

Never-Ending, Vintage Joy

John 2:1-12

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on April 15, 2012

Introduction

- ❖ **One of the saddest things I experience as a pastor is to hear people explain why they've rejected the Christian faith only to discover that what they've rejected is actually not true Christianity but a distorted version of it.** They haven't rejected the real Jesus but a misrepresented, skewed image of him.
 - I have friends who grew up with me in the church or students I use to lead in the youth group here who have since walked away from the faith. They're what sociologists call the 'dechurched'.
 - And as I talk to them and hear them out, more often than not, I'm surprised (and sadden) that the Christianity and the Jesus they've walked away from is far different from what I see revealed in Scripture.

- ❖ For many of the dechurched, their experience of Christianity was stifling. It was all about what you can't do or shouldn't do. And the Jesus that was presented to them was a real killjoy. The Jesus they knew preached self-denial and to them that meant not having any fun. That meant suppressing your desire to be happy. **They felt forced, at some point, to choose between a life of self-denial as a Christian or simply to enjoy life.**
 - Do you see why this is so sad? They have no idea what Jesus meant when he said, "*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly (have it to the full)*" (Jn. 10:10). Those words sound foreign. That doesn't sound like the Jesus they know. But those *are* his words. They're indicative of the kind of person Jesus truly is.
 - So while it's sad they don't know him this way, it means we have an exciting opportunity to show the dechurched that the Jesus they think they know is not the Jesus of the Bible, not the Jesus of true Christianity. He is far better!

- ❖ That is why I'm excited to start this new series in the Gospel of John that we're calling ***Signs, Statements & Sayings***. From now through the course of the summer, we're going to be studying the 7 signs Jesus performed, his 7 "I Am" statements, and 7 significant sayings all from the book of John. **Our hope is that your view of Jesus and the Christian life will be challenged and shaped by Jesus' own words and deeds.**

- ❖ Friends, I'm not so naive to think that no one here identifies with the kind of feelings I've been describing. There may be some of you on the verge of walking away from the faith. Some of you have walked away years ago but now, for some reason, you're here today.
 - Some of you, on the other hand, are comfortable in church. You're comfortable with Jesus. But perhaps you need a fresh look at things. Perhaps the Jesus you thought you knew and the Christianity you've been living is not reflective of what we're going to find in Scripture.

- ❖ So please give ear to listen to this passage in John 2. It is the first of his seven signs, the story of Jesus at a wedding in Cana where he turns water into wine. Give Jesus an opportunity to show you who he really is and the kind of life he has come to bring for those who follow him. **[READ JOHN 2:1-12]**

Revealing Jesus' Identity

- ❖ This morning we're going to query the text with three questions. **First, let's consider what this sign tell us about who Jesus is. What does it reveal about his identity?** The passage begs this very question since it records one of Jesus' many signs.
 - In v11 it says, "*This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory.*" This was not just a miracle. This was not just a raw display of divine power. There was a Greek word that John could have used if all he intended was 'miracle'. But, no, John intentionally calls this a 'sign'.

- ❖ **Throughout the Bible, miraculous signs were given for the purpose of revealing and confirming the identity of the one performing them.** For example, you have Moses performing miraculous signs in Egypt – like turning the waters of the Nile into blood – to reveal and confirm that he was a messenger truly sent by God.
 - In the same way, when Jesus turns the water into wine, John calls this a sign because it's purpose is to reveal and confirm that Jesus is truly the God-sent Messiah.

- ❖ This is explicitly spelled out for us at the end of his Gospel in **chapter 20:30-31**. Turn with me there. "*Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book*". There is that word again. Now John will explain why he recorded some of these signs for his readers. "*But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*"
 - **So Jesus' purpose in these signs and John's purpose in recording seven in particular is to persuade us to believe that Jesus is the Christ.** But the goal is not just an intellectual belief. The goal is that by believing in Jesus you may have life, abundant life. A quality of life so foreign to many who say they tried Jesus in the past.

- ❖ Now let's turn back to chapter 2:11. Notice how John called this "*the first of his signs*". Now that could mean the first in order, but it could also imply the first in importance. But that is kind of strange if you think about it.
 - For 30 years, Jesus grows up in complete obscurity. He was just a town carpenter like his father Joseph before him. But finally he is going public. Finally he will reveal his glory and people will begin to see his true identity. **So what's his first sign to introduce himself to the public? He saves a dying party. (?)**
 - That's not how I would've started. I would've started with feeding the five thousand OR healing the man born blind. I would've kick started my public ministry by raising someone from the dead!

- ❖ But he didn't. He chose this. The Jesus of the Gospels doesn't come across as a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants kind of guy. He's deliberate. Even in our passage we see him very concerned with timing.
 - So his plan to introduce himself to the public was to turn water into wine. What is so significant about that? **All seven signs point to Jesus as the Messiah, but what does turning water into wine reveal, in particular, about Jesus as the Messiah?**

- ❖ The answer is clear once we recognize that the Old Testament provides the theological background to this event. **First, we need to realize that wedding feasts in those days were not like the 3-4 hour wedding receptions we put on.** These feasts could last as long as a week. In smaller towns like Cana, it would've been *the* social event for the entire community. The bridegroom and his family would've been responsible to host and cater the celebration.
 - And to run out of supplies like wine would have been especially horrible in that shame-based culture. There is even some historical evidence that suggests the relatives of the bride could sue the groom in such cases.

- ❖ **Second, we need to recall the various allusions to wine in the Old Testament.** In the Bible, wine was symbolic of joy. **Psalm 104:15**, "*The LORD gives wine to gladden the heart of man.*" So to have an abundance of wine was to be blessed by an abundance of God's joy.
 - That's why the prophets of Israel, writing to an exiled people languishing in spiritual dryness and misery, would use the language of abundant wine flowing throughout the land as a way of describing the coming salvation of God.

- ❖ In **Amos 9** we read, "*Behold, the days are coming,*" declares the LORD, "*when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.*" (9:13-14)
 - **Isaiah 25:6** we read these words regarding a future celebration to be had on Mt. Zion, "*On this mountain 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.*"

- ❖ **So by Jesus' day there was this expectation that God would send his Anointed, and through this Messiah "the mountains will drip sweet wine and all the hills will flow with it".** Jesus, his disciples, and all the Jewish guests at the wedding would have been familiar with this kind of language, with this connection between wine and God's joy.

- ❖ But now, while dining together, a social embarrassment is about to occur. For whatever reason, the groom didn't have enough supplies. The wine had run dry. And Jesus is approached by his mother with this problem. Now we'll consider their dialogue in a moment.

- ❖ He tells the servants to fill up six stone jars with water "*to the brim*". In those days, everyone who came to a wedding like this one would have to go through a purification rite before entering, usually a ceremonial bathing of your hands and feet with water from these jars.
 - So the servants fill them up, and if you do the calculation, we're dealing with up to 180 gallons of water. And without explaining exactly when or how, John implies that the water was turned into wine. The servants draw some and give it to the master of the feast, who takes one sip and is blown away by the high quality.

- ❖ So what are we supposed to see in this sign? Verse 11 says that by this Jesus “*manifested his glory*”. How? **How did creating fine wine out of bath water display his glory? What does it reveal about Jesus?**
 - Answer: **It reveals Jesus to be the Great Bridegroom.** Unlike this bridegroom who failed to supply enough for his guests, Jesus is the True and Better Bridegroom whose wine will never run dry. He is God’s Messiah who will richly supply his wedding guests with joy – and not just any joy – only the finest of joy, the choicest of joy. Never-ending vintage joy!

- ❖ *How do I know this is what the sign is pointing to?* Because it’s consistent with the rest of the Gospels where Jesus identifies himself as the Bridegroom. In **Matthew 9**, Jesus is asked why his disciples always eat and drink and don’t fast and mourn like others. Jesus answered, “*Can you make the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?*” I’m the bridegroom. While I am here, we’re not going to mourn. We’re going to celebrate.
 - John the Baptist recognized this. Later in **chapter 3**, some people come and tell him that all the people are flocking to Jesus. And John says that’s great. “*The one who has the bride is the bridegroom.*” He’s the bridegroom. This is his day. I’m just the best man, so I rejoice to see him increase as I decrease (3:27-30).

- ❖ This is who Jesus is. This is what the first sign reveals about him. Granted it’s not as flashy as walking on water or raising the dead. It’s not as public as feeding the five thousand. Only the servants and his disciples were aware of what happened.
 - But he chose this to be the first in order to dispel any misunderstanding of who he is and the life he came to bring. **Jesus is not the killjoy, party-pooper that so many have mistaken him to be.** Jesus is the Great Bridegroom, and when he throws a feast the wine will never run dry. Your joy will never go dry. Is this the Jesus you know?

Revealing Jesus’ Mission

- ❖ Now the second question we’re bringing to this text is this: ***What does this sign reveal about Jesus’ mission?*** What does it tell us about what he came to do as the Messiah? How does the Great Bridegroom intend to supply his people with never-ending, vintage joy?

- ❖ The answer to these questions can be derived from Jesus’ dialogue with his mother, so let’s look there. In v3, Jesus’ mother informs him of the dilemma. “*They have no wine.*” Now there is no reason to suggest that she expected Jesus to perform a miracle. In all likelihood, Mary was just relying upon her firstborn whom she knew to be faithful and quite resourceful.
 - But it’s Jesus’ response that usually alarms us. V4, “*Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.*” At first glance, it seems a bit rude and dismissive. Not the way you should talk to your mother, especially if you’re Jesus.
 - Now calling her “*Woman*” is not as offensive as you might think. In that culture, it wouldn’t be considered an endearing term but it was still courteous. Jesus addressed her in the same way while on the cross as he placed her under John’s care (19:26). So don’t interpret it as demeaning.

- ❖ But the phrase “*what does this have to do with me?*” definitely should be read as a mild rebuke of his mother. You can sense Jesus creating a certain distance from her at the start of his public ministry. But he’s not talking back to her like an ill-mannered son. What Mary needed to see is that all of Jesus’ ties, even family ties, must be subordinate to his primary mission and devotion to his Heavenly Father.
- ❖ Personally, I’ve been helped by Tim Keller to understand why Jesus sounds so distant and a bit off-putting in his response. Ask yourself this: ***What would a single man like Jesus be thinking about while at a wedding?*** What do most single people think about when they’re watching a new bride and groom celebrate?
 - They’re thinking about their own wedding, Lord-willing someday. They can be sitting next to you in the pew or at your table, but they’re lost in thought, a bit distant, a bit curt, because their mind is elsewhere thinking about their big day.
- ❖ **Jesus was thinking about his wedding day. While watching the new bride and groom, Jesus was starkly reminded that his big day is coming.** Unlike the rest of us, Jesus knew the who, what, when, how of his wedding day.
 - Now we know he is the Bridegroom but who is his Bride? It’s the people of God. We who trust in him. We collectively are the Bride. In the prophets, Israel was compared to a Bride (Jer. 2, Isa. 62), and the New Testament keeps the metaphor and applies it to the Church, mostly clearly in Ephesians 5. And in Revelation 19 we read that all of Jesus’ saving work is leading up to this future, glorious Marriage Supper of the Lamb.
 - That’s what was on Jesus’ mind. **He was deep in thought about the day he will throw a Greater Wedding Feast for his Bride, for the Church.**
- ❖ *How do I know this is what Jesus was thinking about?* It’s because of that statement in v4, “*My hour has not yet come*”. It comes out of nowhere. Mary is probably thinking, “Your hour? What are you talking about? I just want you to help get more wine.”
 - But that’s just like Jesus. **You could be talking about the lack of wine, but he detects a deeper symbolism in your words that you weren’t even thinking about.** Nicodemus is focused on the impossibility of entering your mother’s womb a second time to be born (3:4). Jesus talks about being born of the Spirit. The woman at the well asks Jesus for physical water (4:15). Jesus offers living water to quench her soul.
- ❖ So Mary is talking about the lack of wine. She just wanted to prevent an embarrassing situation. But Jesus detects a deeper symbolism. He sees the lack of wine at this party as symbolic of the spiritual barrenness of Israel, of God’s people. “*They have no wine*” could also mean “*They have no joy*”.
 - **And Jesus recognizes his unique identity as the Great Bridegroom who was sent to bring about an age when wine and joy would once again flow in abundance.** His thoughts are on his own Wedding Feast where he’ll drink the fruit of the vine once again with Bride.

- ❖ **But Jesus knows that before he can drink the cup of joy with his Bride, he must first drink the bitter cup of sorrow.** That is why he mentions his “*hour*” having not yet come. His “*hour*” is actually a technical term in John’s Gospel, which refers to the appointed hour of Jesus’ death.
 - Look up John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1. Jesus’ hour is his hour of glorification when the Son of Man will be lifted up to die. His opponents keep trying to arrest him to bring about these events on their own time, but they’re prevented from doing so because “*his hour had not yet come*”.
 - But then when Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, marking the final week of his earthly life, we read in chapter 12:23 Jesus saying, “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*” It’s time. And immediately we read of events quickly snowballing and landing him on the cross in five short days.

- ❖ All of this is in view when he replied to his mother, “*My hour has not yet come.*” In other words, “Mother, you’re hoping for wine to flow at this party, but my mission is to make sure wine flows throughout this land. I’ve come to prepare a Bride for a Greater Wedding Feast where I’ll supply never-ending, vintage joy to satisfy all my guests. Now I know before that can happen, I will have to drink the bitter cup, but that *hour* has not yet come.”

- ❖ We asked the question, “*What does this sign reveal about Jesus’ mission?*” Here it is. **Jesus’ mission is to prepare a Bride for his own wedding day, but first he will have to purchase her. He will have to pay a bride price, a dowry, that will cost him his life.**
 - You see, his Bride, the Church of God, is made up of sinners – wretched sinners like us – who have adulterated ourselves by seeking our joy in lesser gods, in created things. We have not kept ourselves pure for our Bridegroom.
 - And for our adulterous idolatry, we are condemned. There is prepared for us a bitter cup of judgment that we will all be forced to drink on that final Day.

- ❖ **But thanks be to God that we have merciful, loving Bridegroom who endured the cross and drank that bitter cup reserved for me.** Scripture says it was for the joy set before him that Jesus endured the cross (Heb. 12:2). *And what was that joy beyond the cross?*
 - It was the knowledge that, by his death, he would be ransoming a people from their sins. He would be purchasing a Bride made up of forgiven sinners from every nation, tribe, and tongue. The cost is immense but the joy is even greater!

- ❖ So just picture Jesus sitting at his table at that wedding in Cana. He’s watching the bride and groom clink their cups and sip their wine, full of joy. Then he takes a look at the cup of blood-red wine in his own hand, and suddenly he is reminded of his coming hour. It has not yet come but it surely will. So his hands begin to shake. His mind is troubled.
 - For Jesus knows that the only way for him to prepare that Great Feast for the everlasting joy of his Bride is for him to go through his hour of suffering and death. **The only way he can offer his Bride a cup of never-ending, vintage joy is for him to drink her bitter cup down to very last drop.**

- ❖ Friends, do you know *this* Jesus? Did the Jesus you know come to give a bunch of rules, to lay upon you a heavy yoke of expectations that you cannot bear? Or did the Jesus you know come to give his life as a ransom that he might give you life and prepare you for everlasting joy? Are you sure you have the right Jesus?

The Meaning of this Sign Today

- ❖ Let's conclude by asking *what does this first of Jesus' seven signs mean for us today?* What implications can be drawn for our lives? I have two for you to consider.
 - ❖ **First, this sign of turning water into wine means that God is just as committed to your joy as he is to his own glory.** In other words, God's glory and your joy are not at odds. You don't have to choose between a life living for God's glory or a life living for your joy.
 - *Why do I say this?* I go back to v11. In this first of his signs Jesus manifested his glory. That means the glory of Jesus and the joy of his people are inextricably linked. To increase one is to increase the other. To advance one is to advance the other.
 - This is why I find it so sad when the dechurched end up choosing their joy (their happiness) over God's glory. That was never a choice they had to make!
 - ❖ Let me speak to those of you who feel like you are being forced to make that choice right now. I'm trying to persuade you to see that your view of Jesus and the life he has come to bring (the Christian life) is mistaken. It's too small.
 - In performing this sign, Jesus is saying to us, "I have not come to just supply you with the basics in life. I have not come to provide the mere essentials. I've come to bring so much more!"
 - ❖ Friends, this is a miracle of excess, a lavish miracle. One might argue, "*Doesn't Jesus have more important things to do than turn water into wine? Why work a miracle just to keep a party going for a couple more days? Is it really that necessary?*"
 - No, it's not necessary. **BUT THAT'S THE POINT. Jesus didn't come just to bring the necessary in life. He came that we may have life and have it to the full!** Abundant life overflowing with never-ending, vintage joy!
 - ❖ *Do you know this kind of Jesus?* Is this the Jesus you're thinking of walking away from? If any of you are on the verge, I want to make sure you know who you're walking away from. My friends, don't write off Jesus. Don't write off the Christian faith, especially if you have yet to taste and see the fullness of joy that Jesus said he came to bring.
 - ❖ **Second, this first of his signs reveals what Jesus really thinks of his disciples.** When God calls himself a King, it tells us something about ourselves, about how he views us as his loyal citizens. If he calls himself a Shepherd, then we realize he thinks of us as his sheep. So by calling himself the Bridegroom, what does it say about how Jesus views us?

- ❖ Let me answer this way. One of the privileges of being able to officiate weddings is getting to stand right next to the groom. I'll tell you why. At that moment in the ceremony, when the doors fling open and everyone rises, all eyes are on the bride. But, in that moment, I love to look at the groom's face.
 - Every bride is equally stunning, but in the watery eyes of the groom, his bride, as she approaches adorned in her gown, is the most beautiful thing in the world. Now hold that thought while we consider one more thing from the text.

- ❖ Look back at v6 and those stone jars that we said were used for ceremonial bathing. It's significant that Jesus takes this ceremonial water and turns it into wine. And we know that, for Jesus, wine also symbolized his blood. Remember he said, "*This cup (of wine) is the new covenant in my blood.*"
 - The point is this: Ceremonial waters can never cleanse a sinner of their guilty stains. The Law, with all of its rituals and all of its washings, is still powerless to cleanse you from within, to make you beautiful in the eyes of God.

- ❖ But the blood of Jesus can. "*There is a fountain filled with blood / drawn from Emmanuel's veins; / and simmers plunged beneath that flood / lose all their guilty stains.*" Our robes will be washed and made white by the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14).
 - ***Do you want to know how Jesus views you if you are his?*** You are no longer filthy in your sins, unattractive in his holy eyes. No, He has washed you, and he has dressed in a gown of white without spot or blemish.
 - And as you approach him, Jesus can hardly contain himself. His eyes are flooded with tears. He can hardly speak. You look ravishing. You are the one for whom he died. You are the one he purchased with his life.
 - You are not just accepted by him. You are not just acquitted of sin. You are longed for. You are greatly desired. You are dearly loved.

- ❖ The magnitude of this glorious thought ought to thrill you. I pray that *this* is the Jesus you have come to know and trust and follow. Let me leave you with these words recorded by John in Revelation 19.
 - "*And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."*" (19:9)