

The 7 Signs of Jesus | Water into Wine

John 2:1-11

This year, as we continue our spiritual formation journey of *Apprenticing to Jesus*, we're going to explore Jesus' life story, as told in the gospel of *John*, starting today with Jesus' miracle of turning *water* into *wine*—a story told exclusively by John, who tells us this was, ***“the first of the signs through which [Jesus] revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”*** (2:10)

Now, in John (referred to by some scholars as, *The Book of Signs*) Jesus' early life and ministry is marked by seven *sign*-stories. Over the next seven weeks, we'll look at all seven of these signs in hopes that, through them, Jesus might again reveal his glory *to us*. To help us out, John explains that he's chosen and crafted *these* specific seven signs with a clear goal in mind, writing that,

“Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 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.” (John 20:31)

The seven signs recorded in John are told to reveal Jesus as the *Messiah*—the climax and conclusion of *Israel's* story and, as such, the ultimate fulfilment of *all* human hope—and as the *Son of God*—a term hailing Jesus as God's royal ruler—the *King of the Cosmos*. John wants us, like the disciples, to *believe in Jesus*, trusting him to be our hope and to rule over *our* lives that we might discover a whole new quality of life—*his* life in *us*. John's goal—and the goal of this series—is for us to experience firsthand the full, rich, and abundant life of Jesus for ourselves.

Now, as a sidenote, we're trying something new this fall. Alongside this *7 Signs of Jesus* message series, we'll be recording a weekly podcast to provide some *bonus content* for each week's sermon. We also want to offer some helpful tips on how to approach and engage with scripture on your own, and dig into some of the passages in John we won't be tackling here on Sundays. The first episode is available online now; you can check it out right after the service.

Now, let's begin with the story, already read for us, of Jesus turning *water* into *wine*.

Growing up, I was always *skeptical* about this miracle—not as to *whether* it happened, but *why* it happened. Why is Jesus' first miracle essentially *reluctantly resurrecting a party from deadsville*? Setting aside the questionable act of providing the equivalent of nearly a thousand bottles of wine to an already over-served crowd, couldn't Jesus have done something a bit more *significant*? Like turning water into *penicillin*, *ending world hunger*—something more useful in the advancement of human flourishing? Why is *this* the miracle that launched Jesus' ministry? And how is this glorified *party trick* a sign that reveals his *glory* as *Messiah* and *Son of God*?

Well, to begin, we first need to appreciate why John calls these miracles, *signs*. (For a deeper dive into the Biblical meaning of *signs*—*an idea seeded on page one of the Bible that includes water being miraculously turned into blood*—check out the podcast after the service.) But simply put, *signs point to a reality beyond themselves*, like the *Southridge* sign you passed on your way in today. The sign says *Southridge*, but *it isn't* Southridge; it just tells you where we are. [This sign](#) won't crush your car, but it can alert you to possible danger ahead. [This sign](#) isn't worth the flight to Paris, but it does tell you where you can find the Mona Lisa. That's what signs do—they *demand* our attention in order to *direct* that attention to the reality they point to.

Similarly, Jesus didn't perform miracles just to impress us with cool tricks; his miracles were *signs* pointing to a deeper reality, revealing his glory as *Messiah* and *Son of God*, directing us to believe in him and find life in his name. John urges us to not get so caught up in the *awe* of Jesus' miracles that we miss the *a-ha* moment they provide; to not let the *wow* eclipse the *why*.

So, as we examine this first sign, we need to look beyond the miracle to see its meaning; to see how *turning water into wine* revealed Jesus' glory and turned his *friends* into *followers*.

John's first clues come as he tells us both *when* and *where* this event took place, writing,

On the third day a wedding took place at *Cana*. (John 2:1)

The phrase, *on the third day* likely leaps off the page, like John is winking at us, hinting at Jesus rising *on the third day*? For ancient Jewish Bible-scholars, *the third day* was a loaded term. More than a measure of time, it referred to an *idea* planted like a seed on page one of the Bible.

In Genesis 1, God creates *Day & Night* and *Sea & Sky* on days *one* and *two* of creation. But on the *third day*, God brings forth from the waters, dry land, and with it, the very first *signs of life*—*plants, trees*, springing up from seeds buried in the ground. *Life* arising from *lifelessness*. This is the original *third day*, the birth of a recurring theme seen throughout the Old Testament.

Like when Abraham goes to sacrifice his son Isaac and God intervenes with a last-minute surprising-twist substitution, essentially rescuing Isaac from death to life, we're told in **Genesis 22:4** that this proto-resurrection story happened, **"on the third day."** Later in Genesis, when Joseph's own death-to-life journey ends up delivering the family of Israel from death by famine, this too happens, **"on the third day."** (**Gen 42:18**) And in the epic Exodus-out-of-Egypt story, God miraculously delivers Israel from certain death by turning *water* into *dry land*, delivering them to Mount Sinai, to ascend into God's presence on, once again, **"the third day."** (**Ex 19:11**) In fact, so vivid was the ancient Jewish hope of resurrection on *the third day*, the prophet *Hosea* wrote, **Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces, but he will heal us; he has injured us, but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. (Hosea 6:1-2)**

John tells us Jesus's first sign took place *on the third day*, at a wedding in *Cana*. *Cana* was a small village, not found in any other book of the Bible. But its *name* conceals a connection to the miracle of God turning *water* into dry land. See, the name, *Cana* means the *Place of Reeds*. In Exodus, when Pharaoh orders the death of all Israelite male children, baby Moses' life was saved, when his mother, **"placed the child in [a basket] and put it among the reeds."** (**Ex 2:3**)

Fast-forward, when God miraculously leads Israel on dry land through the sea, (often *incorrectly* called, the *Red Sea*) the sea is actually called, “**the Sea of Reeds.**” (Ex 13:18) Twice! God saves Moses’s life, rescuing all of Israel, by turning a *place of reeds* into a place of *rescue*. Suggestively now, John says Jesus and his apprentices found themselves *among the reeds, on the third day*.

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.” (John 2:2-3)

It seems *Mary* is the real connection to this wedding—that *Jesus* is her *plus one*, with his *disciples* tagging along because wherever the *master* goes, the *apprentices* follow. *I’m sure no one here can relate to being dragged to a social function, like a wedding, where you only know the people that you came with!* And worse, there’s *no wine!* More than just a social *faux pas*, in an honour/shame culture where hospitality is vital to generating status and avoiding disgrace, and where feasting and abundance is a sign of God’s divine blessing, running out of wine at a wedding wasn’t just a drag; it was a *disaster*—one that could follow you around forever. Worried for the newlyweds’ reputation, Mary turns to Jesus for help, and his response seems... *harsh*.

“Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.” (John 2:4)

Now, calling his mother, *woman*, may seem *disrespectful* to us, but your Bible likely has a footnote explaining that it *isn’t*. In fact, it’s the Greek word for what Adam calls *Eve* in Genesis 2: *womanhood*. Later, while dying on the cross, Jesus again lovingly calls her, *woman*, as he speaks his final words to her. Yet, despite the love and respect, Jesus continues with another Jewish idiom best translated, “**What do I have to do with you?**” In other words, *we’re not on the same page here; we have conflicting concerns*. He’s saying *her motives* and *his mission* aren’t aligned. She’s thinking about how to save a *wedding*; he’s thinking about how to save a *world*. You know he’s thinking about that because of how he refers to his *hour*, which he says, *has not yet come*.

In John's gospel, Jesus seems to have a very clear sense of timing. In fact, between Jesus and John-the-narrator, there are 17 mentions of Jesus' *hour*. In the first half of the book, Jesus keeps saying his hour *hasn't come* or is *coming soon*, building a sense of anticipation that finally breaks in chapter 12—the *hinge of the whole book*—where Jesus stands up and in dramatic fashion, declares, ***"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."*** (Jn 12:23) He goes on to explain that the *hour* he's referring to is the hour of his *death*, saying, ***"what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour."*** (Jn 12:27)

Jesus was concentrated on his *mission*, determined not to lose focus, even as Mary worried about the wine. But in that moment, it seems that Jesus saw an opportunity to do something *unexpected*—to announce his mission and launch his ministry. Recognizing the look in his eyes,

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 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.
(John 2:5-8)

The jars weren't for *sanitary purposes*, but for a kind of *religious hygiene*—*handwashing* and *dishwashing* to maintain clean hands and hearts before God. It was a common practice that Jesus seems critical of, saying you can be, ***"so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy."*** (Matt 23:25) In other words, no amount of religious surface-cleaning can truly cleanse our conscience or purify our hearts. Religion at best can modify our behaviour temporarily, but rules and rituals can never change our hearts, renew our minds, or purify our motives. And not only were these religious rituals *futile*; they left the water *filthy*.

Which makes it even more baffling that, when the party host gets a blind taste-test, he declares, ***"Everyone brings out the finest wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."*** (John 2:6-9)

Not only does Jesus turn *water* into *wine*; he turns the *filthiest water* into the *finest* of *wines*. This isn't hyperbole or just showing off. The reference to *the finest of wines—as with this whole story*—is a glowing hyperlink to a powerful passage in the Old Testament book of *Isaiah*.

In Isaiah 24-27, the prophet imagines the world at the end of the age like a party that abruptly and prematurely comes to an end, because all the wine has run out. He writes,

The wine dries up; the vine withers; all the merry-hearted groan. The joyous tambourines have ceased; the roar of partiers has stopped; the joyous harp has ceased. No one drinks wine or sings... Happy times have disappeared from the earth, and people shout in the streets, “We're out of wine!” Nations will be stripped bare, like vineyards after the harvest season.

Isaiah 24:7-13, selected

Isaiah's prophecy would've been on the minds of John's original readers. Their world too had dried up like a withered vine, no longer able to produce good wine, their rules and religion unable to produce life and celebration. Happiness had now turned to heartache, as death and darkness hung in the air like a burial shroud. But Isaiah's vision isn't all doom and gloom; in fact, he gives us some of the most vivid resurrection imagery in the entire Old Testament, saying,

“On this mountain [God] will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations. He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces...” (And he goes on to say,) **“Your dead will live, Lord; their bodies will rise—let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy—your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.”** (*Isaiah 25:7-8, 26:19*)

And, Isaiah says, when God swallows up death forever, it'll be a feast for the ages—a great and glorious wedding banquet, a final and forever resurrection feast for all. He adds:

The Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and *the finest of wines*. (*Isaiah 25:6*)

This is the Biblical hope John is leaning into as he describes Jesus bringing out the finest wine at the end of the party. Launching his mission by turning water into wine wasn't just Jesus' attempt at being *the life of the party*; it was him revealing himself as the true life of the *ultimate*

party—the great wedding banquet feast of God. That’s how this sign *reveals Jesus’ glory* and why it persuaded his disciples to *believe in him*. Because, more than just a clever parlor trick, this was a signal—a *sign*—that through Jesus the end of the age was breaking into the here and now, to turn the waters of death into the wine of Spirit, heaven’s vineyard flowing freely with the fruit of third-day resurrection life. This was an announcement—a proclamation that the old ways of trying to cleanse our sin by the external efforts of religious rituals that can only ever scratch the surface of our sin were officially over; that a new day had dawned and, with it, a new metamorphosis—a way of being transformed from the inside out by the power of God’s Spirit. A chance to be reborn, renewed, redeemed, and restored to life—Christ’s life in us.

That’s why this miracle is actually far greater than *ending world hunger*; it’s a foretaste of a forever feast for everyone. And unlike *penicillin, which only temporarily cures bodily illness*, Jesus’ reveals a water-to-wine miraculous capacity to cure the sin-sickness that infects and plagues us all, inoculating us against *eternal* death by injecting us with eternal resurrection *life*.

Friends, the *first* of the seven signs of Jesus is a *sign* that demands our attention in order to direct our attention us to *Jesus*—the *Messiah* and *Son of God*, our *Liberator* and *Lord*, the *hope* and *ruler* of *all*—promising new life here and now and resurrection in the age to come. It was a sign that turned his *friends* into *followers* and the question for us is... *what about us?*

As you consider your life these days, maybe you’re in *the place of reeds* today; trapped in the weeds and drowning. Maybe you’re still trying to squeeze one last drop of life out of a dried up and withered vine, looking for life where there’s none to be found. Maybe you’re wandering the streets, wondering what happened to the party, where the joy and laughter has gone, searching for any signs of life. Maybe you’re tired of trying to clean yourself up, to scrub away your sins with religious activity—the effort seems *futile*, and the water is just getting *filthier*.

If that's you today, the good news is that Jesus has saved *the best for last*. Jesus—the *true vine* and ultimately *life giver*—has the power to turn our dishwater lives into the finest of wines. Heaven's vineyard is bursting, and we're invited to come and drink deeply of God's love, the blood of Jesus poured out at the cross—the *hour* and *reason* for which he came. If we will come to Jesus, like empty vessels, he wants to fill us to the brim and overflowing with *life*.

But the question he's asking each of us, just like he asked Mary, is, "*What do you have to do with me?*" Are we on the same page? Are our motives aligned with his mission. Do the aims and concerns of my life revolve around his kingdom priorities? Or am I focused on other things, like honour and shame—how to gain status and avoid disgrace? Or like how to keep the party going? John is inviting us to truly believe in Jesus as our one true hope, to let him lead and rule over our lives so that we might be filled with the *finest* life—life to the full. If you want in on the miracle, listen to the instructions of Mary to the servants: *Do whatever he tells you*. Listen to Jesus, trust him and follow him with your whole life. Let him turn water into wine for you.

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One final observation about this story.

Did you notice *where* this story takes place? I don't mean just in *Cana* or at a *wedding*, but specifically *where*? This story is told like a wedding video that doesn't feature the bride, groom, or any of the honoured guests. They're off-screen the whole time, while the real action takes place *behind* the scenes, in the *backroom*, among the *servants*—the *lowly staff* and plus-ones who're *only there because of Jesus*. It is *they* who witness the wonder of Jesus' glory, while the so-called *important* guests are completely unaware that anything glorious has happened. As Jesus reveals himself as the true Bridegroom and Host of God's eternal banquet, it is not the high and mighty who are centred, but the poor and powerless; the last, the lost, and the least—

those of low rank and no social status. This too is a call-back to Isaiah's vision of the final feast, which comes as a great *leveling*—upending all social structures to bring equality to all, writing

It will be the same for priest as for people, for the master as for his servant, for the mistress as for her servant, for seller as for buyer, for borrower as for lender, for debtor as for creditor.

Isaiah 24:2

God's great banquet table as open to all—rich and poor alike. The penniless can freely enjoy the choice food and fine wine—it's all been *paid for*; our place at the table secured by Jesus at the cross. A place with your name on it—not just in the age to come, but right here and now. Each of us is invited to come and take our place at the table, drink deeply of God's grace, poured out through the Spirit to rejuvenate and restore us from death to life, to transform us inside and out and fill us with life overflowing. That's what the communion table is all about. It's not a table of the *wealthy, powerful, or privileged*; it's the table of the *Lord*—a feast celebrating that death has been swallowed up by his death and that new life has arisen *on the third day*.

So, come and raise a glass! Our good and gracious host has saved the very best for last!