

Rev Alasdair I. Macleod: John 2:1-12 The Wedding at Cana

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] I'll please turn back to our reading in the Gospel of John chapter 2, the story of the wedding at Cana.

I'll just read the verse that concludes the story verse 11. John 2.11. This the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee and manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him.

Now I guess we all know the story of the wedding at Cana and know it very well. The story of Jesus changing water into wine.

And we think of this story this evening as we look forward to tomorrow, to the Lord's day and the Lord's table and to the wine of the Gospel, the wine of the Lord's supper.

Now I want to suggest you at the beginning tonight that Jesus is the true bridegroom even of this story.

[1 : 16] We're told by the scholars of that ancient world that in that culture the provision of the wine and the food was the responsibility of the groom and his family to some extent.

But the groom was the crucial one and it was a disgrace for the wine to run out. The groom hadn't provided properly for a feast that was not just a great family occasion but perhaps like weddings here in decades gone by.

It was a great community, a great village occasion. So if the wine ran out the groom was in trouble. So who provides the wine here? It is of course Jesus and maybe John is saying this is the true bridegroom who provides the true wine for the real marriage feast to come.

It's also true in the next chapter that John the Baptist when he speaks about himself and Jesus in chapter 3 he says the one who was the bride is the bridegroom for verse 29.

[2 : 32] The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. He's a kind of best man but he's not the bridegroom.

Therefore my joy is now complete. He must increase but I must decrease. So John is saying I'm the friend of the bridegroom but I'm not the bridegroom.

Jesus is the bridegroom. And then in chapter 4 some of you may think that this is a little bit fanciful but I'll just touch on it.

You know the story of the Samaritan woman who meets Jesus at a well and if you know some of the stories and genesis at the beginning of Exodus you'll know that meetings at a well were often significant in terms of meeting the right person leading to betrothal engagement.

So this woman meets Jesus. Is Jesus here also being portrayed as the bridegroom? Well as some of us were saying earlier there are symbolic numbers in the Bible and one of them is the number 7.

[3 : 46] Have you ever noticed that that woman had had 5 husbands and the man she's now with is number 6, not her husband.

And now she meets Jesus. She meets number 7. She meets the perfect man. Her life has been spent looking for kicks in all the wrong places, meeting one wrong man after another and after 6 disasters.

She meets the perfect man at a well and she comes to trust him as her saviour. She meets the real bridegroom because she is going to be part of his bride and she will sit one day at the marriage supper of the lamb.

So for these reasons in the context here I'm saying that Jesus is being portrayed as the real bridegroom and of course later in John's book of Revelation John will portray Jesus at the marriage supper of the lamb.

So let's look at this story and see what we can learn about Jesus and the salvation that he offers to us. And I want to think about 5 things, 5 questions.

[5 : 06] Say 1 or 2 things about each of them and the questions are very simply who, why, what, how and who again.

The first who and the last who or whom are different. So who, why, what, how and who.

First of all who is this Jesus? Can you imagine somebody reading this Gospel of John who doesn't know all that you know about Jesus and this man is being introduced to them.

The man who at the very beginning of the Gospel that's being made clear is actually God himself coming the flesh. So they're asking again in each story John tell me more about who this Jesus is. So what does this little story at Cana say about the identity of Jesus? Well it says very simply that he is truly human and truly divine.

[6 : 18] Both are true of him uniquely. He's truly human. That's seen by the fact that he is simply invited to a wedding feast, that this is a real man living in the real world who's part of a family and who's been part of a community, who's been a working man working with his hands and people know him and his people.

There's a wedding feast and Jesus and his family and friends are invited to this party. It suggests even more that he was the kind of man who was welcome at that kind of celebration and that he was the kind of man who wanted to be there, that he didn't think that going to a wedding maybe for a day or a couple of days was a waste of his time.

He knew that such an occasion was important and was precious and he honours that occasion with his presence and he honours that couple with his presence and he honours the institution of marriage with his presence.

And then when the wine runs out and the party is going to be a disaster that people will talk about for years, oh that's the groom who, that's the family who.

Jesus provides wine for the festivities when the wine runs out. You see Jesus was not an ascetic as John the Baptist was but Jesus growing up in a home and in a community and working with his hands and being involved right up to the time of his ministry was very much a different kind of person and right through his ministry we see again and again, might see it tomorrow evening, how often he is at people's homes at meals wanting to be with people and talk to people and listen to people and get close to people.

[8 : 37] This is the Jesus who is truly human and who wants to be with other human beings and minister to them in all their many different needs.

So his humanity is clear, truly human but he's also truly divine according to this story at the same time.

The miracle of course reveals his deity, his divinity and John is also making it clear when he speaks about his glory at the end of the story in verse 11.

In this sign Jesus manifested his glory. Now of course he did need to be God for a miracle to happen through him.

We know about other people in the Bible through whom miracles were done by God but John is saying that this man is not just a man but he's manifesting divine glory by performing this miracle himself.

[9 : 40] The sign reveals his glory and if you were to say to John, well what glory is this? John would say have you not read chapter 1 yet?

Chapter 1 as we have it in verse 14, the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory. What kind of glory is that?

The glory as of the only begotten Son of the Father full of grace and truth. In other words divine glory, the glory of the unique Son of the Father, the glory of the one who is the Word made flesh. And John is saying that the essential deity of this Jesus is shining through in this authority over the water. He made water.

He made all the waters and he can change water into wine at his will. And throughout the Gospel John will keep making that point in what sometimes people call in nature miracles where Jesus heals people's bodies and feeds people's stomachs and Jesus walks on water and Jesus even in the most dramatic of all can raise the dead.

[11 : 05] Jesus in the natural world and that natural world is under his authority and he reveals his divine glory by doing impossible things in that natural world even to the raising of the dead.

So that's the Jesus whom we celebrate tonight and tomorrow. The Jesus who is truly human, fully man and the Jesus who is truly divine, fully God.

There has never been anyone else like this. There will never be anyone else like this. The Jesus of the Christian faith is absolutely unique, God and man in two natures and one glorious person forever and forever.

That's who he is. The second question is why? What does this story tell us about why he has come?

Why has this Jesus come into this world in this way? What has he come to do?

[12:18] Well here we're thinking about what he came to accomplish. Why did he come? He came to do something. He came to do something that we could never do for ourselves.

I want again to highlight just a couple of things that I think the story is saying about why he came. I'm going to think about first of all the fact that he is the Christ, the Christ of promise and then secondly what he says himself about the hour for which he has come.

First of all that idea of him being the Christ, the Messiah of promise. The people of God were waiting for a promised one, for a coming one who would arrive one day.

The Messiah, Christ and Messiah are the same idea, just the word in different languages transliterated into English.

So they were waiting for the Messiah, waiting for the Christ who was promised. And one of the interesting things in connection with this story here is that when they thought of the Messiah or when they thought of the Messianic Age or the Messianic Kingdom it was often associated with vineyards and grapes and wine.

[13:53] And it's very significant that the first miracle Jesus does is provide wine. And I think he's saying I'm here.

You've been waiting for the wine provider and here I am in my very first miracle providing wine and John is highlighting that in the story.

You can go way back in the Bible and find these references to a coming one who's associated with the vineyard.

For example in Genesis 49, this is a very famous one, the prophecy of Shiloh, the prophecy of the one who's going to come.

From verse 8 it's to the royal tribe of Judah. And it says in verse 10, the scepter shall not depart from Judah, the royal tribe, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until, I think the best way to translate the next line is until he comes to whom it belongs.

[15:04] In other words until he comes to whom kingship rightfully belongs and whom shall be the obedience of the people. Binding his fold to the vine and his donkey's cold to the choice vine.

He has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine and his teeth whiter than milk. That's a great prophecy of a king who will come to whom will be the obedience of the peoples.

It's going to be the Messiah but the Gentiles are going to bow to him as well. And you see how it's associated with vineyards and vines and wine in various ways.

Or then without going through too many of these prophecies but there's a very famous verse that we will all I guess know in Isaiah 25 and verse 6.

On this mount of the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.

[16:15] The days are going to come and there will be days of aged wine. And then I'll just read another couple.

If I can get this. There we go. I was once at a service where a minister was looking up a reading from the minor prophets and couldn't find it and he was at a communion and the two other men in the pulpit got up to help him.

There were two pages stuck together and they couldn't find this little. I think it was obadiah. It was a very, very embarrassing moment for a whole worried congregation as three ministers tried to find an Old Testament reading with pages stuck together because the reading was not often done I suppose from these pages and it stuck together maybe over 50 years.

So I'm glad I found Joel and then Amos. But for example in Joel, Joel 2 and Joel 3 there are lots of references to wine. For example in verse 18 at the end of the book, in that day the mountains will drip sweet wine, the hills shall flow with milk and the stream bed shall flow with water.

Wine, milk and water. The same at the end of Amos and many other places. I'm just making the basic point that again and again in promises of the Messiah, promises of the King, promises of the Messianic Kingdom, promises of a great age to come in the future, they keep talking about grapes and wine.

[17 : 53] He's going to provide wine like never before. The hills are going to flow with wine. And I'm saying when Jesus in his very first miracle provides wine in spectacular quantities, I think John is saying to us, this is the promised one.

This is the one we were waiting for. This is the one who has come to provide the wine of the Kingdom, the wine of the good news. The Messiah is here beginning to do his work.

The other thing about why he has come, coming to accomplish something that we could never do for ourselves, is also seen in the story in the little word, out.

You have a date in verse four where Jesus' mother says to him, they've run out of wine and Jesus says, what does this have to do with me just now? My hour has not yet come.

Then maybe he says to the servants, do whatever he tells you. Now that hour is very significant in the Gospel of John.

[19 : 08] It refers to what Jesus is going to do later in the story in his death and resurrection. Now I won't take you through all the passages, but in the first part of the Gospel, you could see it running through perhaps chapter seven and chapter eight, Jesus at these points in the Gospel as he does here, he keeps saying, my hour has not yet come.

My hour has not yet come. For example in chapter eight and verse 20, these words he spoke as he taught in the temple, but no one arrested him because his hour had not yet come.

The hour hadn't yet come for his passion when he'd be arrested and tried and sentenced and put to death. And of course he would rise again. So in the first parts of the story, he says, my hour has not yet come.

My hour has not yet come. My hour has not yet come. But then towards the latter part of the story, as you move towards Calvary, Jesus keeps saying the hour has come.

The hour has come. For example, in John chapter 12 and verse 23, Jesus answered them, the hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified.

[20 : 40] Then he talks about his death, a grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying. And if it falls into the earth and dies, remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

So he's talking about his hour, the hour when he will die. Or at the beginning of the high priestly prayer, he's lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come, glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you.

So this point is very important that Jesus' hour is the hour when he will give himself and death for us sinners. And then he will be raised to life by the Father through the Spirit.

And it's very important to note that here at the very beginning of the story, Jesus sees everything that he's doing in the light of that hour. That's why he's come.

He's come to do many things and he's come to say many things, but about everything else, he's come for a particular hour when he will give himself for the sins of the world.

[21 : 53] When he will drink the cup, the cup of wrath, so that we might sit at the Lord's table and drink a cup of blessing.

He has come to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. And in that climactic hour, he will accomplish salvation and he will do all that is necessary for us and for our eternal redemption.

So when I ask a question, why has he come? Well, he's come to fulfil all the promises of the Messiah and that's hinted at here in the provision of wine by the Christ.

And he's come for a very important hour, an hour that nobody else could have as their hour of destiny. Nobody else could do what he is going to do in that hour, but him alone.

He's come to do it and he will do it. He has done it and everything he thinks and says and does throughout his ministry is done with a view to that hour of the passion where he will accomplish our redemption.

[23 : 04] That's why he's come, to be the Christ, to be our saviour, to accomplish salvation for us. Thirdly, what?

What actually does he offer in terms of this story? What specifically does the story say that Jesus is going to give us in the light of all that he will accomplish for us?

Let me suggest three words, just I'll deal with these very quickly. Newness, joy and abundance.

That's the gospel. First of all, it's new. It's a salvation of a new age. You see how in the story in verse 6, John stresses right at the centre of the story that the water jars that Jesus uses for water to become wine are six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification.

You see, there are water jars that speak of the Old Testament and the Old Covenant way of doing things, ritual cleansings, ritual washings where people had to wash over and over again.

[24 : 29] These were signs and symbols and shadows of what Jesus would do. On their own these washings did nothing spiritually, but they were pointing towards somebody who would do something.

And here Jesus replaces that with the wine of the gospel and of the kingdom. I think the symbolism is very clear.

This stands for the Old Covenant, but Jesus is bringing in the new covenant and so the Jewish water jars are turned into gospel wine jars by Jesus because he has come to bring the new wine of the kingdom, the new wine of the gospel in what he will accomplish.

And then there's joy. Joy in the gospel. He has come to give us joy and peace. That's the symbolism of wine in the Bible.

And Judges 9, the vine answered, should I give up my wine which cheers both God and men, gods and men. Psalm 104-15, wine that gladdens the heart of man.

[25 : 48] Isaiah 55, come by wine and milk. One of the commentators says, milk is for nourishment, but wine is for exhilaration, for pleasure, or joy.

So Jesus is saying, I've come to bring joy that no one else could bring into people's lives.

Remember the first fruit of the Spirit is joy. Through all that Jesus will accomplish, he is saying, I will bring the joy of the gospel, the joy of the kingdom into these people's lives as they trust in me and know their sins were given.

They will have a joy like never before and a joy that the world will never rob them of and a joy that they will have for all eternity.

And then abundance. Notice what it says about these jars in verse 6. You can work it out yourselves when you work in gallons or look at the food note and work it out in litres.

Each jar held from 20 to 30 gallons. There's six of them. And he turns, I believe, all that water into wine.

[26 : 58] So it's a spectacular amount of wine. So it was far more than required to meet the immediate need. I think that's the point.

Jesus does something over the top, because again this is an illustration of the gospel. The gospel is over the top.

God is not mean in the gospel. He's not stingy. He never does the minimum, but he comes and does everything to the max.

And then he says, I will forgive all of your sins. And the moment you believe in Jesus, I will justify you with his righteousness 100%.

And I will give you my Holy Spirit to live in your heart forever. And again and again and again, he says these kinds of things. But last he says, and when you die, I'll take you to heaven, and I'll take every one of you who trusts in me to heaven, not the best 5%.

[28 : 00] I will take 100% of you to heaven. I will give you heaven forever. And then the new heavens and the new earth forever and forever and forever. So God is not mean.

God doesn't hold back. And that's part of the symbolism of the miracle, that God does something extravagant and overflowing and seemingly unnecessary with Jesus turning all of that water into wine.

And people have never had so much and seemed so much and had so much that was so delicious before. It's a sign of the hospitality and the generosity of God in the gospel.

So what does Jesus offer in the gospel? He offers us something new that we could never enjoy without Him. He offers us a happiness and a joy and a peace that we could never know without Him.

And He offers us an abundance and an extravagance in the gospel that is over the top and is ours forever.

[29 : 10] The gospel is amazing. It is amazing grace. And Jesus does this new thing to give us joy and to give us the abundant gifts of His gospel in very quickly four and five.

Fourth question is how? How can Jesus deliver this to us? I'm asking the question now, not in terms of accomplishing salvation, but in terms of us enjoying salvation as Jesus applies salvation to us. So He's done all of this and He offers all of this. How can He deliver it into our lives when our lives are such a mess and when we are so rebellious and so recalcitrant and this world is such a mess and there's so many forces ranged against Him.

How can He do what He says He will do? And I think again the answer is in the story and the answer is in terms of His power.

This story is a story about the power of Jesus. Jesus can do whatever He chooses to do. He can really do the impossible.

[30 : 43] So at one level that speaks of His power to change. He changes water into wine and He can change a dead sinner into a living saint because Jesus has the power to transform.

He has the power to do things. We say that's impossible. You can't. I've got a glass of water here. We could spend the rest of the evening trying to do it. We wouldn't turn it into wine.

And the same with us trying to give the new birth to somebody whom we love and want to see as a Christian. We can spend the rest of our lives trying to make them born again.

But only God can do these things. But the glory is that God can do these things. Jesus can change water into wine. Jesus can transform anything He wants into anything He wants.

And so Jesus can transform anyone He wants into whatever He wants them to be. So our conference is in the power of the Jesus of this miracle.

[31 : 53] The power of transforming Jesus who throughout the Gospel of John keeps changing things and keeps changing people and works the most amazing transformations in the hearts and lives of men and women.

The Jesus who can change water into wine can change anyone into anything. But there's also his power to provide. As he changes people, he then has the power to provide for us in all our different means.

And we say, well, okay, Jesus can change me, but then I could never keep it up. And Jesus says, no, it's not just that I change you and leave you to your own devices.

My power that has transformed you will always provide for you. You know, the language of this miracle, you're at my table, the Gospel table.

And I will feed you at my table every day, not just the Lord's table. I'll feed you from the Gospel table every day. I'll give you the bread and the wine, whatever else you need for every day.

[33 : 04] I'll provide for you every day. And then in special ways, like at the Lord's Supper, I will provide for you there as well.

Again, it's a picture of His hospitality to give us what we need, to feed us with what we need, to provide us with the means of grace and His blessing on all of these means of grace and to keep us and to enable us to persevere.

So He preserves us day by day by day in His power. If it wasn't for the power of Jesus, you who trust in Jesus wouldn't be able to stay as a Christian for a day, or an hour, or a minute.

You couldn't keep yourself going. But it's the power of this Jesus of this story that keeps us all on the road, that keeps us trusting, that keeps us faithful, that keeps feeding us and nourishing us and helping us and guiding us and encouraging us.

It's the power of Jesus. And we give Him all the glory for our continued perseverance on the Christian road. So how can this Jesus deliver?

[34 : 19] In His power, the power of this story, the power of every story, the power that He has now from heaven, the power to change anyone, and the power to provide for me and for you everything that we need for the Christian life and for the Christian journey.

Then finally again, the question who. The first question was who is this Jesus? But this who question is who gets to enjoy this?

All this that Jesus has accomplished, all this that Jesus offers, all this Jesus can apply in His power, who gets to enjoy this?

And the answer of the story, the answer of the whole gospel is in terms of seeing and believing. You see, disciples have already believed in Jesus, okay? You would accept that that those who follow Jesus have already believed.

[35 : 28] But they need to have their faith deepened. So they need to see more. So in verse 11, His disciples believed in Him after He manifested His glory.

You know, they have seen Jesus and they have believed in Jesus. So that was their conversion. But now they see something more of a glory of Jesus. So they believe in Jesus even more deeply. And that is going to continue throughout the whole story. Let's turn on in the story of Lazarus in John chapter 11.

And perhaps use the words seeing, they see Jesus and they believe. In John chapter 11, in relation to the raising of Lazarus, Jesus says to Martha, when Martha says he's been dead four days and Jesus said to her, did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory.

[36 : 35] Now I've been saying to you, in John 2, they see and they believe. In John 11, Jesus says, if you believed, you would see.

And later on at the tomb, John goes into the tomb and he sees and believes. You see that two-way connection between these two words throughout the Gospel of John.

By God's grace, we need to see who Jesus is and what he's done for us. And then we believe in him. But that's not the end.

Because believing in him, we then want to see more. So they see this miracle. And when they see more, they believe in him even more.

And then Jesus says to Martha, if you believe, you will see even more. And then John goes into the tomb and he sees and he believes even more.

[37 : 35] It's part of the rhythm of the Christian life. Those who enjoy, all that the story speaks about and all that this Gospel speaks about, are those who see and who believe, who put their faith in the Jesus, whose beauty and glory they've seen.

But then they see more and they believe more. And they see more and they believe more and they see more and they believe more. That's the story here. That's the story of the Gospel.

That's why you're invited to the Lord's table. Because at the Lord's table, you are offered a vision of Jesus as you take the bread and the wine so that your faith might be strengthened.

It's a means of grace through which in the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacrament, you can see more and believe more, having your vision enlarged and your faith strengthened by the Jesus who invites you to his own table.

My prayer is that all of us will see the glory of Jesus in this story and see the glory of Jesus in the Gospel and believe, put our faith in this Jesus, then begin a life of discipleship where we see and believe and see and believe and see and believe.

[38 : 56] We see more and believe more and come to the Lord's table that you might see more and believe more. Amen. I'll leave it there.

Thank you.