

When I learned how to drive a large truck, my boss pointed out to me that many truck drivers can get lulled to sleep because they follow the flow of the cars around them. He told me that it was important to pay attention to the signs on the road; they'd help me stay safe as I followed them. But if I just went along with the flow of traffic, I would end up in trouble.

Have you ever seen a sign that was there for its own sake? Signs don't generally exist for their own sake. They point you to something; they direct your attention. Like a good road sign that shows you what is coming ahead, Jesus' miracles function like road signs. They don't exist for their own sake and are not an end in and of themselves. In John's gospel account, he records seven 'signs' or miracles, and these miracles point to something that lies ahead. So we need to pay attention to what Jesus is doing. What are his miracles pointing us towards?

Our problem: Brokenness

While Jesus is at a wedding, a terrible social faux-pas occurs: the wine has run out. Running out of wine at a Middle Eastern wedding is like not having enough food at a reception. Middle Eastern wine was often very low in alcohol content to preserve the grapes and prevent contamination of the water. The best wine would be served first, and as the palates of the guests would diminish, cheaper wine would be served. When the host runs out of wine, Jesus' mother approaches him to tell him that they have no wine.

It's no surprise that Jesus and his extended family are at a wedding together. Someone Jesus knew – maybe someone from his youth – was getting married. A wedding celebration would often last a week, and the happy couple would throw a massive celebration. When Jesus arrives, the wine has run out. And this becomes a source of embarrassment for the hosts.

But before we get to the miracle, we need to see the problem. We have lost a biblical view of wine. Because we live after the prohibition era, many Christians struggle with this passage. Some think that Jesus' first miracle was turning water into Welch's Grape Juice! But it is clear that Jesus changes water to wine. This lightly fermented drink was commonly used in Biblical times. And it was intended to be used as a gift from God. Psalm 104:15 says that the Lord gives wine to gladden the heart of man.

The problem with humanity is that we are prone to take God's good gifts and abuse them. This is the problem humans have with alcohol. "Do not get drunk with wine," says Paul in Ephesians 5:18, "which leads to debauchery." God never intended alcohol to be used for drunkenness. Ephesians 5:18 makes it clear that drunkenness is a sin because people lose self control and indulge in their own pleasures. Instead of being renewed in the mind and having a spirit of self control, abuse of alcohol removes inhibitions and causes people to act in ways that they wouldn't normally act. Your judgment is impaired. You can't drive properly. And people find themselves in all sorts of situations where they do or say things that they regret.

But humans also use alcohol in a way that shows how broken we are – we use it to mask our pain, to cope with disappointment, to fall asleep, or to escape problems. Whenever we use alcohol in this way, we are not enjoying God’s good gifts, but abusing it. Wine is to be used to celebrate, not as a coping mechanism. Drinking alone, drinking to become sleepy, drinking to forget problems are all indications that we are broken. Joy does not come from a bottle. Joy is found when our hearts are glad in the Lord.

God gave us wine to make the heart glad. For some people, they have chosen the path of abstaining from alcohol, and this is a noble and respectable action. Others enjoy God’s good gift in moderation, and this is acceptable to God. So when Jesus comes to the wedding and they have no wine, he sees that there is something wrong.

We are all broken because of sin. Deep down, each one of us functions in ways of brokenness. We all find ways to cope that are inappropriate. Addictions, laziness, workaholics, excessive drinking, avoiding people – whatever it is, we are all broken and we need someone to rescue us from our sorrow, from those things that we use to mask our pain. We need to be delivered. But how?

Our Hope: The One Who Makes All Things New

When Mary, Jesus’ mother, tells him that they have run out of wine, Jesus says to her, “Woman, what does that have to do with me?” Now when we hear this saying, we hear it as derogatory. To call someone “woman” is disrespectful and dishonouring. But when Jesus uses it, it’s more like saying, “Ma’am” in that Southern sense of respect. In every instance that Jesus has with women, he doesn’t cast them down or disrespect them, but he honours them. He will refer to his mother again as “Woman” as he hangs from the cross in 19:26 when he commands John to care for her after his death and resurrection, pointing out that Jesus has the dignity of women in mind.

So when Mary tells him that they are out of wine, Jesus is pointing out that his time hasn’t come. Notice how he responds? “What has this to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” In John’s gospel, Jesus talks about “the hour” seven times (here, 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1), and “the hour” refers to his time as the Lamb of God who comes to take away the sins of the world (1:29). If he reveals his glory in the wrong way at the wrong time, his mission will be interrupted with other concerns. Jesus does not want to detract from what he has come to do.

Yet Mary tells the servants to do whatever Jesus commands. She comes to Jesus. She sees that something is wrong. And she is pleading with him to fix this broken situation. And in a simple act of faith and obedience, the servants follow Jesus’ instruction: they take 6 stone jars that would have held 20-30 gallons of water, they fill them to the brim. And then, when the water is taken out and given to the tablemaster, he tastes...fine wine!

So what is the point of this miracle? What is the point of this miracle? Why does John record this event as the first miracle in his gospel and put it in such a prominent position for us to notice?

Trust Jesus to Make All Things New

When we read the Gospel of John, we can get enamoured with John's great writing style. His beginning is so deep and profound. But John has been giving us clues about how we should read his gospel account from the very opening words. He starts his gospel with, "In the beginning..." And these words take us back to the very beginning of the Bible story, to Genesis 1:1, where God created the heavens and the earth, and on the 7th day he rested and enjoyed his work.

John starts off his gospel account with a testimony that Jesus existed before the world, yet he was the Word that created all things. And then, in systematic fashion, he puts together the first week of creation.

Day One – John comes as a testimony.

Day Two – Jesus is announced as the Lamb of God (1:29).

Day Three – Jesus calls his first disciples Andrew and John.

Day Four – I think v. 40 points out a new day since v. 39 indicates it was late, he calls Peter.

Day Five – in v. 43, he calls a few more disciples.

Day Six – he travels to the wedding.

Day Seven – he is at the wedding in Cana.

Here, John has the first week of Jesus' ministry, and time is important in structuring John's Gospel. He builds his gospel account around a week at the beginning, a week at the end, and three Passovers throughout his gospel. This tells us something important: Jesus is doing something brand new. He is bringing about his new creation as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is dealing with our problem – the brokenness that sin has created, and he completes his first week with a sense of renewing joy at a wedding. Just like the first week of creation ended with the marriage of the man and the woman in the Garden of Eden, Jesus is bringing about renewed joy in the midst of our brokenness.

One of my favourite sermons of all times comes from the American pastor and theologian from the 1700s, Jonathan Edwards. He is probably best known for his sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" and has been interpreted by many to be a hell-fire preacher. But in my opinion, one of his best sermons is called "Heaven Is a World of Love." In this sermon, he takes Paul's words that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has comprehended what God has in store for those who love him. He looks at heaven and considers Paul's words seriously. Heaven will be a world where there are new notes, new colours, new flavours, new smells, new thoughts – and they will fill us with great joy and make us love God more. There will be no more tears, sorrow, or pain – only joy increasing infinitely. If you have more rewards for obedience

than I have, I won't be jealous that you received more and that I have less because I will only be grateful for how God used you for his glory, and my lesser rewards won't cause you to look at me with pride and think that you're better than me because you will thank God that he gave me strength for the tasks that I did do. Every joy will culminate in Jesus to his praise and glory because from him, through him, and to him are all things. And if heaven will only increase our sense of pleasure, it will be so that I might know the infinite love of God forever!

For this reason, Jesus comes on this first week and comes to the wedding at Cana to perform this miracle. Mary's request should be what we all do – we come to Jesus with our broken situations and we ask him to make all things new: broken relationships, broken lives, broken because of sin and death, yet made new by the One who has come to take away sin and restore our joy in him.

Find Newness of Life in Christ

When Jesus instructs the men to take the large pots, John specifically tells us that these pots were for Jewish purification. When someone had been unclean, the law required that you go through a washing ritual so that you might be able to approach God. Jesus sees these pots that hold 20-30 gallons of water each and instructs the servants to fill them with water. And once done, they take the water to the tablemaster who tastes it and discovers that it is fine wine! I don't know who said it, but "The conscious water looked at Jesus and blushed!"

And there, instead of water to wash away sins, Jesus gives gladness that brims to the top. What was once used for the forgiveness of sins now becomes the source of joy. And when Jesus does a miracle, it's not just a little thing. From water to fine wine would have meant that thousands of dollars of wine had been produced by Jesus! And he doesn't just provide a little wine, but abundance of excellent wine!

The pots that once helped with washing away the sins of an unclean soul have become the source of gladness and joy. This is why Jesus has come. This is why he will go to the cross. This is what his miracles are about. He is not interrupting the natural order. He is remaking the world that has been destroyed by sin and death. And he begins with taking our sins that show us our brokenness and gives us newness of life. The joy of a clean conscience. The joy that overflows like wine from stone pots.

This passage should cause us to reflect on what the prophets were waiting for. In Isaiah 25:1-9, the hope of Israel was that the Messiah would come to defeat death, make things new, and bring joy to the heart. In Jesus, that joy has come! He comes to this wedding to point us to the final wedding – that day where we will be united to him at the marriage supper of the Lamb. There won't be any tears, sorrow, only joy infinitely increasing. The old things will have passed away. He takes our sins and doesn't just wash us clean, but fills us to the top with joy!



THE STORY OF
Everything
LUKE 24:27

So here's a sign. It's not just a sign for the sake of a sign. It points beyond itself to something greater. Can you see and believe what Jesus is going to do? In a world full of brokenness, this miracle calls us to live faithfully in the One who will make all things new.