

# John's Gospel - the Life of the Party

by John Vissers

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*Jesus performs his first miracle by turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, revealing his glory and his mission to bring new life and joy to people.*

**Duration:** 40:24

**Scripture:** Genesis 1, Matthew 6:33, John 1:19-29, John 1:35-42, John 1:51 - 2:11

**Topics:** "Gospel Of John"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by asking the audience about their needs and challenges in life that may push them to seek Jesus. He emphasizes the idea of trusting Jesus and allowing Him to intervene in their lives. The speaker then focuses on the story of Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. He highlights that this miracle is a sign that points to Jesus as the one who brings the kingdom of God. The sermon concludes with the invitation for the audience to experience the transforming power of Jesus in their lives.

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## Transcript

We continue in our study of the Gospel of John, and we're reading in the second chapter tonight, reading verses 1 to 11. John chapter 2, reading verses 1 to 11. On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee.

Jesus' mother was there, and 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 20 to 30 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 performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him. Amen, and may God bless to us this reading from his word tonight.

Let's pray together, shall we? Gracious God, our father, we thank you tonight for your word, your inspired and holy word, which instructs us and encourages us, which exhorts us, and empowers us to live for you. We pray tonight, O God, that you would send your spirit. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer.

Amen. My experience has been that weddings can be wonderful times of joy and wonderful times of celebration, but that sometimes they can also be occasions of great tension and sometimes even occasions of embarrassment. I've been quite fortunate as a pastor so far in that I've not had any weddings, at least none that I can remember, that have been unmitigated disasters.

But some of my colleagues have horror stories about weddings that they've conducted over the years, about grooms that have fainted, about brides that have arrived two or three hours after the time of the start of the wedding. One of my friends had fisticuffs break out amongst the wedding party in the middle of the service, if you can imagine that. All kinds of problems that can potentially occur.

Some of you might have heard a couple of weeks ago about the wedding reception in Woodbridge, just a little north and west of Toronto, where someone showed up and held the bride and the groom and some of the wedding party up and made off with some of the gifts and some of the money that had been given. Not exactly the kind of thing you want to have happen on the occasion of a wedding. Well, the wedding that's described here in John chapter 2 had the potential to become an embarrassing situation, had the potential of being a very difficult and embarrassing social situation.

I mean, imagine what it would have been like to have been present at this wedding in Cana of Galilee. It was a small town. It was a small town wedding.

Presumably people knew each other and everyone at this wedding would have known each other. It was a time of celebration and everyone was there to celebrate with the bride and the groom to have a good time until the wine ran out. What a disaster.

Perhaps someone had not planned well enough. Perhaps more guests had showed up than were expected. Had someone forgotten to buy enough wine.

We're not told exactly or precisely what happened to cause this situation, but what we are told is that this is the place where Jesus performed his first miracle. That it's at this wedding in Cana of Galilee that Jesus intervenes. That Jesus moves in and reveals his glory, rescues the situation, changing some water into wine, bringing life back to the party, and indeed showing people that he is the Son of God.

And our passage tonight takes us right in to the middle of this wedding. Notice that the text begins in the first verse, On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Now the opening verse links this event with the events that have already been described in the first chapter of John's gospel.

This is now the seventh day which is described by John the Gospel writer. And let me just remind you of the unfolding of the events in the first week of Jesus' ministry. On the first day, John the Baptist, you'll remember, was interrogated by the religious delegation which had been sent out from Jerusalem to inquire as to who he was.

On the second day, John the Baptist pointed, when he saw Jesus, pointed to him and said, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. On the third day, two of John's disciples, Andrew and John, and then Andrew's brother Simon Peter, follow Jesus. They pick up, they take up, and they follow after Jesus.

Andrew and John had in fact been disciples of John the Baptist and now they turn and follow Jesus. On the fourth day, which we looked at a couple of weeks ago, Philip and Nathanael are called to follow Jesus. And then the text says in the first verse of the second chapter, on the third day, and the intention I think is on the third day after this, that is on the seventh day, on the third day after the fourth day which has just been described, on the seventh day Jesus and his disciples attended a wedding in Cana of Galilee.

Now many students of John's gospel have noted the importance of these opening seven days in the life and in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the prologue, you'll remember that Jesus was identified as the Word of God through whom and by whom all things were created. And you'll remember at that time that I pointed out how clearly that was a parallel to the opening chapter of Genesis.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Well what happens in the rest of Genesis? In the rest of Genesis chapter one there is then the unfolding day by day of the seven days of creation, the week of creation. And it's been suggested by students and scholars of John's gospel that John the gospel writer here is using a creation week parallel at the beginning of the gospel.

Jesus is the creator. He is described as the Word of God by whom and through whom all things are created. And now this is the first week unfolding of his work and ministry.

The eternal word became flesh and began his work of recreation, the work of redemption, the work of calling a lost and alienated world back to its creator. And so now we come to this seventh day, the day in which this miracle took place. It's also important I think to understand the context here in terms of what immediately precedes it at the end of chapter one.

You'll remember as we looked a couple of weeks ago at the end of chapter one Jesus was speaking to Nathanael and he says to him, you shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man. And you'll remember how that is an illusion, a direct reference really or an allusion to the story of Jacob at Bethel in the Old Testament. Jacob had seen a golden ladder that went up to heaven, leading up to heaven.

God had made something of his glory revealed, made something of his glory accessible to Jacob in that vision, in that dream that he has. And Jesus is now saying that this glory will be revealed in his ministry, that they shall see his glory revealed in their midst and then what happens is this miracle. Jesus turns water into wine and if you jump down to the end of the passage in verse 11, this is the first of his miraculous signs Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee and he thus revealed his glory and his disciples put their faith in him.

He revealed his glory. And so as we move into this second chapter we have all of this from chapter one before us as we move into this story, this description of this miracle which Jesus performed at Cana of Galilee. And so let's look at this account in and of itself and see what's here and what the Lord would teach us through this story of Jesus changing water into wine.

First of all let's notice in verses one to four that the situation is described and the problem is presented very clearly. As the story opens there is a problem. There is indeed a crisis.

The wine has run out. Now for a reason that we're not given, Mary the mother of Jesus tells Jesus this. She comes to Jesus and she says they have no more wine.

Now as I say we're not told exactly why Mary came to Jesus with this information. There may be any number of reasons why she may have gone to Jesus with this problem. One of the reasons that's suggested is that this may well have been a family wedding.

This may well have been part of their extended family and Mary may have had some responsibility or at least would have felt some embarrassment over the fact that the wine had run out and so she goes to Jesus, her son, and informs him of this situation thinking that he might be able to do something about it. That's one possible explanation. Another possibility is that Jesus and his disciples had in fact failed to bring with them wine to the wedding feast and Mary intends to remind them of that omission.

According to the wedding customs of the day as much as we can understand them and those who have studied them, weddings in the first century, it usually was the case that guests were expected to bring a present of wine to wedding feasts and so it's possible that Jesus and his disciples may have come without such a present and that Mary comes to Jesus to point out the problem that has now occurred. It's also of course entirely possible that Mary expected Jesus to do precisely what Jesus did. That he might miraculously intervene in this situation.

That he might indeed change water into wine. Whatever the case, there is a problem here and Jesus is expected to help. Jesus is expected to intervene.

Jesus is expected somehow to rescue this situation as it unfolds. And then notice Jesus' response. The response that he gives seems rather abrupt to us.

Dear woman, he says, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come. He seems to hesitate in response to her request. It's almost as if he's saying to her, why are you bothering me with this? This is not my problem.

But if you look carefully at the words, I think you'll discover that the words are not as jarring as they may at first appear. He calls his mother dear woman. And in fact that's the same expression, the same way that Jesus addressed Mary from the cross.

That he addressed her from the cross when he entrusted her care to John in John chapter 19 and verse 6. But the point here is at the same time he makes it clear that his supreme concern is obedience to his father in heaven. He's now marching according to God's time. His supreme concern now is obedience to his heavenly father.

He cannot be driven simply by the needs and the requests of his human family. All of his life now as his ministry begins is lived under the shadow of the cross. His supreme concern is obedience.

All of his ministry is in the light of his mission. Everything that happens, everything that he says, everything that he does must be done according to God's time. And his point is this, if he's going to intercede in this situation, if he's going to intervene in this situation, if he's going to act in this situation, it's going to be because it's in the will of his father in heaven.

It's because he's acting according to the timing and to the will of his heavenly father. That it's according to the Lord's marching orders. That it will bring glory to his father.

That it will reveal his glory and his mission and his saving work. And I want us to pause here because I think here really is our first point of application if we think about it carefully. It's often our experience, it's certainly often my experience, that we come to Jesus and that we are driven to Jesus when our own human resources are depleted.

Sometimes we only come to Jesus when we come to the end of ourselves. We are driven to Jesus out of need. And often Jesus meets us in the midst of our own need when we have come to the end of ourselves.

At such times it seems we seem somehow more willing to be able to call on the name of the Lord. Perhaps it's when we face difficult circumstances in our own lives, difficult challenges, whether it's financial pressures, difficulties in our families, difficulties with an illness, difficulties in relationships, whatever it may be, these things, these needs push us toward Jesus Christ. And in fact this is sometimes how people become Christians.

They realize their need, their resources are depleted, and they are pushed in the direction of Jesus because they think somehow although they're not always sure, but they think somehow that Jesus is the only one who can help them. It's also sometimes how our own faith, those of us who are Christians, is renewed. We may go along in our lives for a while and some crisis may occur and we're thrown, as it were, into the arms of Jesus.

And we realize that we have no other help than Jesus himself. And certainly I have found this to be true in my own life, that sometimes it's when you are pushed to the edge that you realize and you learn then what it is to trust in Jesus. I really learned how to pray one summer when I was 18 years old.

When I was 18 years old I was given the responsibility of giving leadership to one of our church camps. And I realized not long into doing that job that summer that I was way in over my head. I was responsible for 80 children every week, 25 leaders, over 600 people in the course of the summer.

And as we went into that summer I realized that my own abilities, my own resources, all that I brought to this position of leadership was not going to be enough in order to really give the leadership and the ministry that was required in that circumstance and in that context. And it's in that kind of a situation that you're pressed to your knees because you realize that your own human resources are not going to be adequate. And I remember crying before God to intervene, to intercede time and time again because I didn't know how to handle a particular situation or because there was a particular problem that emerged.

And I've discovered again and again and again in ministry that it's at those points when we come to the end of our own resources that the Lord often is able to use us because then we cast ourselves upon him. We expect something. We believe that the Lord can do what we're not able to do.

We believe that the Lord can provide what we're not able to provide. But there's another aspect to this point that we need to understand and that is that the Lord does it in his time. And the Lord does it in his way.

And the Lord does it according to his will, not always according to our will. And he does it ultimately so that he will be glorified in and through us. That his will may be done.

It may not always be according to our timing. But God answers. Jesus intervenes.

And he works in us in such a way that we may become transformed. That we may become trophies of his grace. That we may become occasions just as this wedding feast in Cana of Galilee.

That we may become occasions where the glory of Jesus is revealed. Because you see the Lord is always at work in the midst of our lives. But our lives are always part of his grander purpose.

His grander will which he is working out in the world. And we need to bear that in mind as we seek the Lord in prayer. Particularly as we come to the end of our own resources.

And so I ask you tonight, what is your need? What is it that might push you to Jesus? Are you pushed to the limit in some area of your life? Are your resources depleted? And may this become an occasion for Jesus to intercede and to intervene in your life. Where can the Lord be glorified in your life tonight? Where are those points where you're willing to trust him? But let's move on because the story as it unfolds becomes very dramatic. And in verses 5 to 10 what happens then is the miracle itself.

And Jesus changes water into wine. And it's done in a very simple and in a very straightforward manner. Mary tells the servants to follow the instructions of Jesus.

We're not told exactly what Mary thought or how she responded to this word of Jesus except that she tells the servants to be obedient. Follow and do whatever he tells you to do. She sees that something is going to happen.

That something is at work here. And so Jesus, the text says, tells them to fill six stone jars, six stone water jars with water. And they fill them to the brim.

And Jesus then tells them, he instructs them simply to take some out and to take it to the master of the master of the feast, the master of ceremonies, the head waiter as it were, the person who was in charge of the wedding feast. And the master of the feast tastes the wine. And he didn't realize where this new wine had come from, although some of the others had.

And he's stunned. He assumes that the bridegroom had broken open a new case of wine which had been held back. But he's confused by this because this is good wine.

And then we have this lovely statement which he makes. Why had they kept the best wine until the end? Here they were worried about having enough wine and there was all this good stuff still to be served. Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper after the guests have had too much to drink.

A wonderfully honest statement isn't it? The expectation was that people would have too much to drink at a wedding and so you could water down the wine by the end of the evening and people wouldn't notice if the cheaper wine was brought out. But here this is good wine. This is the best wine.

It is brought out at the end of the feast. And I want you to notice that the miracle is really very simple in the sense that there's nothing really sensational. There's no magic here.

The water had simply been turned into wine. We're not even told whether the master of ceremonies, whether the master of the feast or the bridegroom ever fully understood, ever found out that Jesus was the one who had provided the wine by the means of this miracle. But some of them knew and the point is that

the disciples knew.

Now I want us to notice some things about the way this miracle unfolds because I think there are two or three points of application that we need to note. The first is that the water, the water was poured into six stone jars. The kind that was used, the kind that were used by the Jews for ceremonial washing.

You'll recall that Jewish law required that hands be ceremonially washed before meals. And this represents the requirements of the law. And the point is very clear that Jesus brings new wine out of the water that's used to fulfill the requirements of the law.

And this indeed is a theme that runs throughout the Gospels. The law represents that which stands over against us. It stands, it represents that which holds us in bondage as customs and external laws and taboos which can never give satisfaction, only frustration and failure and death.

We can never fulfill the law's demands. It can never really cleanse us. It cannot really purify us from sin.

And so this ritual water is turned into wine. And the idea is very clear that only Jesus is the one who can really cleanse us. Jesus is the one who can bring new life.

Only Jesus is the one who brings the joy and the new life to this party and to the lives of all those who will trust in him. This is new wine. I want you to notice this.

Brought out of the water. And then secondly, notice that there's enough to spare. Jesus provided enough wine, it says, for the feast.

He provided between, according to the jars that were filled, between 120 and 180 gallons of wine. That's an awful lot of wine for this wedding feast. And I want to suggest to you, and most of the commentators point this out, that again here we have the lavishness of God's grace being poured out.

That when the grace of Jesus comes to people, there is enough to spare. Think, for example, of the feeding of the 5,000. The feeding of the 5,000, which we'll come to in due course in this gospel, is not a miracle where Jesus barely cobbles enough food together to just barely feed the people who are there and who are needy.

It says, after all of the people had been fed, there were basketfuls of food picked up. And so it is with this wine. Jesus takes this water, he transforms it into wine, and there is enough to spare.

And the reality is that when Jesus comes, when Jesus comes into our lives, we discover that the fullness of his grace overflows in our lives. He does so much more than we could ask or imagine. He opens up new horizons.

He brings us the fullness of life overflowing as he comes. It's new wine. It's a lot of wine.

And then notice, thirdly, that it is the best wine. I love this part of the story. The wine produced by Jesus was the best wine.

The master of ceremonies, the master of the feast, is perplexed. Why have they saved the best wine until the end? You see, common water, this water that was used for religious purification, is turned into the best wine of the evening. And when Jesus touches our lives, when Jesus transforms our lives, he recreates us.

He makes us new. He transforms us into what he wants us to be. Long before Mother Teresa was well known for her work amongst the poorest of the poor in Calcutta, Malcolm Muggeridge had gone to visit her.

This was back in the 60s already, and gone to see the work that she was doing. And he was so impressed with her life and her ministry that he wrote a book about her, and that was really the book that brought her to public attention. And the book was called simply, *Something Beautiful for God*.

And that's what Jesus wants to do in our lives. He wants to make us something beautiful for God. Bill Gaither, a few years ago, wrote a song that some of you will know, which sums up the transforming power of Jesus.

Something beautiful, something good, all my confusion he understood, all I had to offer him was emptiness and strife, but he made something beautiful of my life. You see, Jesus takes our lives in all of their brokenness, in all of their commonness, and by his grace as he touches our lives, he can make our lives into something beautiful for God. And then finally notice that there's an interpretation given to this miracle.

The meaning points to the sign, the identity, and the mission of Jesus. Verse 11, John concludes the story by telling us that this was the first sign that Jesus did. Now a sign tells us something.

A sign points us in a direction. It gives us direction. It points us somewhere, and in fact this is the first sign, the first of a series of signs, which is given in John's gospel.

The others are the healing of the official son in John chapter 4, the lame man who's healed at Bethesda in John chapter 5, the feeding of the 5,000 in John chapter 6, Jesus walking on water, the man who's born blind who is healed in John chapter 9, and then the raising of Lazarus, which becomes, as it were, the final sign before Jesus himself is raised from the dead. And all of these are signs, but what are they signs of? John says that through these signs, Jesus revealed his glory and his disciples put their faith in him. These are signs of revelation.

These are signs of the unveiling of the glory of Jesus. They tell us something about Jesus. They are signs which are intended to generate faith in those who saw them, and particularly in the lives of the disciples.

And we need to understand that in the gospels, and especially as the miracles of Jesus are explained and interpreted in John's gospel, that these are not just sensational acts which Jesus undertakes to impress people. And they're not even things that are simply done out of compassion for people, although Jesus certainly responds out of compassion with a heart of compassion ministering to the needs of people. But underneath them is this deeper reality.

They are intended to reveal the glory of Jesus to those who witness them. And the point is, as John's gospel unfolds, is that these miracles, while they were intended to generate faith, to create faith in the lives of the disciples, the point was that the disciples were not to have faith because of the miracles themselves, but they were to see the one who performed the miracles. They were to see the reality of Jesus and put their faith in Jesus.

And that's what verse 11 says, and his disciples put their faith in him. What we discover a little later is that some of the disciples no longer follow Jesus, because when he calls them, when he starts to talk to them about what it really means to follow, what it really means to be a disciple, then they realized that they had

followed simply for the sensational acts, and when something more was involved, they weren't willing to follow any longer. Now, what does this tell us about Jesus, this miracle, the changing of the water into wine? Well, it tells us that he is the one who brings in the kingdom of God.

The central teaching of Jesus is that the kingdom of God was at hand, and in the Gospels, in the New Testament, the kingdom of God is illustrated by two things. The kingdom of God is said to be like new wine, and the kingdom of God is often compared to a wedding feast. And here, Jesus is revealing his glory at a wedding feast, at a wedding celebration, and he changes water into wine.

It is no accident that in this first miracle, Jesus chose to reveal himself at the beginning of his ministry at a wedding, and that this first miracle was the changing of water into wine. The kingdom of God was at hand. This was a new day breaking in through the life and through the ministry of Jesus.

You see, the wedding at Cana in Galilee represents a transforming moment, not simply in the life of that party, but it represents a turning point in the course of human history. Jesus had begun his work of redemption. The kingdom of God was now at hand.

Things would never be the same again. The kingdom of God was breaking into this world, and the repercussions of that day would echo, would echo, and would continue to echo down to our very day today. Because as Jesus comes to our lives and transforms them, he changes them into something beautiful as we are brought in to his kingdom.

The Christian musician Larry Norman could have been a casualty of the 1960s drug culture. He grew up in California in the 60s and became a part of the counterculture. He was immersed in it, but something happened in his life.

At a point when he was still a teenager, he met Jesus Christ, and he found that Jesus transformed his life. It didn't seem possible to him. It seemed like a miracle, but Jesus made a difference in his life, and it was real.

And this is how he described it in one of his early songs. The words are simple and straightforward, and I think in a sense they are the kind of words, the kinds of words that we reflect on as we reflect on this miracle in John chapter 2. He writes, I don't believe in miracles. I know what's real.

I don't pretend. I don't believe in miracles or stories with a happy end. Life is no one's friend.

But when we met, I felt so free, and suddenly I felt a change come over me. Do you suppose a miracle is happening to me? I don't believe in miracles. I've been around.

I've seen enough. The only way to get along, you must be strong. You must be tough.

Life is one big bluff. But then you opened up the door, and I walked right in, and all my fears fell on the floor. Do you suppose a miracle is happening to me? The hope of the gospel, the promise of John chapter 2 is that the kind of miracle which Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee is the kind of miracle that he can perform in your life.

He can change the water of your life into the new wine of joy as he brings you into the kingdom. May you know his transforming power in your life tonight. Let's pray.

Gracious God our Father, we thank you tonight for this story which comes to us from Gospel of John. We thank you for our Lord Jesus and for this miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. And we thank you here that his glory was revealed.

And we thank you, O Lord, that by your grace you come to our lives. You change us and you transform us according to your will. Help us, we pray, to receive that grace tonight, open our lives that we might experience your renewing power, your transforming power.

Touch us at our point of need and help us to trust you. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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