

John 2:1-11 – Water to Wine

A prayer from Augustine: Almighty God, enter our hearts, and so fill us with your love, that, forsaking all evil desires, we may embrace you, our only good. Show unto us, for your mercies' sake, O Lord our God, what you are unto us. Say unto our souls, "I am your salvation." So speak that we may hear. Our hearts are before you; open our ears; let us hasten after your voice and take hold of you.

Amen.

Let's take a look at John 2:1-11:

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

⁴ "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

⁸ Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, ⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

¹¹ 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.

This is the Word of the Lord.

This morning, we come to Jesus' first 'sign' as John calls it. Notice, it is a 'sign' not simply a miracle. Then we should ask what does a sign do? When we think of a stop sign, what is its purpose, it isn't simply a decoration, it has a purpose. It points beyond itself to tell you something necessary. It says, if you don't stop here, you could hit another car.

The sign that Jesus gives here is far more important than a simple stop sign, but it too functions the same way, it points beyond itself to a greater reality that might go unseen.

Remember last week we looked at the importance of seeing properly. Through Jesus' signs, as John calls his miracles, he is training us to see the world, not simply as it appears, but as water turned to wine.

Slide 7

The passage says that Jesus made six jars of water, each containing 2-3 measures, or 20-30 gallons, into the best wine the people have ever tasted. For a reference, that is something like 900 bottles of wine. It's passages like this one that make me glad I'm not a Baptist preacher! I remember people telling me it was the best wine tasted because it was grape juice! Some have even said that it was the best wine, because it was still water... promoting prohibition will make preachers say very odd things.

The great amount of wine points to the undeniably miraculous nature of this event. It is not some kind of magician turning a bit of water with a slight of hand, but something outlandishly large, an overabundance. The Prophets had declared that in the coming age the mountains would drip with new wine, and here we see Jesus giving a foreshadowing of that time.

When Augustine begins his sermon on this passage, he says that in comparison to all the things that Jesus does, this miracle doesn't really register as being that impressive. It isn't mentioned in the other Gospels, unlike the feeding of the five thousand. Augustine says, God is always turning water into wine if there is enough time allotted. The rain comes down watering the grape vines which yield their harvest and are turned into wine. Because this happens all the time we are not impressed, but that God has created a world to do this is in reality much more impressive than taking six stone jars and directly changing water into wine. It is only because our eyes are closed that we are not daily astonished by the intricacy of God's marvelous creation.

Slide 8

In our scientific world, we are really good at looking at the intricacies of God's creation, but really terrible at understanding their point. We are like a person going up to a stop sign, marveling at its strength, able to stand against wind, rain, and snow, looking at the beauty of its reflective paint, shining in the reflection of light. We marvel at the clarity of the font, and the recognizability of the shape and colour, able to proclaim its message from a distance. But we then ignore what it is saying and blow right past it. How deeply do we know God's world today! But how shallow is our recognizing what the world is pointing to? We can scoff at ancient people's rudimentary knowledge of the world, but they can laugh at our blindness as to what it is pointing to. Which is the greater blindness?

Slide 9

In this sense, of creation pointing to God, any miracle is a sign, as it points to how all creation is dependent on God whether we recognize it or not. A miracle is, as defined by J. Gresham Machen, as “the immediate, as opposed to the mediate, power of God.” What is a ‘mediate’ power? That is when God uses *means* to do his actions. God is constantly working through all things for his purposes, whether this be a direct action or the use of secondary causes, like our actions or the laws of nature. God is mysteriously in control of all things by his providential care, in ways mysterious to us.

Slide 10

Nature is not independent from God; God’s creative power is always at work. John said this in the past chapter, “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (Jn. 1:3). Water is changed to wine through grape vines being watered by rain, the soil feeds the vine nutrients, vines are planted and harvested, human ingenuity and creativity are implemented, yeast cells on the grape skin transform the sugar of the grape juice into alcohol, and water becomes wine. We would see God in this clearly if our eyes were open.

An ‘immediate power’ as Machen describes it, is where God uses direct action that is visible to all. Jesus tells the servants to fill some stone jars water and serve it to the wedding guests. Water becomes wine instantly rather than through time, and eyes are opened to who it is who is doing this, even if he is always the one doing it. It is a sign, it points us to the greater reality.

Slide 11

But any miracle points us to this greater reality. They tear open the veil that masks who is doing all things. Augustine, in this sense calls them “sacraments,” which is especially fitting since we are looking at wine. The Belgic Confession, quoting Augustine, says sacraments “are visible signs and seals of something internal and invisible” (BC A.33). This is not simply a miracle for the miraculous’ sake, a show of power and nothing else, none of Jesus’ miracles are like that. Just as none of the words of scripture are superfluous, so too Jesus’ actions are all pregnant with meaning. To see what the ‘sign’ is pointing to, we have to go a little deeper than simply to be impressed that Jesus can do this, as awesome as it is to give someone 900 bottles of wine.

Slide 12

At the wedding, Jesus has a somewhat odd encounter with his mother. It might seem to us that Jesus speaking to his mother in a disrespectful tone, “Woman, why do you involve me?” And he goes on to say, “My hour has not yet come,” but then he does what she asked. The weirdness of Jesus’ response should open our eyes to something deeper going on.

On the face of it, the request from Mary seems appropriate. In this culture, where weddings can last up to a week, there was a significant financial burden on a family to provide for their guests at a time like this. To run out of wine would give a significant amount of shame to the family, and there are even some sources that indicate a family could be given a lawsuit by the family of the bride for failing to provide adequately.

Seeing as Jesus, his disciples, and his family were all there, it seems that it was likely a close relative. Mary could have even been involved in the planning. We should note that this is Jesus' first miracle, there is no reason to think that Mary telling Jesus that there is no wine left would be a request for him to do what he does. It likely just shows how much she relies on him for taking care of her. We might imagine that Jesus was a very resourceful and dutiful son to his mother. Mary was likely also a widow at this time, as we do not hear of Joseph past Jesus' childhood.

If you were paying attention last Sunday, you might remember that when Jesus says something, there is great importance to the words he uses. They are not empty, but very precise. When Jesus says, "woman, why do you involve me...it is not yet my time," he does so for a good reason. One that has to do with the creation of the world, and the creation of us.

Slide 13

Remember, John is pointing back to the book of Genesis constantly in the first chapters of his Gospel. You might have noticed here that John begins his story of Jesus' first miracle by noting that it is the 'third day'. On the face of it, this is rather confusing, as the previous verses denote four days' time, and now John says it is the 'third day'. What is most likely taking place is that John is saying that this is three days after these original four. It has been three days since Jesus' encounter with Nathaniel, so it's now the seventh day.

With Genesis firmly in our minds as John has been drawing from it heavily in the first chapter, we can see that John is speaking about the last day of creation, where God rests. God's resting on the seventh day points towards our future rest. This is what Jesus is bringing us into with his ministry. We will no longer toil with work in this world, but we all will rest in his salvation. John will not keep track of days from here on out, he has made his point about the nature of Jesus' ministry. Jesus is coming to bring God's rest, his peace, his shalom.

Slide 14

But what does this have to do with Jesus calling his mother 'woman'? I think he is doing this because of the way Mary undoes the sin of Eve, the archetypal woman. Eve in her pride wanted to be like God, but Mary says, "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your

word to me be fulfilled” (Lk.1:38). Here, Mary shows the same humble submission, she says, “do whatever he tells you.” This is exactly what Eve failed to do. As Jesus is our new Adam, Mary is the new Eve, as it were.

This becomes clearer in the when Jesus calls his mother ‘woman’ again, from the cross. Jesus says from the cross in John 19, “woman, behold your son.” Again, this is a striking use of language, would you say this with your dying words? Jesus is not being flippant, he is pointing back to the very first pronouncement of the gospel. In Genesis 3, when Eve is hearing from God about the consequences of her sin, pain in childbirth and so on, God also announces that through Eve’s progeny one will come that will crush the head of the serpent. Genesis 3:15 says, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” Jesus on the cross is crushing the head of the serpent, and Mary gives birth to him. In this way she is bringing Eve’s prophecy to fruition, and being what Eve was supposed to be, the true “woman.”

Slide 15

Next, we must see that the stone jars that Jesus used were those “the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing...” Ceremonial washing was commanded by God in many places and for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, it is a recognition of some kind of natural dirtiness that must be cleansed before coming before a holy God. Because of this, many interpreters see these jars as a stand in for the whole of the law, as the law was purifying like the cleansing water.

Note there are six jars. The number six in the Bible signifies incompleteness. It may be that this is signifying that the laws for purification were not complete, they are awaiting Jesus to bring them to fulfillment.

Slide 16

If the water in these jars is to be taken as a stand-in for the old covenant law, then what could it mean for it to be transformed to wine? In this sense, it is seen that Jesus is taking the law, and transforming it into his new covenant. The ‘water’ of the old covenant law is turned into the ‘wine’ of the new covenant. Remember, Jesus says, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” The ceremonial cleansing water becoming wine is an image of what Jesus is doing with the Law, he is bringing it to what it to fulfillment.

The necessity of old covenant washing represented our filth and uncleanness before a holy God because of our sin. We see some of this in John’s baptism, as he emphasized repentance in the washing. But now, we see Jesus coming and baptizing in the Holy Spirit.

In comparison to the old washing water, now we have that which is transformed, a wine as it were.

In fact, this sign, and the cleansing of the temple after it, are two parts of the same whole. Both deal with how Jesus is fulfilling the law. In the cleansing of the temple, we see Jesus fulfilling the purpose of the temple, to offer sacrifice before God. In our story, Jesus shows how he will be the one to ultimately cleanse us. That which was closed to us because of our sin, namely the presence of the Holy Spirit, is now given to us because we are purified by Jesus' holy sacrifice.

We should also recognize what is being signified with the water becoming wine. Wine is of course what we use at the Lord's table. The cleansing that was anticipated in the Law is now brought to fruition through that which truly cleanses, the blood of Christ. With this sign, Jesus is pointing forward to the Lord's Supper.

Slide 17

It is in this sense that we can understand why Jesus mysteriously says, "my hour has not yet come." When Jesus refers to his 'time' or more literally here, his 'hour', it is a reference to the cross, where his whole life is leading to. The wine here represents Jesus' blood, which we partake in the sacrament. Here, Jesus gives a foreshadowing of what is to come. He is turning the water of the old covenant washing into the wine of the new. This new wine will cleanse like no other that has come before it, and brings the cleansing water that was there before into what it was created to be.

You might say to yourself, well, this is very nice, and it is good to understand what is going on in this passage better, but what does this mean for me? Why should I care about Jesus' fulfillment of the Law?

To see the importance of this it is helpful to remind us of what day we are celebrating today. Today we celebrate Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit is given to the disciples. We remember the story; the disciples are in the upper room praying and the Holy Spirit comes to them with tongues of fire.

Now, why was the Spirit able to do this? We might look back to the Old Testament, where the presence of the Spirit was highly guarded in the Holy of Holies, only able to be approached after much washing and sacrifice, and only by one person on one day. But now, there is a great High Priest, who offers one sacrifice to all, who has fulfilled all the requirements of the Law on our behalf and stands as our intercessor and Priest in heaven for eternity.

We celebrate Pentecost because of Christ's sacrifice we now can have the Spirit present among us, empowering us for holy living. It would be tragedy to take this for granted. Billions of people today struggle constantly worrying about how they can present themselves clean before God. Struggling with fasting, and praying, and offering sacrifices, but our God has done it for us.

We do not need to worry about our sin as we come before God, our uncleanness is covered by him. We do not need ceremonial washing as it was in the Old Covenant, we are given the living water of the Holy Spirit in the sign of baptism. This is good news, and a rest for our souls. Christ has taken our uncleanness on himself. The water of our old nature is now the wine of the new creation. It is finished. We have freedom from striving to be clean, and can live lives of gratitude for having been made clean.

The passage ends by saying, after this "his disciples believed in him." This is the goal of the whole gospel, John says in 20:31, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." We are to look on this miracle and not only see Jesus great power, or his desire for a host to not lose his honour, or that Jesus is here to bring joy, but that Jesus is coming that we will put our faith in him. He is the one who brings his creation to fullness. The water of this age will be the wine of the next, and we partake in that by putting our faith in the only one who can effect this change. We too are like water, and become like wine with the gift of the spirit.

Slide 18

We should not miss that Jesus' first miracle is taking place at a wedding. The significance of marriage should not be lost on us. If you remember a few months back when we were looking at Ephesians 5, we noted that God has instituted marriage as a sign of a greater reality. Paul calls marriage a "profound mystery," in how it gives an analogy to God's relationship with his people. The love and commitment of a husband and wife show God's love and commitment to us, the fruit of marriage in childbirth and creation of society, shows God's will for his creation.

This will be finally complete at the wedding supper of the lamb which is described in Revelation. Here Jesus and his church are wed together eternally. This is our hope. We are given white garments of his cleanliness to be his eternally. Let us close with this image from John's Revelation, 19:6-9:

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

"Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God

the Almighty reigns.

⁷Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;

⁸it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure”—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

⁹And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

Amen!