

Communion

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[0 : 0 0] Please turn to our reading there in John chapter 2, and this event, the beginning of Jesus' life. As it states here, this was the first miracle that we have recorded in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, the first sign, as John calls the miracles. And I guess in some ways it may seem a surprising choice for the Son of God to begin his public ministry by facilitating a party going well, by creating gallons and gallons of alcohol to lubricate the celebrations of this wedding.

And that in itself may have challenged the people then, and I think it would have given them some sense if they had eyes to see of what Jesus was about to initiate in his public ministry. Something new, something surprising, something different, something very powerful, something that ultimately brings the deepest and greatest joy. And I think in some ways, as he continues to reveal his glory amongst people today by the power of his Spirit moving, gatherings like this changing people's lives, when he reveals his glory today in people's lives, that work and that means the things that he'll use can also be surprising still. When God begins to work in our lives, he very often has to blow away a few preconceptions of the church or Christianity that we may have. If there's anybody today, you've just come in for the first time. Undoubtedly, you'll have a lot of preconceptions of what church may be about and what all this God stuff is about. And if any of us are really going to experience God's will in our lives, then we will have to see some of those preconceptions, no doubt, beginning to evaporate.

And so I think you've got something of that here in Jesus. Undeniably, sometimes the preconceptions that people may have, the fault for that often lies with us in the church. We can often give out the wrong of the rightful vibes about Jesus. But this story shows us who he is, what he came to do, and what God is ready still to do in people's lives today. And what we are doing today gathering around this table very much symbolizes that as well. So as we look at this story to see what it teaches us about God breaking into our life, and perhaps in surprising ways, you see, first of all, the problem that has arisen here, and the solution. Simple as that. The problem. Here is a bad start to life for a young couple as they were getting married. It tells us that the wine had run out. They have no more wine.

And this was a big problem in those days for the wine to run dry. I love Mary's statement, the way she comes up to Jesus and just tells him, they've got no more wine. She hasn't seen any miracle of Jesus yet. This is going to be the first one, but she knows. She knows her boy is special. She knows that he can do things. And if anybody can fix this problem, he will be the one who can do it. And it was a massive problem in a culture that was very much based on shame and public events. A wedding that ran out of wine. It really was a disaster. And it would have been really frowned upon, and it would have looked bad for this young couple to start their married life together like that. Can you imagine today for most people in this country the idea of a dry stag party being invited for Christmas turkey and receiving nothing but a tiny little canopy? You'd feel what? You'd feel insulted. You'd feel confused. And that's how things would have brewed and bubbled up in this situation. This family was facing a major crisis if they ran out of wine and what could have been a wedding that could have gone on for three to four days, even a week sometimes. So, that's the problem. Mary comes, and the family has its crisis. The wine's running out, and she turns to Jesus for help. And it's his ability to work in situations like that where there are problems, that we often discover just how real God is, and just how amazing his power actually is. Let's face it, every family can have its crisis. Plenty of families having crisis today, just as then, as it were, when the wine runs out, when something runs out.

And some of you today will feel that, that there's something running out in your lives. Maybe even some of the managers here may feel that there's something running out there. Some of you may feel that you're running out of answers to life. You've got plenty of questions, and you've been

looking, but can you find any answers to life? Some of you may be running dry on peace, and you're just wondering, how can you keep things together? Some of you just feel you're running out of time all the time, always chasing your tail, always trying to cram life together, wondering what is the purpose of it. But it's just work, work, work, bills, bills, bills, bills. Some of you may even be running, I suppose, out of faith. You're looking today for a word from God to strengthen your faith. Well, I wonder where most people today turn for help in times of need.

[7 : 16] Back at 9-11, the Twin Towers said that a lot of people after that worldwide-viewed tragedy would turn to the TV for comfort, for consolation, as it were, from soap operas and talk shows.

I think that's sad, that the best our modern society can come up with in giving people help, in giving a family help when they go through a time of crisis. Well, Mary saw different. She may not have seen the full picture, but she understood that this Jesus, his very presence in the midst of what was a crisis, could transform the situation. And John has written this and recorded it for the benefit of the church down through the ages, so that we might see that Jesus is the same today. And as he still continues to reveal his glory, it will often begin in such times, in such crisis, that we may become first aware of just exactly who Jesus Christ is. Some kind of problem in your life, in your home, in your family. Something that could bring you shame if it was to get out into the open.

Well, whatever it might be, these are the moments that we may often start to see God for the first time properly. So some of you may be almost questioning, God, suffering, why does it all happen? A picture like this, reflected in other parts of Scripture, would say, yeah, but actually, that suffering, that problem, that crisis, that thing that is driving you to distraction, that burden in your life that you can't cope with, is the very thing that God, in his amazing power and grace, will reveal himself to you.

And you may make the biggest discovery of your life on the back of some of the biggest crisis that you may ever face. Because it's then that we begin to ask for help. Then we slowly begin to understand all that God wants to do in our lives. So, when things are beginning to run dry, you may get serious with God for the first time. Things begin to run dry. As a Christian, I hope that's why, you come here today. Because in this sacrament that we constantly repeat, the one sacrament we constantly repeat throughout our Christian pilgrimage, is here to constantly top us up, as it were, to refresh our faith, refresh our knowledge and experience of Jesus Christ to stop us running dry. But there's another part to the problem here, and that is the fact that Jesus also had to rebuke his own mother. And you get that here in verse 4, it says in the NIV, Dear Woman. Somebody once made a little jive there. The NIV is the nearly inspired version, that the word dear, that the word dear isn't actually there, so you can cross it out. It's a bit more abrupt. Woman, why do you involve me? What does this to you and to me mean? Somewhat complex little phrase in the original language. And at the very least, it seems to imply or contain a certain level of rebuke to Mary. See, Mary's coming to Jesus as if he's just her son. But here at the beginning of his public ministry, he's turning things around a little bit and making her see, no, I'm more than your son now, Mary. And the day will come when you're going to have to see me as your Savior. And he makes reference to that in the same verse, my time has not yet come. That time reference, I was pointing to his death. That great miracle, that great reason why he came. And Don Carson, in commenting on this, says that Jesus is declaring his freedom from any kind of human advice, agenda, or manipulation, right at the onset, right at the beginning of his first miracle. Jesus is declaring, free of human advice, agenda, or manipulation, even that from his own mother. And that is the key to us seeing Jesus working in our lives. Mary almost takes that. I think she does take that lesson on board, that she quietly afterwards says, well, to the servants, do whatever he tells you. He is going to do something, but he's not going to do it on her terms. He's making it plain, if anything's going to be done, it'll be done on my terms and my way. And then the way he actually does this miracle, fulfills it in itself, adds to this all being a sign, a signpost pointing to what he had come to do, that the miracles declare something about the kingdom of God as well. But first, the rebuke.

Because you and I, if we're going to get serious with God today, we are not going to see God working to our agenda. We have got to realize that we come with humility to the great creator and to his son, Jesus. And you may come into church today, believer or unbeliever, asking God, well, here's the list of problems in my life. Here's the issues that I have. Here's the questions. Please, will you help me here?

[13 : 41] Will you fix that? Will you do this? Will you arrange for this to happen? And Christ stands amongst us today, and he is willing to do amazing things in your life. He is willing today to reveal his

glory. He is willing to transform and change any one of us here by his amazing power and grace.

But it will be done on his terms, on his agenda. And Mary realizes that. She tells the servants, well, do whatever he tells you to do. And then he gives out these orders that might not have made much sense initially. There's some water pots. Fill them with water. Fill them up to the brim.

Go and do it. And you could imagine them maybe thinking, well, our problem is wine, Jesus. It's not water that we need. It's wine. What are we splashing about with all this water for? He says, no, fill it. Then go and draw the water out. Then go and take it to the master of ceremonies. Just do what I tell you to do. And it would appear, I'm sure, with little commands. Do we commands? Without reason. It didn't appear to make sense initially. The key point is to obey. And it'll be the same with us at times in our life. You may come into Christianity and start getting involved in the church, and you have your agenda, but it'll come the day that you have to submit to Christ's agenda, and you'll be hearing things and advice from Christians, and they'll be saying, well, you need the cross. You need forgiveness for your sins. And you're going, no, I've got a problem in my life. I need that fixed.

[15 : 39] And he says, yes, you need the cross. You need to be forgiven. And you go, but I've got a crisis at work. I can't cope with that. Surely God can help me there. He says, yes, He can. What do you need?

You need the cross. He says, why are we talking about that all the time? But you must come to God on God's terms. And one of them, as we'll see, that begins with cleansing. So, there's the running dry, and there's the need sometimes to be rebuked. But then there's the solution. We've just begun to touch on that. How does God bring transformation into our lives today? Well, the first way He does it is through washing. I think John is giving us this little key. Why is this such a sign about the kingdom?

And he gives us a little detail. In verse 6, he talks about the water pots, and he specifically says that the Jews used them for ceremonial washing. And I think he's asking here that, and hinting at, and asking us to see this hint, that there's a deeper transformation than merely water into wine going on here. That what marks out Christ's rule and the explosion of grace in someone's life when they come to know God through Jesus is that it will be marked by a cleansing process, a washing process.

The Jews had their whole system in the Old Testament. Here's Jesus now, really introducing the fulfillment, something new of that whole system. And it's all about Him, and transformation, and cleansing. Here's the solution he's saying. It must involve a cleansing, a ceremonial cleansing, but a real cleansing that leads to a deep transformation. And the rest of the New Testament makes that plain, that that is exactly what Jesus' life and death came to do, to bring about a new birth that starts from us having faith in His death to cleanse us and to wash us. Now, that might be news to some folks. The idea that we need to be cleansed and washed is not very popular. Everybody else is a sinner in our society today, but not us. Other people might be intolerant. Other people might be greedy, but not us. But that's not the way the Bible sees it. And if you're going to get real with God, you're going to have to have an awakening to your human nature. And it won't be pretty, but it is necessary that you and I begin to see that we too have needs to be cleansed. And if you can't see that, you'll never make sense, for example, of what we're doing today with this bread and wine and wine and what it symbolizes and why we keep remembering the death of Jesus. Because it is absolutely the critical point for where we can be transformed by God. Because first you must remove the barrier between man and God before God will break through and begin a lifetime's process of transformation. So you need to understand the cross. You need to understand why this Jesus of Nazareth died, bled and died, tortured on that cross. Why? Because he was cleansing us. He was doing something there whereby he took upon himself the guilt of our sins, and we received his very perfection in the sight of God. Now that's got to make sense to you today. And if you're a Christian, well, you must never lose sight of that. And that's why we must keep repeating this sacrament today.

So it's saying what you can have. It's saying what you do have if you are a Christian today, you are cleansed. That all that Jesus has done on the cross is sufficient that you can be utterly cleansed. And if you're a Christian here today with a broken conscience, you're pretty laid low under a real sense and burden of guilt and accusation, and even this morning as he thought of coming today to the table, he just felt hammered with doubts and accusations. Here is your answer, the one who cleanses.

[20 : 38] That's the first point to transformation. Believe it, see it, and now come and taste it. And let the table today refresh the reality of that cleansing upon your mind.

The other point, quickly, the transformation must involve washing, and it must also involve his spirit. Once the sin has been removed like a barrier, once the roadblock's been cleared out, the power of God can now come down that road. And that comes out in this sign as well, I believe, the way John structures his gospel. He has several big miracles, and each one has a sermon, if you like, a block of teaching from Jesus, fused with it. John chapter 2's miracle would have John chapter 3's sermon about the new birth, but being born again by the power of the Holy Spirit as the accompanying message to the sign.

And the rest of the book, the rest of the gospel is written like this. And there Jesus says in John 3, I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to Spirit. We must have the power of the Holy Spirit to enter into a new spiritual relationship with God, the Great Spirit.

You should not be surprised, he says, at my saying. You must be born again. And so today we remember the new wine of the new birth, if you like, the work of the Holy Spirit as he fills our lives and enables and empowers a new beginning and a new way of life.

[22 : 38] That's what this is all about. That is how Christ will receive glory today, as we taste more and more of the Holy Spirit.

And that is a cup of wine, if you like, that will never run dry. He was poured out at Pentecost, and God has never taken him back to heaven.

The kingdom of God is described in terms, not as a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. He is the engine. You can wash the car, but then you've got to put a new engine in the car to start driving down the road where God wants to lead you. So, this is what you can have, the one who has the power to change anybody here today. This is, if you are a Christian, what you do have, that you are a temple of the Holy Spirit. And this is what you can now refresh as you sit at the sacrament today.

So, it's washing, it's His Spirit, and the last thing, that can all be surprising, verse 10. They take the wine to the master of ceremonies, and He is surprised.

[24 : 06] The best has been left till now. You've saved the best till now. The reality is that we will echo this when we drink from this work of Christ in our life today, when He cleanses us, and when He renews us by the power of His Holy Spirit.

And you'll continue to echo that as a Christian, as you continually refresh that. You refresh your faith as you grab hold of these truths. And you do that even today by eating and drinking to remember what He has done. And it is, I believe, a surprising thing. Some of you, till now, perhaps, you've always been saying in your life, I haven't tasted the best till now. You've sensed in your hearts, there's always been something missing. You ever thought like that?

You've always been left wondering, there's something just missing in my life. And you'll continue to say that until you experience what this whole sign is about, the cleansing and the renewing. And then, it will take you by surprise. And it is a total surprise, I'm sure, for many people today, when they discover that Christianity, that thing that you so despise these days in the public, actually contains the very thing they're looking for. People are looking. They're running dry. But to think that could be discovered in all of this Christianity stuff? What a shock for some today to discover that even in the free cart, lives can be changed and transformed. Marriages are being healed. Families are being restored. Addicts are being set free. Lives are being transformed. And souls leave satisfied by a new wine, God's Holy Spirit moving amongst them, and by cleansing from their guilt and sin.

[26 : 31] That will be surprising for many people. That, though, is what brings glory to Jesus Christ. When we taste the reality of our ourselves of what this sign is pointing us today towards, that will bring Him glory. So, I hope that this changes somebody's view of religion today.

Is this the kind of man who can fix our problems with our families? Well, part of the joy is that no matter how real life's problems are, no matter how real life's problems are, how pressing the need for a solution, our God today is so real that if you trust in Him, He can transform your situation, but more importantly, transform you through it.

And if that's true in your experience, these three things, the washing, the involvement of the Holy Spirit, being surprised by the joy of it all, then you should be sitting at this table this morning.

If these things aren't true and you can honestly say you've really had no awareness of your sin, then please pray that God would show you even one thing in your life that He doesn't like and wants to change.

Pray that He convicts you of your need for forgiveness. If you've never known the work of His Holy Spirit in your heart, then don't take the bread and wine today, but pray instead.

[28 : 22] God, give me this new life. Change me by the Spirit of God changing me. And as the Spirit feeds the believers at the table today, the Spirit can speak to those of you who are watching on, so that all that we're doing today really can be a means of grace after a fashion to everybody.

If you cannot receive the bread and the wine because you haven't become a Christian yet, today if you would stretch out the arm of faith, take Christ Himself by faith as Savior, asking God for cleansing and renewing.

But if you know this joy, if you know the work of the Spirit, if you know you have been washed clean, and if you want to see that refreshed today, renewed today, to see the joy and the surprise of your faith gripping you afresh, to know more of the Holy Spirit, to be more strengthened in your conviction, that all guilt is gone, then come and sit at this table.

And Christ will bless you today, and He will reveal His glory and transform lives. And it will be so. Amen.