

Wedding Wine
Isaiah 62:1-5, John 2:1-11
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One thing we know about Jesus from the Gospels is that he was known for being a miracle worker. I didn't count them up myself, but I found a chart online that showed the total number of miracles reported in the Gospels as 37, and those are just the ones that were written down. The last lines of the Gospel of John tell us that there were many other things that Jesus did and if they had been written down all the books in the world couldn't contain them. Presumably, some of those other things were more miracles.

When Jesus did miracles, he demonstrated his authority and his power over nature, and sickness, and demons, and when he performed miracles, it's not only the display of this power and authority that seems important. The miracles also seem important because Jesus ministered to people in need when he performed them. When he multiplied the fish and loaves, hungry people were filled. When he healed people of their diseases, their quality of life improved. When he quieted the wind and the waves, the disciples' fears were relieved. But then there is this miracle that we read about in John.

Jesus is at a wedding, and he turns water into wine. I know some of you might argue that wine is essential to life, but in this story, no one was sick or dying. There was a wedding, and the wine had run out, and Jesus's mother wanted him to do something about it. It is true that the provision of wine may have saved the host from some amount of humiliation or shame so you could say that Jesus's ministered to the host family when he did the miracle, but still, the ministry element just doesn't seem as apparently crucial with this miracle which might make you wonder, what is this miracle about anyway? Was Jesus just trying to show that he's a relatable guy who

knows how to have a good time? Did he want us to know that he isn't going to be mad at us if we have a glass of wine? I do believe that Jesus is a relatable guy who could enjoy a good party as much as anyone, and this story does show Jesus being human and doing regular human stuff like we do, but there is more to it miracle than that.

John tells this story toward the beginning of his Gospel, and we're told that this is the first of Jesus's signs. John calls Jesus's miracles signs, and they were signs that revealed his identity as God-in-flesh. You can see how this miracle pointed to his divine identity. Who else could transcend the laws of nature apart from the One who created those laws? When Jesus did what would be impossible for us to do and transformed water into wine, the miracle pointed to his identity, but it also pointed to what he had come to do. Jesus came into this world on a mission and his mission was to rescue, and redeem, and *transform* people and a world that had been damaged and defiled by sin. He had come to make all things new, as we hear him say in Revelation 21:5, and the transformation of the water to wine was an object lesson that illustrated this reality. The nature of the miracle - that it's a miracle in which something is transformed into something new - helps us begin to understand what the miracle was all about - but the context in which Jesus performed the miracle also helps our understanding.

You may have seen the meme online that shows a grocery store shelf with a sign hanging above it labeled "water," but the shelf is filled with wine bottles instead of water bottles and the caption says something like "Jesus was here." If Jesus stopped by Publix today, he certainly could turn the water bottles into wine bottles, and in his own day he could have gone to a busy well instead of a grocery store and performed the miracle there, but the particular context of a wedding and a wedding feast (vs. a public well) helped connect the miracle with the promises of God's love and faithfulness and plans to restore God's people. One of the interesting details about this story is the

exchange between Jesus and his mother. She asks him to help. He demurs, but she ignores it and tells the servants to do what he says. Jesus ends up getting involved, and you wonder if it's just because he felt pressured by his mother, but I think instead that he had an "aha!" moment and decided to seize the opportunity to tie into the imagery that the wedding and wedding feast provided.

Jesus and those in attendance were familiar with how the Hebrew prophets used the image of marriage as a metaphor to describe the relationship between God and God's people, and we see an example of this in our reading from Isaiah. Isaiah's words describe the passion and intensity with which God loves God's people. You hear that passion and intensity when God says, *I will not rest until her vindication shines like the dawn*. The Lord's words through the prophet speak to how God is going to redeem and transform their brokenness and their losses. The language is so beautiful. *You will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a beautiful crown in the hand of the Lord*. God's love and desire to transform and redeem God's people then culminates with that image of marriage between God and God's people. *You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight is in Her and your land Married. As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you*. The wedding celebration that was the backdrop for the miracle of turning water to wine helped complete the whole picture. Jesus's mission to rescue, and redeem, and *transform* people and a world that had been damaged and defiled by sin, was leading to a day that is described in Revelation as the marriage feast of the Lamb – when the new creation will be completed, and God and God's people will be united and together forever.

If at first the water to wine miracle seemed odd or out of place among the other miracles, now we begin to see its great significance. Jesus wasn't just having fun, or helping his mother out, or saving the host from embarrassment. Maybe he was doing those things, but

most importantly, he was proclaiming good news, and when you and I hear about this miracle, we are meant to understand that the miracle that Jesus worked that day at the wedding *is the same kind of miracle* that he wants to, and that he can, work in our own lives. Not only can Jesus turn water to wine, but he can also turn sinners into saints. He can turn broken people into whole people. He can turn those who are isolated from God into God's intimate friends. He can change hearts that are hopeless into hearts filled with hope. He can turn self-centered people into empathetic and compassionate people who want to love and serve others, and when we hear about this miracle, we are meant to understand that Jesus's promises to us are the same promises that God made to Israel through the prophet Isaiah. His love for us is fierce and protective. He is ready to fight for us, to rescue us from trouble, to redeem our brokenness, and to bind himself to us forever.

I know that one thing that people carry around with them is baggage. Even people who appear to have an easy life because they're good-looking, and have a good job, and a nice house, and happy marriage. Even "good Christian people." Everyone has baggage of some kind. It may be baggage that we got saddled with because of things that others did to us. It may be bags that we packed ourselves and filled up with bad choices, and rebellious actions, and dark curiosities that we indulged. It may be bags filled with secrets that we've collected because we were too afraid or ashamed to tell them to anyone. However we come to have it, we have it, and when we are carrying it around it becomes exhausting. The weight of it all can feel like it's crushing us. It can feel like we'll never move forward or that our lives will never change in any significant way because we just can't move forward when we have all of that stuff attached to us.

This past week I was listening to the Carey Nieuhoff Leadership Podcast, and he was interviewing some guests who are involved in college ministry. They travel around at the invitation of student campus ministry groups and lead services, and the woman that was

being interviewed said that one of the things that she hears students saying repeatedly is this statement or something like it. “I just want to be clean.” They are carrying baggage- secrets, sins, shame – and it’s heavy, and it’s holding them back, and they want to be free. If you are carrying baggage of some kind, maybe you relate to what the students are saying. *I want to be clean*, or you want to be free, or you want your life to be different.

If there is anyone listening today who finds yourself feeling tempted to despair and you find yourself thinking, *I’ll never change. My situation will never change. There is no hope for me.* If you are stuck in the shame of your own failures or stuck because you have been victimized by others, God is speaking today, and I believe God that God wants to speak to you directly and wants you to hear these words and know that they are God’s word to you – *I will not rest until your vindication shines out like the dawn and your salvation like a burning torch! You shall be called by a new name that I will give to you. As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride so shall I rejoice over you.* The wedding miracle is the miracle that Jesus wants to do in you. It’s the miracle that he wants to do in all of us. He wants to take all of the baggage that we carry and throw it away. He wants to take our hearts and start reshaping and reforming them. He wants to make us brand new from the inside out- the best version of ourselves – and he wants us to be him forever.

In that same podcast, the woman who was talking about speaking and engaging with students at these campus ministry events told a story about a water to wine miracle that God worked in one student’s life. At one of the services, this student responded to the invitation to be honest with God about his life, to hand over the baggage he had been carrying, and to believe that Jesus loved him, had forgiven him, and would make him brand new inside. Several months later, he got in touch with this woman and shared about the transformation Jesus had worked in his life. He said he had not gone back to his college campus after that night when he put his faith in

Christ because he had been a drug dealer and needed to remove himself from the environment. After leaving, he heard God calling him to become a missionary and all those months later he was in the process of training and preparing to answer that call.

Drug dealer to Christian missionary. That's a water to wine story, and God's good news that is proclaimed to us today is good news for drug dealers who want to be known by a new name and want to have a new life in Christ, but it isn't just for drug dealers. This good news is for anyone and everyone who is saying "I'm stuck. What I'm doing isn't working. I've got baggage that is holding me back." It's good news for anyone who is facing a situation that you are powerless to change. It is the good news that each and every one of us are loved so deeply and through Christ we can have a new mind, a new heart, a new purpose, new hope, a new future. Jesus will do the miracle, and all we need to do is believe that he is the one who can, tell him like Jesus's mother did at the wedding what it is we need, and believe that he will do it. Amen.