

John 2:1-11

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[0 : 0 0] The Lord confides in those who fear Him. He makes His covenant known to them. Now, I hope those words ring a bell or two, because that was the verse that we were thinking about last Sunday evening. And we noticed how this verse speaks of one aspect of the privilege that we enjoy in being friends with God. We noticed how the verse is also translated as, the friendship of the Lord is for those who fear Him. And the particular aspect of that friendship being that God confides in those who fear Him, in His own people.

He has, to put it another way, drawn us into His circle of confidence with whom He shares the wonders of His love, or in the language of the psalm, He makes His covenant known to us. This is what He confides in us as an expression of His friendship. Now, that verse considered principally how that confiding takes place in one particular direction. That is, how the Lord confides in us. He confides in us His covenant. He confides in us the love that He has for us, as it finds expression in His covenant, and very particularly in His Son, the Lamb of God, whose blood was shed as a covenant, as sacrifice.

But this confiding that is an aspect of friendship is not only in one direction. It's not simply that the Lord confides in us, though He does, and that is a privilege that we should be the objects of such a confidence, but it is also, of course, in the other direction. We are also able to confide in Him, and we do that as we pray to Him. We confide in Him, the needs that we have, the concerns that we have, the fears that we have, and indeed, in many other ways, we confide in Him as He confides in us, so we also are able to confide in Him. And that is a part of this friendship that we enjoy, one of the privileges of the friendship that we enjoy with the Lord. And I want to think about that aspect, that direction, if you wish, of confiding, having thought last Sunday evening of how the Lord confides in us, so this evening to think a little of how we are able to confide in Him. And we're going to think about that with the aid of the passage that we've read in John's Gospel. So, if you're able to have your Bibles open there in chapter 2 of John's Gospel, it's certainly a very familiar passage, we want to look at it this evening with those lens, as it were, of what it teaches us, what lessons we can take from the passage on this matter of our confiding in the Lord, of our praying to Him. And, of course, Mary and the manner in which she approaches the Lord will serve as our example, and from which we will draw lessons. In actual fact, the lessons that we want to draw can be drawn from three parts of the account. The first is Mary's approach to Jesus, how she approaches Jesus, the manner of approach. We want to draw some lessons from that, as we would approach the Lord and confide in Him. We also want to draw some lessons from the manner in which Jesus responds to Mary, as it's recorded for us. And then, finally, draw lessons from Mary's subsequent action. So, she approaches Jesus, Jesus responds to Mary, and Mary in turn acts in a particular way. And we want to just notice how she does so, and what we can learn from that. So, that briefly sets out the scope of what we want to consider this evening. And if we just very briefly remind ourselves of the circumstances of Mary's approach to Jesus, and it can be very brief because really I'm sure all that I'm going to say is covering that which is already familiar to us. A wedding was taking place there in Cana, in Galilee. It seems reasonable to presume that as Mary and the disciples were there, and Jesus, of course, they were part of the circle of friends, perhaps family, of one or other of those who was getting married. And in the course of the celebrations, which we are told could last for many days within this particular cultural setting, in the course of those celebrations, well, they run out of wine.

And again, as I'm sure we've been reminded on different occasions, this is not to be understood as simply a matter of social embarrassment, you know, an awkward moment when, well, you haven't calculated well how much you need, and you feel a little bit embarrassed about it. For the family concern, this would have been a much more serious matter. An element of shame would have

attached itself to the family for failing to provide something so important, so fundamental to the wedding celebrations. And our concern really is in the light of those circumstances, what is it that Mary does? And that brings us to this first aspect of the incident we want to consider, and that is Mary's approach to Jesus. We read there in verse 3 that when the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, they have no more wine. To use the language that we've been using, as it were, picking up from last week, she confides in Jesus. As I've already wanted to stress, this was a delicate matter, not something that she could mention to anybody. This was a confidential matter, if you wish, and she had to find somebody who was suitable in whom to confide. And in whom does she confide? Well, she confides in Jesus. Possibly there was nobody else she could turn to, not only in terms of who would be able to help, but who she would enjoy sufficient confidence with to approach with such a delicate matter.

[7 : 11] And she comes to Jesus with what we might call a petition. Though, before we simply proceed and take that as a given that it is a petition, we maybe should pose the question and try and answer it, is it actually a petition that we have here? We are told what she says, and what she says is, they have no more wine. So, in actual fact, she doesn't ask for anything.

What she does is describe the problem. She describes the situation. The petition, if we want to call it a petition, is descriptive rather than prescriptive. She doesn't tell Jesus what to do. We don't have reason to believe that she was even aware of or had a notion as to how He would respond. But what she does do is describe to Him the problem that has arisen, clearly with the intention of leaving that with Him, that He would do as He sees fit. And of course, that, before we move on and maybe miss the lesson there, does provide us with a simple but important lesson for us, as we would confide in the Lord, as we would pray to Him, perhaps in the circumstances of a difficulty, a need of one kind or another.

It's not for us to tell Him what He should do. We don't come to Him and say, well, this is the solution that I'm looking for. This is the answer that I require. This is the problem, and I'm not going to burden you with having to work out what the solution is, because I already know what the solution is. And so, Lord, if you could please just answer in this way, then that would be much appreciated. No, that is not for us to do. We are to learn from Mary. We come to the Lord, and we lay out before Him what the need is. And we can do that in great detail and unburden our heart with great honesty, but that is what we do. We don't prescribe, but rather we describe what the problem is. And the wisdom of that is seen not only in recognizing that to prescribe to the Lord, to tell God what He should do, would not only be improper. I think we would all be agreed that it's improper for us to come to God and say, well, this is what you must do. It's inappropriate. It's not right that we would approach Him in that way. But it's not only a case of it being improper.

If we are to make that mistake, we also run the risk of being oblivious to the manner in which the Lord answers in an unexpected way. You see, if we have already determined how it is that He should respond, and the Lord chooses to respond in a different way, in an unexpected way, we might even miss the answer. We might not even notice. We might think that there is no answer to our prayer, but in actual fact, an answer has been provided. But we have missed it because we had already determined what the answer might be. And of course, that could happen even if we do avoid the mistake of verbally telling God, this is what you should do. We might say, oh, well, I would never do that.

I would never be so, bold isn't really like the right word. I would never be so inappropriate in coming to God and telling God, this is what you must do. But of course, even though we don't say that, it's possible that in our own minds, we have decided how we believe the Lord should respond.

[11 : 05] Now, of course, it's unrealistic to imagine that we wouldn't have some ideas, that we wouldn't have our own, perhaps, desires or expectations, and that in itself isn't wrong. But we have to be careful that those desires or expectations or notions that we might have as to how the Lord might respond, we have to be careful that they shouldn't be so fixed that, as I say, they would blind us to the Lord answering in another way. So focused in our mind, in one direction, that we're blind to what's going on, on either side. And as I even just visualize this picture of just looking in one direction and missing out on what's going on, it reminds me, I don't know if this will be of any help at all in illustrating what I'm saying, but I'm going to launch in and mention it anyway. And if it's of help, good, if not, well, so be it. On Friday morning, I had the dubious privilege of being a Santa at the Little Lamb's party. Now, the outfit that I was provided was a very impressive Santa outfit. I've not often been a Santa, but this was undoubtedly the best outfit that I've ever had.

But it was a very voluminous outfit, if that's the right word to use, the big white wig, and then the big beard, and then on top of that you had Santa's hoodie that covered me completely to the point that I really couldn't see. My lateral vision was zero, and all I could see was right in front of me. I couldn't see to the right or to the left. I couldn't hear very well either with all these layers.

Now, you might say, well, that's not really a big problem, but when you've got over 70 little lambs scurrying about around you, and you're trying to hand them their presents, and you're having to make your way through these crowds of little children, it can become really quite a dangerous matter. On more than one occasion, I have nearly knocked over some poor child who I had missed, because I really couldn't see on either side, and if perhaps a mother or one of the helpers had been motioning me to go in one or other direction, possibly I wasn't seeing what they were telling me to do.

Why? Because I was only looking in one way, and couldn't see in any other direction, and it proved a dangerous task, though I have to say, as far as I'm aware, I didn't step on any little fingers.

[13:40] And certainly I didn't hear any screaming if I did. The point being this, that it's important to be able to look around and see right around, not just in one way, but look, have good lateral vision.

I think that's true also as we would confide in the Lord and as we would wait on Him and the manner in which He answers. If our vision is so focused in one direction, whether we actually verbally express that in the request that we make or the petition that we make, or whether it's simply more subtly hidden in our own minds, that this is the way the Lord should respond. This is what I really want of Him, and this is what I'm looking for. And then, as I say, when He does respond in a different way, we might even miss it all together.

Mary's approach to Jesus, then, as we return to Mary, has this characteristic that it describes the problem and does not tell Jesus what to do. But we can think a little bit more about this petition of Mary's and some of the characteristics of it. One of the things that we can say about it that I think is instructive is that she makes this petition on behalf of somebody else.

On behalf of somebody else. This isn't something that she herself needs. Now, some who have read the account and written about it wonder whether the relationship of Mary to one or other of those who was getting married was so close that she'd actually been given some responsibility in terms of the organization of the wedding. Well, of course, that's possible. But I don't think there's anything really to suggest that that is a conclusion we can come to with any degree of confidence. She was a guest. She was a guest, no doubt, who was close to those involved. Perhaps they had confided in her this problem. Certainly, she knows about the problem. But I think as a guest, as a friend, as one who cares for the couple, she wants to help them. This isn't something she's doing for herself. This is something she brings to Jesus on behalf of somebody else, of somebody she cares for, of somebody she loves. And I think that is a very good measure of the love that we have for others. You know, we profess love for many. We profess love clearly for our family, for friends, for a circle of close friends that we might have. And we profess to love them, and I'm sure we do. But how do we measure that? Well, this is surely one very good measure. To what extent do we intercede on their behalf before the Lord? To what extent do we confide in the Lord our concerns for them and our desires for them and our wish that the needs that they might have would be met by the Lord? On this occasion, in the incident described, it was a practical need, a material need of wine that had fallen short of the amounts required. Of course, we can confide in the Lord on behalf of others on any number of needs, be they physical, material, or indeed spiritual needs of those whom we love. Perhaps those whom we love who as yet are not trusting in Jesus as their Savior, they're not going to go to the Lord themselves to ask for help, though we pray that one day they would do so. But in the meantime, we can do so on their behalf. Because we love them, we intercede for them on their behalf.

[17:27] On the subject, just as an aside, I suppose, on the subject of spiritual needs, it is possible that this very incident does have a purpose, a symbolic purpose in terms of the absence of wine or the running out of wine, illustrating a spiritual barrenness that was the case in the Judaism of Jesus' day. And that suggestion, though it is only a suggestion, maybe is given greater weight when we appreciate how in the Old Testament particularly, and we've sung a psalm that illustrated that, wine symbolizes joy and symbolizes God's blessing on His people and generously providing for their needs. And so the absence of wine may well have as its purpose to illustrate that absence of God's felt presence, the barrenness of the spiritual landscape at this time. Well, be that as it may, and be that a valid suggestion or not, what is true is that with Mary we can confide in the Lord on behalf of

others. Another feature of her approach, of her confiding in the Lord, is that she comes to him very immediately and very directly? And is this not also evidence of the measure of confidence that she enjoyed? You know what it's like when you have a request to make of somebody that you don't know very well, with whom you don't enjoy a close friendship, but there's something you need to ask of them, how sometimes you can be very reluctant. You can hum and haw and dither as you imagine, well, what will I say, in what way will I approach them? And your reluctance is a function of not enjoying confidence with them. And so that holds you back in some measure. Of course, we're all different. Some people are not held back at all, but generally speaking, I think it's true that in the measure that we don't have confidence in somebody or not related to them in that close way, we tend to hold back in approaching them. Well, in the case of Mary, there is no holding back. There is a problem, and she approaches Jesus confidently, which is this another element of her approach. It is a confident approach. Maybe it leads us to ask the question, why is it that she was so confident?

Why was she so confident? And certainly it would give the impression that she was that Jesus, in one way or another, would be able to respond. You almost wonder whether she was expecting Jesus to respond in the way He did within this miraculous provision of the wine. And yet, it seems highly unlikely that there would have been that expectation, particularly in the light of what the passage and what John very explicitly tells us at the end of the account in verse 11, this, the first of His miraculous signs Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. It's very clearly and explicitly stressed that this was His first miraculous sign. And so it seems really highly unlikely, to put it mildly, that there would have been on the part of Mary an expectation of Jesus responding miraculously to this need, perhaps in another way, in some practical way, finding a solution. But a miraculous response, it seems unlikely, it was on

Mary's radar. Well, this is something of the manner in which Mary approaches Jesus, with one or two lessons for us, as we too would, in prayer, confide in the Lord. But moving on quickly to how does Jesus respond? And very particularly the words recorded for us there in verse 4, Dear Woman, why do you involve me? Jesus replied, My time has not yet come. In the original, the word that Jesus uses, or rather the manner in which Jesus addresses Mary is with one word, the word Woman. Woman, why do you involve me? And that's the way in which it's translated in a number of versions. Woman, why do you involve me? And the reason why the NIV chooses to introduce this qualifying word, Dear Woman, is not difficult to understand. They do so because in the absence of that word, Jesus' response does come across, certainly at first glance, as being rather harsh and distant. Woman, why do you involve me? This is his mother. Is this the manner in which he should speak to her? Woman, why do you involve me? And so, as I say, in order to, in a sense, soften that impression that is this introduction of the word, Dear Woman, I'm not saying it's illegitimate to do that, but I think that's really what lies behind this manner of translation. And so, while it's understandable that this one word, Woman, is translated in this, what shall we say, broader way of Dear Woman, rather than introduce another word, though sometimes legitimate and necessary, perhaps more helpful is simply to explain or attempt to explain the manner in which Jesus is addressing his mother. And if there is the impression, and I stress the impression of harshness, I think it can be easily dispelled when we do just one thing and note how Jesus uses the very same word on another occasion. And if we turn to chapter 19 of John's gospel in verse 26, we will see where Jesus once again addresses his mother using exactly the same word, and yet the context is such that there is no suggestion quite the contrary of a harshness on the part of Jesus. In John chapter 19 and in verse 26, Jesus is dying on the cross. And we read there, when Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciples whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, Dear Woman, here is your son.

Again, the NIV chooses to use this, use two words to translate one, Dear Woman. But what Jesus actually said was, Woman, here is your son. And as I say, within that context, it would be ridiculous to suggest that there's any kind of distance or harshness. On the contrary, one of the most tender moments that we have in the gospels in terms of Jesus' relationship with his mother. Some have suggested, and maybe with good reason, that the word, though not harsh, does reflect a tone of polite distance.

[24 : 48] There is a sense in which Jesus is distancing himself from his mother, but doing so for gracious reasons, as he recognizes what awaits him, as he considers, indeed, the verse that we have read, and the impending death that he would die. And so there is this manner in which he would protect his mother from the effects of that by distancing himself somewhat. He uses this

language, which is also a little mysterious or cryptic, my time has not yet come. And as we would think about what he means by that, at one level it may seem that the obvious answer is that he's simply saying his time to reveal himself, to identify himself, had not yet come. Though that would be a little bit difficult to fully recognize as the reason given that he does go on to perform this miracle, that we are told very explicitly did prove a means of revealing, if not his identity, something of his glory.

What certainly is true is that on every other occasion in John's gospel, I think we can say that on every other occasion, where Jesus uses this term, and he does so on a number of occasions, the reference is very explicitly to his death. My time has not yet come, being a reference to his death. And we just notice a couple of occasions very quickly. In chapter 7 and verse 30, there are others, but we'll just limit ourselves to two. There in chapter 7, verse 30, at this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him because his time had not yet come. In this case, not Jesus himself using the language, but the circumstances being described in that way. And then again in chapter 8 and verse 20, just one page on, he spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him because his time had not yet come. However, we conclude as to the meaning of these words of Jesus, the important thing to draw from this in terms of our concern, of lessons that we can draw, as we would confide in the Lord and as we would await an answer. What is certainly true is that Mary could not presume to demand of her son. That is clear. Why do you involve me? My time has not yet come. Jesus says, you can't presume that I will be able to do what you want me to do. You can't presume that I'll be able to help you in the way that you would wish me to help you. And so we too, we come confidently. We come sure that the Lord is willing to help and able to help, but we don't come presumptuously imagining that he will do so just in the way that we maybe wish that he would.

So that is the way that Jesus responds or part of what he does or the manner in which he responds that also serves as a lesson for us. But I want to conclude by simply noting Mary's subsequent response to this rather mysterious, perhaps perplexing response of Jesus. Dear woman, or woman, my time has not yet come. Why do you involve me? My time has not yet come. And what can we say of Mary's subsequent action of how she responds to the Lord's response? Well, at a very simple level, we can say that she acts. And she acts in a way that involves her in answering her own petition while remaining entirely dependent on the Lord. In verse 5, we have it described for us. His mother said to the servant, do whatever he tells you. Maybe just in parenthesis, we can note how this nugget of wisdom from Mary stands the test of time for us also. We would do well to listen to Mary as she directs these words to us. Do whatever he tells you. Of course, that's true in any matter where Jesus expresses himself, what he gives instruction. Do whatever he tells you. Sounder advice, it would be difficult to find.

But the point in terms of the story before us is this, that Mary does act. She prays, or she confides in the Lord. She spreads out her case before Him. She describes the problem. She doesn't tell Him what to do.

But having done that, she doesn't simply sit back and wait for Jesus to act. She acts. She makes use of the means available to her. And of course, there we have a clear lesson. And we can ask ourselves the question, do we act on our own prayers? Do we use the means that are available that will result in our petition being granted? You know, we can, as a congregation, or as individuals, as Christians, we can pray for the neighbors here around the church. We can pray fervently that the Lord would touch them and draw them to Himself. And that is a very worthy prayer. But if we leave it there, if we pray and then we do nothing, then something is very awry in that. It would, I think, cast a very reasonable question as to whether our prayer is a sincere one, because we must accompany that prayer with action. Mary confides in the Lord. She presents the need to her son, but then she, in parallel, as it were, acts and makes use of the means available to her. If we can quote to illustrate this point, Spurgeon, who is always eminently quotable, he expresses it in this way, prayer and means must go together. Means without prayer, presumption, prayer without means, hypocrisy.

[31 : 09] And another quote that I leave you with, this time from Bishop Ryle, commenting on this very incident, he says as follows, duties are ours, events are God's. It is ours to fill the water pots. It is Christ to make the water wine. Mary and the servants went as far as they could go. They acted, they did what they could do, and then the Lord did what only He could do. And that pattern still holds today.

Finally, what are the results of Mary confiding in the Lord? Well, we're told in verse 11, where the results are summarized. This, the first of His miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed His glory, and His disciples put their faith in Him. In few words, really quite significant results are described. The miracle itself, the glory of the Lord is manifested, and as a result, the disciples believe. All of these things, all of these very significant results, all began with Mary confiding in Jesus. A chain of events, as it were, was initiated by Mary confiding in Jesus. And is that not an encouragement for us, as we would confide in the Lord on a matter that we maybe think isn't of great moment, or of great significance, and yet as we are confident in bringing it to the Lord and confiding in Him, who is to say how the Lord might order the circumstances that quite unexpected and very blessed results would come of our confiding in Him, as was the case on the occasion with Mary. Well, the Lord, as an expression of His friendship, confides in us. And we, as those who by faith in Jesus are in a relationship with God, can also confide in Him. We who enjoy that friendship, we can confide in Him. And in what we've been able to look at this evening, some lessons as to how we might do so, and how we might wait on God as He would respond to us. Well, let us pray.