

**A TASTE OF NEW WINE**  
**One on One: Drawing Nearer to Jesus**  
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John 2:1-11, as we look at this theme “Drawing Closer to Jesus of Nazareth” I want to borrow a title that Keith Miller made famous a number of years ago “A Taste of New Wine.” That’s what it involves in this passage of scripture we read from this evening. “On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, ‘They have no more wine.’ ‘Dear woman why do you involve me?’ Jesus replied. ‘My time has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, ‘Fill the jars with water,’ so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, ‘Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.’ They did so 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 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.’ This the first of his miraculous signs Jesus preformed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory and his disciples put their faith in him.”

We’ve been for some weeks looking at these early chapters in the gospel of John for the first impressions that Jesus’ disciples had of him. Knowing that those first impressions are meant to be our impressions of him as well. That’s part of our drawing closer to the Lord.

When a new President is elected and begins to serve in the United States the press and the political pundits look at the first hundred days of that presidential administration for a sign of how the whole administration is going to proceed. Often those first days in office are very telegraphic as to what is going to happen in that person’s presidency.

I remember when the day Jimmy Carter was inaugurated. His leaving the security of the presidential limousine and walking with his wife Rosalyn hand in hand down Pennsylvania Avenue from the capitol to the White House. It was a sign that from his point of view there would be a non-magisterial presidency. They would be friendly and lowly and humble and approachable president. A kind of man of the people, a man from Plains. Whatever you may like or not like about Carter’s administration he certainly never appeared to be an officious sort of a person. He did not represent himself as better-than-thou and disdained the kind of trappings that go with presidential power. He telegraphed in the first few hours and the first few days of his administration what kind of a style he would set in office.

Ronald Reagan did the same thing. I think it was within his first hundred days that he had fired the Air Traffic Controllers who were threatening to paralyze the nation’s airport system and airline routes, and thereby establish that he was a tough guy and don’t tread on me. He has sort of represented that kind of mentality through his presidency, that the United States is going to be in all areas, tough and firm and difficult to deal with and proud and forcing people to live up to the letter of agreements and the like.

I would suggest that when you look at this pattern of setting the course of administration and by the way, I’m not arguing whether or not Reagan has been successful. I’m just simply saying that

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he sought right from the beginning to send a message and he probably has been successful as most people in that public relations approach in that area.

But when you look at Jesus of Nazareth he also has been inaugurated for a mission. He is from eternity past, the elect Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior. But the first days of his administration did not begin to come into human focus until his baptism at the river Jordan. Then his consequent coming into Galilee. In between that baptism and his coming into Galilee John's gospel tells us he's been gathering disciples to himself. What he is doing in those first days of his administration is sending a message on the way things are going to actually be. The first miracle which he does, the turning the water into wine, sends us a great message as to what kind of administration we can expect from him who is the Lord of glory.

The one thing that immediately strikes us is the fact that Jesus in this first miracle, does sit with no ostentation at all. In fact, he carried off the miracle so quietly it never appears that the bride and groom knew that he did what he did. And only the servants themselves knew that he had turned the water into wine and later the disciples also came to the understanding. Jesus is beginning his administration is what someone has said on the small stage what God is in the universe, an anonymous and unknown, a hardly known stranger. Even as he has told us in our own personal lives to do our acts of giving without calling attention to ourselves so his mighty miracles were often done without calling attention to himself. But simply done because he spotted the need in another person's life and choose in a very quiet and humble way to use his miraculous powers to fulfill that need.

For many evangelical Christians especially Christians who do not believe or partake in alcoholic beverages the fact that Jesus would begin his ministry with a miracle at Cana has been somewhat of a stunner, and a conundrum. So there have been those along the course of time who have advanced the idea that Jesus really turned water into grape juice. There are those on the other end of the church in looking for an excuse to imbibe alcoholic beverages have said Jesus turned the water into real wine. There is some discussion here on what kind of wine did Jesus make and is he telling us that by the time that Jesus turned the water into wine everybody was so sodded that they didn't know the taste of one brand of wine from another and Jesus simply made a potion that would get them all more inebriated.

Probably one of the best analysis of New Testament understanding of what is involved in the word "wine" was done by Dr. Robert Stine, an article publicized several years ago in *Christianity Today* magazine. He did a whole process of looking at what constituted wine in the Greek world, the Roman world and the Jewish world of the first century. I want to note some features of it. He notes that in biblical days wine was stored in large pointed jugs called amphorae, which rested in a holder. When you're dealing with a culture which there is no refrigeration the minute that you store the product of the vine it is going to go through a process of fermentation. And become highly intoxicating and that is the content of what was in the amphorae. But people did not drink out of this large amphorae container whether they were Roman or Greek or Jews. Instead there was a process of drawing from that amphorae, that large container. There were other large bowls called craters where the wine was mixed with water. From these craters where the wine was mixed with water then the wine was poured out into cups. The ratio of water to wine varied depending upon the desire of the mixer of the wine to have a high alcoholic or low alcoholic content. Stein notes that even in the Roman and Greek world only the barbarians drank wine from the amphorae unmixed. That was truly strong drink.

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A one to one water to wine ratio, that is when you take the crater and mix wine and water together if you did one part water to one part wine ratio that was regarded as strong drink. The Talmud, which is the Jewish book of rabbinical teachings which interpret the Old Testament and was in formation for centuries the Talmud said that the normal wine drunk in the Jewish household approached a two to one ratio. Two parts water to one part wine but that for the Passover wine it was three parts water to one part wine. Quoting from the apocrypha the books between the testaments 2 Macabees 15:39 says "It is harmful to drink wine alone or to drink water alone." If you've ever been in Cairo Egypt you know why it's harmful to drink water alone. It's something you just don't want to expose the intestinal organs of your body to less you come out with ferocious monster that grabs hold of your insides and won't let go. So in the biblical world, and even in the Near Eastern world today without the water purification standards. If you've ever even been down into Mexico and watch how water is held in a cistern. I looked into a cistern, a holding tank for water. The rain water pours in there from the roof and I've not only seen chicken feathers but I've seen a dead animal in the water that's the family drinking supply. You understand what 2 Macabees says it's harmful to drink water alone.

And it's also harmful to drink wine alone. That is from the amphorae. But wine mixed with water is sweet and delicious and enhances one's enjoyment is what Macabees says.

Stein goes on to reflect that to consume the amount of alcohol that is in two martinis by drinking wine that has three parts water to one part wine, one would have to drink over twenty-two glasses of three part water to one part wine to equivalent the alcoholic content in two martinis. So therefore one would have to drink twenty-two glasses of such a substance in order to approximate two martinis and by the time you've drunk 22 glasses wine with three parts water with one part wine then you would have had your bladder affected long before your mind would have been.

The fact that Jesus made 120-180 gallons of wine he made about 2,000 glasses of the stuff. And by the way, that suggests it was a large wedding. The wine that Jesus made was not grape juice. It was the normal biblical household wine of the period and drunkenness was disdained both in the Jewish community as well as other cultural communities. Jesus made a sparkling drink.

I have an ethical belief that the Lord of glory is not making stuff that people can drink a couple glasses of and go off crocked. But the kind of wine that he made may have had some degree of alcoholic content to it but perhaps a closer description would be to say that he made a sparkling cider that may have had some alcoholic content but which when you drank it tasted good! That's why the people at the wedding feast said it was good stuff. You have saved the best till now. Normally by that time they served the worst wine. Whatever that meant within their culture we don't know but after people have been at an all day pot luck and have stuffed themselves with everything to stuff themselves with and drunk in large quantities along with the food by the end of the day you don't feel like eating or drinking much. Therefore you save the leftovers whether it's drink or food until the end.

But this process was reversed at Cana because whatever Jesus does he does really good. He does well.

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I have a personal belief that Christians living in our culture are better never taking alcoholic beverages but I would not be so crazy as to suggest that the drink that Jesus made did not contain an alcoholic content. It most likely did but it's doubtful it contained the kind of content one could easily become drunk on.

This miracle is called the first of his signs which means there was no miracle, which he did prior to this time. And a sign is given to set forth his glory. The word "sign" is used 17 times in John's gospel. Out of those 17 times there are 7 specific signs or miracles that are given. Beginning with a wedding and ending at a funeral. From John 2 to John 11. I think it's extremely fitting that the spectrum of Jesus' miracles should take those auspicious moments of life at a wedding to kick off the miracles and the last miracle which he does recorded in John's gospel the last sign is the raising from the dead. Because it is precisely in marriage and precisely at the moment of death it is within the family and it is in respect to personal mortality that we most need the presence of the living Christ. So he chooses to do his miracles in an arena where in life we have most need of meeting him.

These miracles are called signs because they reveal his glory and his disciples put their faith in him. It opens a window into the inner nature of Christ and his life and to show his glory means to show that in him which is most to be admired.

So what do we see in this miracle today that causes us to admire Jesus, that causes us to see his glory? I put before you two things that I have seen that are helpful to me in admiring the Lord from this text and to draw closer to him.

The one thing I see is that in this sign, in this miracle at Cana Jesus is one who appears as a person who does the works of God. It is God himself who has control over natural processes and can do something related to nature. Jesus is appearing on the stage of life and he's going to be saying to us in his ministry that he is God in the flesh. How do we know that he is who he says he is? How do we know? We know who he is if he does the deeds that only God can do. That certainly is the case here. John 1:3 says, "Through him the word all things were made." And he's demonstrating that he has this remarkable creative ability in the wedding at Cana. He shows us that.

A student seeking to know God came to an old man who had a reputation for knowing God, an old Christian scholar. The student said, "I'll believe in God if you can prove to me the existence of God by a miracle." The old man answered, "I need to know first of all your definition of a miracle. So I'm going to ask you. I have a seed here and I have a pot of dirt. If I plant this seed in this pot of dirt and it instantly begins to grow and within one hour of time the seed has become a tree that's filling all the room with its leaves and with its fruit, will you accept that as a miracle?" The student replied he would accept that as a miracle. The old Christian scholar looked at him and said, "What you would see is going on around you everyday only by a slower process. You would believe in it as a miracle if it happened within one hour but I'm telling you there is a miracle of everyday life that is going on around you all the time and yet you don't see the existence of God in it."

God can in one moment's time shorten the whole process of nature so he can if you will grow a tree in a room in an hour. This is what's happening when Jesus feeds the 5000. As he's breaking bread there's the idea of what is sowed in the ground and takes time to come up and be

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harvested and threshed and treaded and broken and made into flour and cooked in an oven and broken and distributed. All that is taking place in a split second time.

C.S. Lewis puts the wedding of Cana in the same kind of way when he says, “Every year in the natural order God makes wine. He does so by creating a vegetable organism that can turn water, soil and sunlight into a juice, which will under proper conditions become wine. But once and in one year only God now in the flesh short circuits the process, makes wine in a moment uses earthenware instead of vegetable fibers to hold the water. Instead of putting water in the fibers of the grapevine the Lord puts the water in the earthen pots of the vessels and short circuits the whole grape growing process and wine fermentation process and in one moment makes it all happen together.”

This miracle therefore is a tip off to that day that Christ speaks of in Revelation 21:5 “Behold I am making all things new.” He who can make wine in a moment has the power in a moment by the word of his mouth make a new heavens and a new earth. That’s the kind of Lord we serve who has that awesome power. A power that’s greater than simply the power to split an atom. But a power to make an atom where there is none. A power to make a universe where there is nothing. Not just to destroy it but to build it and to make it. Christ appears in the arena of history and his nature miracles beginning at Cana shows us who he is. God almighty in the flesh.

That’s one of the things that strikes me about this miracle. When I am serving the Lord Jesus Christ I am serving one in whose acts I see the dawn of a whole new day when everything in his time will be made new.

Then I think a second thing that flows off of this miracle by way of insight is that Jesus is not only manifesting himself as creator but Jesus in this miracle is showing himself as one who is committed to the welfare of the marriage and family. John the Baptist had withdrawn from social events to which now Jesus is coming. Jesus in coming to this wedding at Cana of Galilee was setting forth the difference he had with John in style. John went away in the wilderness and people came to him. Jesus would come into public and populated places and into social events and go to people. Jesus is also showing that he chooses not to live a life of an esthetic or the life of the Essene off in the wilderness somewhere. He’s showing by doing the miracle within the context of the marriage and a home that the home is still the great arena of activity.

I want to take a moment and spiritualize this message as it relates to the family and to marriage. I want to spiritualize the phrase that says “But you have saved the best until now.” Anyone that has been married any degree of time or ministers to people who have been married any degree of time knows that along the road there are bumps and strains and stresses upon marriage relationships. Probably there’s never been a time in the whole history of mankind where there has been as much strain on families, even the Christian family, as there are in the world today. So often it is the case when there is a failure of resources in a marriage – whether it be economic resources or communication resources or spiritual resources of one kind or another to look at that running out of the wine of life and presume that nothing can be done about it. That it’s all going to end in disgrace. And the guests are going to go back to their homes disappointment that our marriage feast was not what it was cracked up to be.

I think what Jesus was saying in this miracle is that when we expect the leftovers and the low grade wine of life he is wanting to move in and do something very splendid and save the best for

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the last. For the times when we have run out of resources the Lord wants to assure us that his presence is moving into the situation.

When it looks like in family life the supply of wine has run out – the vitality, the effervescence, the sheer elation of living – when it looks like that has run out of our experience instead of being in despair over that event open your heart and look. Because it is at that moment that the living Jesus wants to move into our lives with his presence and turn what is a down moment into a moment in which there is a sparkling presence and things turn out far differently than the down side we had envisioned.

I encourage us to see this first sign of Jesus as a sign that suggests to us hope in those moments of life when our resources are at low ebb. That may come in a time in your marriage or in your family or it may come at any time in your life when the wine is gone and the happiness is not present. It is in those moments when the wine is gone that the Lord again wants to come with his power and make his presence felt and give to us the joy of life.

If you've come this evening and it just looks like there are a lot of hard times in your experience and you wonder if it isn't going to crash this way and you're heading down and there's no hope for you and there's no rescue for you.

Don't rule Jesus out of the picture. Because it's in that moment of your life that he seeks to establish his presence and give us his joy.

Lord, there may be friends here this evening that are in desperate condition as the bride and groom was on that day in Cana in Galilee where they looked around and they had no more resources to stretch. In their society they faced the humiliation of being embarrassed for not having made provision. That so describes how we live sometimes in the every day. We've done our best and we thought we'd prepared and planned. But the unexpected has happened. Our resources are no longer sufficient to deal with the challenges that we face. There are times, Lord, we are so weak and so flat and so lifeless and so pressed down that we too are in need of a miracle in our life. We're in need of you turning around situations that we cannot change in our own power. When we've done our best and gone the last mile and tried and prayed as hard as we could and yet the shortage remains. We find ourselves again with you at the wedding in Cana and we find ourselves asking you, "Lord, I have no more wine." Sometimes, Lord, you may give us the impression that you're putting us off like Mary probably felt when you asked her why she was involving you. But you do see our heart cry. And you do make provision. Quietly in our life and in ways that we cannot fully understand or know you open up resources for us so that we do not run out of the wine of life. We think of Paul's words when he shares the same experience within his language. Of how he was knocked down but not knocked out. How he was in trouble but had not completely despaired. How he had found in you're the power to come back and find the resources and the vitality to live. There are some within this room for whom living is a chore. It is a hard task. It takes all the strength they have just to live an ordinary day. The troubles of life seem to come and there is simply too much coming their direction. You know that. And you cause us in those moments of life to look around. Lord, you do show up. You are the giver of joy. Our only responsibility is to stay at the feast until you've done your thing. If we leave early or check out before you've done your miracle then we miss the party. But life is meant to be rewarding. It is meant to be fulfilling. Even at its lowest

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moments there is to be a level of joy in our life that is still there in1` the most dry time, there is still joy. You want to give us enough so that we never run out. And you want to surprise us with your presence so in those moments when we think we're going to have the worst, we will instead discover that you've saved the best until now. That we learn as we follow you. Grant that in our lives we may taste the new wine that you're giving to us. Fill us through your presence with joy and purpose and hope. We ask in Christ's name who loves us. Amen.