

Text: John 2:1-11

Title: Believe because Jesus turned water into wine

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Introduction: We live in a world that creates signs designed to glorify things that are truly inglorious. If you travel to Minneapolis, MN, you will find there a sign that declares a block of the city to be "George Perry Floyd Square." Not far away stands a mural painted on a building in honor of this tragic figure, with glorious sunbeams protruding from the visage of this criminal.

A new film is out about the tragic circumstances and consequences of the death of George Floyd called, "The Fall of Minneapolis." The documentary shows how Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin was sentenced to 21 years in prison after doing his job in an environment in which race-baters, politicians, media pundits, a corrupt judge, corrupt prosecutors, and lying witnesses made justice impossible. Last week Officer Chauvin was stabbed 22 times in his prison library. The film documented the rise of crime in the city since these events, noting that the Minneapolis police force has lost over a third of its force.

Again, our world creates signs designed to glorify things that are truly inglorious. As such, these signs tell lies, and not the truth. It takes a courageous documentary to uncover the truth in these circumstances.

By way of contrast, the Apostle John has set forth seven signs in his Gospel that tell the truth about Jesus Christ and reveal His glory. Our passage records the first of these (v. 11). The Greek word translated *miracles* here is used 17 times in the Gospel, and it is translated *signs* in 20:30-31, where John told his readers the purpose of his Gospel: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not

written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

The first part of the Gospel of John has been called “the book of signs,” because throughout these first chapters John uses this word to describe seven miracles that communicate the true glory of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, so that we can believe on His name for salvation. In addition to the (1) one of our passage, John records (2) the healing of the nobleman’s son (4:43-54), (3) the healing of a lame man (5:1-15), (4) the feeding of the five thousand (6:1-15), (5) walking on water (6:16-21), (6) healing a man born blind (9:1-11), and (7) raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-57). The final sign of chapter 20, of course, is His own resurrection from the dead.

And so, what truth does this first sign reveal about the glory of Jesus, which requires us to believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and have life in His name? I will mention four such truths this morning.

I. The sign revealed the glory of divine respect for a ceremony (vv. 1-2).

Illustration: The wedding of our youngest son and future daughter-in-law approaches. This will be the third that my wife and I have witnessed up close and personal. From our experience we have learned a few things about weddings.

First, they are expensive. Second, they are labor intensive. Third, they require a myriad of decisions. And fourth, for these reasons and many others, it is great to have a wedding planner who can help walk two families through all the preparations that hosting a wedding requires. We were thankful and relieved the day we heard that Deb Andrews, the mother of Brandon’s wife Carrie, had agreed to be the wedding planner for Kent and Caroline’s ceremony.

Application: It is likely that Mary, the mother of Jesus, played a similar role in this wedding. You notice that the text tells us that she “was there,” whereas Jesus and His disciples “were called,” or invited to the wedding. It may be that Mary was in charge of the refreshments for the big day, which would explain why she feels responsible when the wine runs out.

I say all that simply to say that Jesus, His disciples, and His mother all support the significance of a wedding ceremony in their attendance and actions. There was a day when preachers did not have to remind people that wedding ceremonies are important and worthy of support. But today we live in a world that magnifies the vulgar, not the transcendent; the common, not the unique; the casual, not the formal; the convenient, not the ceremonial.

Illustration: I am not much of a movie buff, and I do not remember many lines from movies, but one from Pixar’s “The Incredibles” has stuck with me. The story is about a family of superheroes, who are better than everyone else in important ways, and a villain who is determined to use technology to give everyone superpowers. A line in the movie objects to the villain’s plan this way: “If everyone is super, no one will be.”

Weddings are super occasions. They are special times and involve special traditions because they honor a special covenant – the covenant of holy matrimony between a man and his wife. I believe with other commentators (ex., D. A. Carson) that we can learn from the example of Jesus, His disciples, and His mother, that it is good to keep weddings special. This sign reveals the glory of divine respect for this ceremony.

II. The sign reveals the glory of divine promise (vv. 3-4).

Illustration: When we come to chapter 3 in our study of John’s Gospel, we will read about a conversation between Jesus and a Jewish rabbi named *Nicodemus*, in which Nicodemus

suffered some confusion. He said to Jesus, "We know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these miracles [signs] that you do unless God is with him."

Jesus's reply seems out of place: "Verily, verily I say unto you, you must be born again." Nicodemus suddenly does not understand the topic of their conversation. He asks about reentry into a mother's womb for another physical birth in his confusion. What was happening in that conversation? Well, Jesus was talking about spiritual things, and Nicodemus about physical things. Jesus explains: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (3:1-7).

Application: The same thing happens here in Jesus's conversation with His mother Mary. As one of the hostesses of the reception, she comes to Jesus about the lack of wine (v. 3). She is talking about physical wine that you drink at a wedding. We do not read of Joseph's presence in this passage, and commentators agree that Mary is likely a widow at this point who has relied on her firstborn for the provision of the physical needs of the household. It would have been second nature for Mary to come to Jesus about this crisis, because she believed He would know how to purchase more wine somewhere quickly.

Jesus's response must have seemed as strange to Mary, as His words to Nicodemus seemed to the rabbi. They seem strange because Jesus's reply refers not to physical wine at a wedding, but to a spiritual wine in the Scripture. This spiritual wine is a metaphor of biblical prophecy about the Lord's eternal blessing on Israel:

Jer. 31:12, "Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all."

Hos. 14:7, "They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon."

Amos 9:13-14, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them."

Jesus understood what His mother was asking Him to do, to go purchase more wine; but instead of answering her on that level, He gives her an answer about this wine of prophetic promise. He explains that their separate topics of conversation using the same word have nothing in common, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?", and then He points to the hour when He would have to suffer on the cross of Calvary so that His people could be saved from sin and blessed with the eternal wine of the glorious future He had promised them.

Will that future be our future? Can we live for that future wine of God's kingdom rather than the mundane things of life, like the stuff we use to keep our wedding guests nourished? Do we see that Christ had to endure an hour of great suffering to give us the wine of His kingdom? The sign revealed the glory of divine promise, the promise of eternal salvation and blessing. Do we see the glory? Do we believe?

III. The sign revealed the glory of divine power replacing lifeless religion (vv. 5-9).

Illustration: A water molecule is made up of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom - H<sub>2</sub>O. The chemical composition of a grape is 70 to 80% water with the addition of many

dissolved solids. There are so many organic and inorganic compounds in a grape that I could not find an article telling me how many. They only said they are “numerous.” One article listed some molecule types in a grape that are important to wine-making as sugars, organic acids, phenolic compounds, nitrogenous compounds, aroma compounds, minerals, and pectic substances.

Application: It goes without saying that changing water into wine by filling up waterpots and drawing out the liquid is a mighty supernatural miracle of divine omnipotent power.

John tells us about the glory of this power while showing how its miracle was designed to draw a contrast with lifeless religion. The stone waterpots were those used for the purification customs of the Jews (v. 6). One seventh of the Jewish Mishnah, the largest section, instructed Jews how to wash for purification. It contains 126 chapters on the topic. Thirty of the chapters are dedicated to how to wash vessels, and four of the chapters are dedicated to how to wash your hands. And this without any Covid fears at the time.

Into that dead and lifeless religious world, Jesus brings the glory of omnipotence by executing this amazing miracle. Apostate Judaism needed to be changed into the blessing of Israel’s promised future. Only an all-powerful God could execute such a work. Jesus demonstrates that He is this God.

But notice too how omnipotent glory is revealed – he tells the servants to do some things to make this happen. Only Jesus could do the miracle, but He chooses to do the miracle through the obedience of these servants. We need miracles in our gospel ministry. We need the Lord to turn dead and lifeless religion into the glory of a promised future through His omnipotent power. How can that happen? Mary tells us (v. 5): “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.” Dead, lifeless religion does not listen to what He says, or if it hears what He asks, it

refuses to comply. If we want to see the glory of omnipotent power, we must obey whatever He tells us to do (Eph. 3:20).

IV. The sign reveals a glory that calls men to faith (vv. 10-11).

Application: The ruler of the feast cracks a joke about drunkenness in verse 10. The idea is that you can serve inferior wine when people are drunk (ha, ha). He was kidding, not calling his fellow-guests *drunkards*, but trying to complement the hosts on the abundance and quality of their new wine.

Let me say at this point that I am a teetotaler when it comes to any form of alcoholic beverage. The wine of this culture, although a substance that could make you drunk, was diluted with water between one-third and one-tenth of wine's natural fermented strength. Its ability to make you drunk was less than today's light-beer.

The reason I avoid all alcohol comes from the book of Proverbs, which often warns about even its diluted dangers. One passage sums the issue up for me: "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink" (31:4). In Christ, I am royalty and so are you. We are a royal priesthood 24/7 (1 Pet. 2:9). We should not be drinking on the job.

That issue aside, the ruler of the feast misses far more than the virtues of teetotaling in his comments. He misses the glory revealed by the sign. The servants seem to see the sign, but we do not read anywhere that they believed. The disciples, however, saw not only the sign, but also the glory; and so they believed. They believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, because He turned water into wine. Will we?

Conclusion: Imagine that, at the next first Lord's Day of the month, we filled the communion cups with water instead of grape juice, and that as we passed out those cups of water the

Lord turned the water into wine. Would that sign reveal more glory than the one we have always practiced the first Lord's Day of every month, where we start with grape juice, and it just stays grape juice?

I believe we must answer, "No," because the glory of the sign of the Lord's Table does not belong to the nature of the sign, but to the person and work of the One possessing the glory it represents. Whether the sign is miraculous or not matters little to our omnipotent God. What matters to Him is that we understand the glorious message His sign reveals to us – that Jesus shed His blood for our sins.

If we disbelieve, it will not be for lack of a sign, nor for the lack of glory. It will be due to a hard heart. May the Lord open our hearts to read His signs, to see His glory, to believe on His name, and to live forever in the abundant blessings of the corn and wine of His kingdom.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*