. And transforming the water into wine signified that the Lord would bring a new and better order, the New Covenant, and the New Covenant age.

That's what John said in chapter 1, back in verse 17. He said, “The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.” The difference between Moses' ministry and the Lord's ministry is seen in the way their ministries began. Moses' first miracle, in the land of Egypt, was turning the Nile into blood. Christ's

was turning water into wine. His miracle was one of liberty and joy. Moses' miracle was one of judgment.

Moses was the lawgiver. Paul called the Law a "ministry of death". (2Cor 3:7). It was given to expose sin. It was good, it is good. It was necessary. It exposes our sin. It condemns us in order to show us our need of the Savior. But it put people under a heavy burden of obligation. And that again was part of its purpose, a kind of obligation, such a heavy obligation that Peter said, 'No one could bear it'. Acts chapter 15, verse 10. Our fathers could not bear the heavy burden of the Law. No one can keep it. The demands of it are too high—and we fall short every time.

Christ invited people to, 'Take His yoke upon them, to learn from Him; and they will find rest', (Mat 11:29), —a rest that they cannot find under the Law. And He said, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." (Mat 11:30). Not because He has a lower standard, (He has the highest standard), but that's the New Covenant; that's the new relationship with God that Christ established through His blood, through His sacrificial death. He gained for us forgiveness of sin. He gained for us His righteousness which is imputed to us, given to us through faith alone. And in all of that we have the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to do the things that we're not able to do on our own— which is everything. There's nothing we can do on our own that's pleasing to God; and that is changed in Christ.

The Christian life can't be reduced to a simple code of conduct; whether it's the Sermon on the Mount or the Ten Commandments—it involves right conduct. But only by the Holy Spirit, (who gives wisdom, who gives power and ability, who gives joy in that life of freedom), can we experience that.

Well that's the Gospel message: That the cross of Christ brings life and liberty; life and joy. It releases us from sin and guilt; the heavy burden falls off our shoulders. And as it does, we can say with Christian, "He hath given me rest by His sorrow and life by His death."

Finally, the Lord chose a wedding feast for His first miracle because it pictures the kingdom to come and the marriage supper of the Lamb announced in Revelation chapter 19, verse 9. John was told to "Write", and what he was told to write is, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." *Lamb* is John's special name for Christ which he borrowed from John the Baptist. He is the *Lamb* of Isaiah 53—the 'Lamb of sacrifice.' It's His feast bought with His blood; the sacrifice that redeemed His church and elect throughout the ages, (which is the reason they have been invited and brought into it.) His feast which He obtained; and He gives the invitation; and He brings the invited in.

What that event and experience will be is impossible for us to know altogether, to know how great the future's going to be. We can contemplate that, but we really cannot begin to fathom what it is like. It's described in terms of a 'lavish banquet' to help our imagination. What we can say about that age that's coming and what is to be our hope is that it will be one of uninterrupted glory—and joy that will only increase and expand, expand exponentially. And think about that: Not just through a millennial kingdom but through all eternity. There will be no end to that.

And there will be reunion and fellowship when "every tear is wiped away." And at the center of all of that communion is companionship with Christ, our Lord and Savior, the second person of the Trinity; and through Him, fellowship with the Trinity, with the Godhead. Now that is the greatest aspect of it all. In fact later, in chapter 17, in verse 3, Jesus defines eternal life for us as 'knowing God and Him'. So that's eternal life. That's the greatness of it, our relationship with Him.

But I don't think that we can even begin to understand that. It's almost an act of faith—I trust it! That's the greatness of it. —Not the glory of it; not 'the streets of gold like glass', and all of those metaphorical descriptions that are given of heaven. Look, it's much more than all of that and that's an exciting thing to contemplate: But that's not the essence of eternal life and that's not going to be the real joy of eternal life.

It is fellowship with the Lord. And as I say that, and when you hear that, it may not strike us as all that great. It ought to, but that's because of who we are and where we are in this time and place. Many have said how it won't be until we are there, that we will understand Him and what we owe Him. And I think that's true. Then we will know how great a blessing it is.

Nevertheless, the happiness of this wedding feast in Cana suggests the reason Christ came: The future glory and blessing that He has obtained for all of us who have been saved by Him. And it will be for all eternity, "world without end." (Isa 45:17, Eph 3:21).

But we don't wait for it. It's not simply a blessing out there in the future. It begins the moment one is born again and believes in Christ. We have the best life right now. We don't need to search for meaning in life; or experiment in ways to be happy and find happiness.

Solomon did that early in life and he wrote about it in the Book of Ecclesiastes. It's famous; you all know about it. He tried everything: wine and women, even knowledge and accomplishment—even took up gardening. None of it fulfilled. It was all "futility", he said. "Vanity of vanities," he said, "all is vanity."

But not all. He did come to wisdom; and in the end he gives 'that wisdom' at the end of his book: "The conclusion," he said is this, "...fear God and keep His commandments." Fear is not terror: it's humble trust and obedience to the Lord.

And who better to trust in this little life, and this brief life that we have that so soon passes away—who better to trust for this life than the creator of life? He knows best and He promised to give us the best; like the good wine that He gave that feast.

Now I know that will ring a bit hollow to some; the idea that meaning and fulfillment is not found in wealth; and pleasure; and things—that's hard to believe. That's the opposite of what the world teaches us. It says you need a bigger bank account; you need to have much more money. You need to have many more things; you

need a bigger house. You need prestige. What you really need if you want to be happy, is a yacht! [*Laughter*] (That's what they all buy now, it seems like.) And the world is convincing—it is. It is a system that's very articulate in convincing us of what it says.

But the fact is, The world is wrong. Trust in the One who changed water into wine; Who transforms life; Who died to do that; to gain forgiveness and eternal life to all who believe.

That's all one must do—trust in Christ. There's nothing else that we can do, Christ has done it all. At the end of it all, as He hung on the cross, He said, "It is finished." (Jn 19:30), 'I've done it all. It's complete': And all one must do, all one can do, is receive what He has done; His person and His work. He paid for all the sins of all who believe in Him. He's paid our debts in full. And so it is simply for us to accept the free gift that He gives and receive everlasting life. Isaiah put it this way in Isaiah 55, verse 1, 'Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.' In other words, it's a gift.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. If you've not done that, we encourage you to do it. And may God help all of us to live lives of joy and service to Him. Let's pray:

Father, we do thank You for that mercy; and we are debtors to it. We could never obtain the salvation that You have obtained. The very proof of that is the fact that it took Your Son coming into this world, becoming one of us, living a perfect life, and then offering Himself up on the cross to bear the suffering and shame of that; the suffering that is beyond our comprehension. It's far more than physical; it's spiritual. It was hell on our behalf. That's mercy, that's grace and we thank You for that. May we never lose sight of that.

And as we take the supper that is to follow, may we remember all that He obtained for us at what great cost. And may we be grateful. We thank You for Your mercy.

And now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In the name of Christ, Amen.

(End of Audio)