

Surprised by Jesus

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[0 : 00] 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 know 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 wine until now. What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

After this, he went down to Capernaum with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days. Thanks Naomi for reading.

If you keep your Bibles open at John chapter 2, that would be a great help. It's page 1064 in the church Bibles, if they've fallen closed. At 1064, John chapter 2, just to make sure that what I'm saying isn't from me, it's we're just looking together at what God is saying.

[1 : 21] And if you find it helpful, you can find an outline inside the notice sheet, just to see where we're going as we look at that together. But let's pray, let's pray that as we hear God in his word, we encounter him and are changed by him.

Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you so much that you are a God who has made yourself known to us, and we pray that as we turn to your word together now about events long ago, you will give us ears to hear your word to us, heads that can understand it and hearts that are willing to change and follow you.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, this year at St. Silas, we've got six couples getting married. I think, I can't even remember how many we've had married now.

It might be five or four. It's maybe one to go. Anyway, exciting. But I find that often when you look, when you look back at a wedding you've been to, there's something you remember the wedding by.

So there's like a standout memory. And Colin and Katie, who got married earlier in the summer, if you were there, it was all about their first dance. Okay, they hadn't just practiced, they'd been coached.

[2 : 41] There'd been a choreographer involved. It was amazing. And when Andy and Maya got married, it was really all about Maya's dad's dancing. As he hit the dance floor with tea lights wrapped around himself, and you knew he was never going to get off that dance floor.

Terrific. At my wedding, Kathy and I got married, and it was all about the father of the bride's speech. He kind of stole the show, really.

He put a beanie on, and he performed his speech as a rap artist. It was extraordinary. A phenomenal thing. Anyway, at this wedding in Nottinghamshire, that we're about to watch a video of, it's all about the vicar.

Let's just watch this together. So if you're looking back on that wedding, there's clearly one abiding memory, isn't there?

Clearly it's what the couple wanted, but it was all about the vicar. But if we'd been at this wedding in Cana, looking back, we'd have known it was all about the wine. We'd have gone, oh, that was a great day, wasn't it?

[3 : 53] That wine. That was amazing. But of course, there's something much deeper going on, and so we're going to think about that together. Now, we're in this account of Jesus' life, John's account of Jesus' life, and the way it's unfolded, since we started a few weeks ago, is it starts in eternity, where the eternal God, Father, Son, and Spirit, steps into our world in the person of his Son, and he does that so that through him, we can become God's children.

It's an extraordinary claim. And then we're left wondering, how do we know that claim is true? It's important because the Christian life is very costly.

The Christian life costs you everything. And the benefits of being Christian are off the scale, if they're true. But we need confidence to believe that Jesus really was, who John claims he is.

So he introduces us to witness after witness, who sees Jesus and believes, and their testimony is there, to encourage us to put our trust in him.

So we've seen John the Baptist, who pointed at Jesus, as though to say, this is the one the whole Old Testament is about. Put your trust in him. And then we met the first five disciples of Jesus, last week.

[5 : 18] John himself, Philip and Nathaniel, Andrew and Simon Peter. And we're now probably on the seventh day of their momentous first week with Jesus.

It starts, chapter two, with that phrase, on the third day. It's quite pregnant with kind of meaning, that it's kind of the first Sunday. It's the seventh day they've been with Jesus.

And Jesus goes to this wedding. There's a focus on Mary. Probably Mary's been invited to the wedding. Jesus is there as her son. And he's brought his disciples with him. And the wedding looks as though it's all about the wine.

But really it's about what Jesus is showing us about himself. So three things about that. And the first is, he's out of this world. So we're familiar with what happens. They run out of wine.

Mary clearly knows there's something special about Jesus, her son. And so she goes to him, in verse three. And Jesus tells the servants to fill some jars with water.

[6 : 17] And they get filled to the brim. And then when they draw the water out and take it to the master of the banquet, it's been turned into this incredible wine. Then the bridegroom gets complimented.

And we read this in verse 11. Key explanation of what's going on. Verse 11. What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him.

It's a sign so that we can believe because the promise is that when you believe in Jesus, he gives you life. The life you were made for knowing God.

And in John's gospel, there are seven signs culminating in the resurrection of Jesus. As though looking back, that's the main sign to look at and investigate for ourselves. But just in this section, we've got the first sign, and it's in Cana.

And at the end of chapter four of John, you have the second sign, and that's in Cana as well. And they're like bookends to this very important section of John, chapters two to four, about who Jesus is.

[7 : 21] And the big idea for us is we can trust Jesus because he can do things that are ordinarily impossible. He's out of this world. And you might be thinking to yourself, water into wine?

I just, I'm not sure I can believe this. It's understandable because we've never seen it. And we can't repeat it. We can't recreate what happened. It's ordinarily impossible.

And I guess you'd have to say, wouldn't you, if there's no God, then this universe is just a closed system of cause and effect. And what was claimed to happen here wasn't a miracle.

It was something else. Jesus is either a wicked imposter leading people astray, or him and his disciples were completely deluded about who he is, and we should have nothing to do with them.

But what I want to say, I want to say a couple of things about that. What we need to be very careful of is ruling out the possibility of a miracle taking place. Because if we rule it out as even possible, then if there is a God and he wants to get our attention, we would miss it.

[8 : 35] We rule out the evidence because it doesn't fit with conclusions we've already drawn. And sometimes it feels as though today, lots of people would think, well, we don't believe miracles are possible because we can see now that the universe obeys laws.

There are laws of nature that don't get broken. But I want to suggest that for my money, the fact of our existence and the fact that we live in a universe, we inhabit a universe that does obey the laws of nature, fits much better with the belief that there is a God, a personal God of order, who's made it, than it does with the popular alternative today, that there is no God and that this universe just came out of nothing.

There was nothing, and now there is something. A multiverse, a universe, nothing to something that has this order and had the conditions for life.

that we now inhabit. I think it's much more plausible that there is a personal God. And the reason I say that is so that when we hear the claim from the Bible that there is a personal creator, for my money, we shouldn't approach that with a kind of skepticism that says, this doesn't fit with anything else I'm encountering in my life.

No, instead we should be thinking, well, if that is true, it would make good sense of our existence and the way we think about life and that we could exist in this universe and that it does obey established laws of nature.

[10 : 12] And if there is a personal creator God and he really did step into our world, what would we expect him to do? How would we expect him to get our attention? Surely we'd expect him to break the obvious rules.

So the whole point about these signs is that they are absolutely unique, unrepeatable. As C.S. Lewis said, if you don't know that the sun always rises in the east, you'll never notice the day it suddenly rises in the west.

And the disciples here are our friends because they weren't gullible people, these were hardened men, and their barriers to believing that God would become a man were just as significant as the barriers we might have to believe in our culture today.

But they were open-minded enough that when they were confronted with the evidence, they could see and even taste that Jesus could do things that only God can do. They drew the rational conclusion and put their faith in him.

So we read, he revealed his glory. And the glory of God is like the brilliance of God. And he shows that in himself and the disciples put their faith in him.

[11 : 27] So far they've been believing in Jesus because of his words to them. We saw that last week. Now they see his works and it's as though there's this earthquake in the Middle East as bang, heaven breaks in and Jesus announces his arrival as the Messiah doing something that only God could do.

But there's something very strange about this miracle, isn't there? Of all the things Jesus could have done to prove who he was, why did he do this?

So we've seen he's out of this world. Second thing about Jesus is that he gets the party started. If you think about the kind of miracles Jesus does, he never says, I'm God in the flesh and to prove it to you, I'm going to levitate and do backflips in the air.

Watch me. He never says, I'm God and to show you, I'm just going to destroy that mountain with lasers coming from my eyes. He never does that kind of miracle and he could have done. Why not?

It's because by his miracles he says, I'm a king and I want to show you by my works the kind of kingdom I've come to bring.

[12 : 38] A kingdom where there's going to be no more sickness and no more sadness. But the very first miracle Jesus, that John records of Jesus, doesn't take away disease or disability.

It deals with a social embarrassment. Why is that? Well again, it's because just like with the healing miracles, the wedding points us to life under the saving reign of Jesus.

Just imagine you were the bridegroom at this wedding. Weddings are a really big deal today, aren't they? In the first century Middle East, they were an even bigger deal.

They lasted for days. The biggest celebrations a town would have. And the bridegroom footed the bill. I don't know who, if you're married here, who was responsible for your wedding or if you've got a child who's got married, whether you had to pay for it.

Back in those days, the bridegroom footed the bill. So when the wine runs out in verse 3, it's incredibly embarrassing. It's a source of great shame for the bridegroom.

[13 : 47] If people find out, then he's going to look back forever on that day as really embarrassing, a source of great shame. People might see him in the village for years to come and go, oh, there's Danny.

He couldn't even get his wedding right, Danny. We ran out of wine. And shame is a horrible feeling, isn't it? I don't know if you can think of anything you look back on in your life that fills you with a sense of shame.

But hardly anybody knows about the miracle. The disciples, the servants, Mary, nobody else knows.

And what happens to the bridegroom? Verse 9, Then the master of the banquet 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. No cheap plonk here when the guests won't notice. Vintage claret, like nobody had ever tasted before.

[14 : 56] And so what happens to the bridegroom? He gets glory. Thanks to Jesus, his shame is taken away and he's enjoying glory.

And that's what Jesus does to any of us when we come to him. We take him every moment that's caused us shame and he says, Let me take that off you and deal with it.

And then he clothes us with glory so that God the Father looks on us forever as brilliant and praises us. How else do people try and deal with their shame before God?

Well, in verse 6 we read this. Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from 80 to 120 litres.

So these jars were part of the man-made religion of the time, the religious system. The people of God had bound themselves to these rules. When they came in to eat, they would plunge their arms into this water and wash in this special water.

[16 : 06] And it wasn't just to get them physically clean, the idea was that it would make them spiritually clean before God. So what does that tell us about them? They were people who feared God and they knew that spiritual uncleanness was a problem.

But they thought that to get yourself clean, you had to remove from you things that are outside you. They thought it was outward things that made you unclean.

Especially contact with people who didn't fear God and follow God. The Gentiles, the non-Jews. So they come in from the marketplace where they've been interacting with the non-Jews.

and they get themselves washed so that God would see them as clean. It was a system, a ritual. And all over our city today, just as all over the world today, you will find people who do fear God and they hope that by a religious ritual they can be clean in God's sight.

For some of them that will be some kind of washing in special water. But Jesus says that our uncleanness is on the inside. I was thinking about how technology is changing, right?

[17 : 24] So that voice recognition, for example, is getting much easier. And so you're not going to have to, you know, push buttons on your sat-nav soon or use your remote control on your TV.

You'll just walk in the room and you'll just tell the TV what you'd like to watch and it will do it. Okay? And that'll be great. But then we'll get to a point where we'll think that's still quite a lot of effort having to speak.

And so, I don't know, eventually maybe Google will develop some kind of brain scanner that when we walk in the room it will know what we want before we have to say and then it will just do it. Okay? And then I was thinking, well, but what if Google invented a scanner like that and it could really tell what you were thinking?

And so you could show, you could show other people everything you were thinking all of the time. How would we feel about people knowing everything we think all the time?

I wouldn't survive like that for very long at all. I'm hoping it's not just me. We're unclean on the inside.

[18 : 29] And yet John the Baptist pointed out Jesus and he said, look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. So when Jesus says to these servants, fill those jars of water for ceremonial washing to the brim, he's saying, all of that is fulfilled in me.

All that you're trying to do over there with ritual, it's finished now. Come to me. A new era has begun where I take away all your uncleanness and shame if you trust me.

And so it's natural to ask, well, what will this new era of salvation history be like? Where we can go to Jesus and he deals with our shame. And the picture Jesus gives of this new age is of overflowing vintage wine.

Over a thousand bottles of it. It's a symbol of great joy. And it's very challenging to our own views of Jesus, isn't it? For lots of us, we'd expect that if Jesus went to a wedding with his disciples, one of the first things he'd do is say to the disciples, can you get all the wine off the tables and get some jugs of water out for everybody?

Let's stop all this. What a great first miracle. Jesus gets out of the gate with a sign that brings great joy to a whole crowd of people.

[19 : 46] The party is on him. And if you were there and you were one of the servants who saw that happen, you'd be thinking, I want to be with that guy over there. I was talking to someone this week who said to me that if you're a Scottish Christian, you've often grown up basically thinking, it doesn't really matter what you do as long as you don't enjoy it.

And it's as if John is saying, look at the real Jesus. He arrives with a miracle that kicks off his ministry with a message, come to me, I'm the one who's got real joy on offer.

So he's out of this world, he gets the party started, and yet the Christian life isn't non-stop joy like overflowing wine, is it? And so we need to look at the third thing we learn about Jesus from this miracle.

Thirdly, he's ahead of his time. Have a look with me at verse three. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, they have no more wine. Woman, why do you involve me?

Jesus replied. My hour has not yet come. He speaks quite abruptly to his mother there, doesn't he, Jesus? It's as though he needs to tell her off, gently, a gentle rebuke.

[21 : 11] It might be that she's realized Jesus has this miraculous power, and she thinks there are times when that power could be quite useful to sort out problems as we go along through life.

And he needs to remind her that he has a mission from God, and nothing can distract him from that mission. So he says, my hour has not yet come.

And all through John's gospel, we keep hearing about this hour of Jesus. And then we get to chapter 17, the night before Jesus dies, and he prays, Father, the hour has come.

Glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you. So the hour that Jesus is referring to is his death and resurrection. That's his mission.

But what's that got to do with running out of wine? Well, it's about what Jesus' death will achieve. We read together, Isaiah chapter 25 at the beginning of our service, that God promises the future for God and his people will be like a great feast with overflowing wine.

[22 : 16] He promises a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats and the finest of wines. Then he says some extraordinary things about what that really looks like.

He will swallow up death forever. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces. In that day, they will say, surely this is our God.

We trusted in him and he saved us. So there's this great feast of wine provided by God himself. And what we learn as we read on in Isaiah is it's not just a banquet, it's a wedding banquet.

In chapter 54, God says this, your maker is your husband, the Lord Almighty is his name. In chapter 62, as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.

And in just the next chapter of John's Gospel, John the Baptist is going to say, Jesus is the bridegroom. So that when Jesus says to his mum, woman, why do you involve me?

[23 : 20] He's saying, this isn't my wedding. I'm not the bridegroom yet. But his wedding is coming. A wedding where we, everybody who trusts in Jesus, will be united to him, will be his bride.

And when he provides the chateau lafite for that wedding in Cana, he's saying, I can do a pretty good job of hosting a wedding. He wants us to see it as a foretaste, just an anticipation of the coming wedding when he will be the host and the joy will be unrivaled but incalculable.

That's what his death and resurrection is going to achieve so that we can be his people and be there. So that when we see what Jesus did that day in Cana, the application for us is for us to believe, but it's more than that.

It's for us to set our hope on this man because the feast is coming and we're to be people of hope. We shouldn't underestimate the joy on offer for Christians now.

We live with the assurance today that all of our sin is dealt with. We're forgiven people. We know God as our Father. He's adopted us and that's of great comfort. We enjoy a relationship with Jesus Christ, our risen captain and friend, and we have the gift of his spirit living in us.

[24 : 49] These are great blessings now, but we shouldn't overestimate the joy of being a Christian now. We're vulnerable to the pain and brokenness that everybody else is in our world and yet we're marked by our future hope, people who should be yearning for the wedding feast that we know is coming.

So let me just finish with two implications, a challenge and a comfort. What would it look like today to be people of the feast, to build your life today on the future hope of this great wedding banquet with Jesus?

Firstly, the challenge. If you believe that Jesus turned water into wine at this wedding to give you a foretaste of what it would be like at his wedding, then could I suggest to you that I think it means you should be at church every week.

Church on Sunday should be locked in. Growth group or roots locked in. Commitments that nothing else would get in the way of. Now of course, even as I say that, I realize that's not practical for some people because of shift patterns and work life or because you're caring for an elderly relative or somebody who's sick.

There are times in life and seasons where that's not practical. But it's about an attitude of the heart that says meeting with my church family is a real priority in my life.

[26 : 19] The reason I'm saying that is because when the New Testament talks about God's people, Christians, gathering together, it doesn't give us a new Ten Commandments where one of them is thou shalt not ever miss church.

Okay, it never says that in the Bible. But whenever in the New Testament it talks about gathering, it does talk about us gathering because we're looking forward to Jesus' return.

So when Paul writes in 1 Corinthians about having communion together, he says this, every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

So we look forward to Jesus' coming as we gather to have bread and wine. And then in Hebrews chapter 10, he talks about us keeping going as Christians, the writers of the Hebrews, and he says this, let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day approaching.

So that might be at the end there about how we might see signs that make us think Jesus' return is coming soon and so we think I'd better carry on meeting with the church family that I'm in.

[27 : 39] But I think there's probably a subjective reality to the end of that verse where it's saying the more that we're aware in our own hearts that Jesus is returning, the more it should really inspire us to commit to being at church week by week and not letting things get in the way of it.

Now, let me say as well, we do have people in our church family, we do have a committed core, who are at everything every week and it's wonderful, it's very encouraging. And we also, I think it's probably worth saying as well, we have a number of new people around the church family who come to everything and it's great.

But it's just worth all of us asking ourselves questions like this. Is being at church every Sunday without fail really the priority it should be for me with the life I've got, with the commitments I've got.

Am I making it the priority I should? And if I've got children, when they look at how often I manage my weekends in such a way that we don't make it to church, what impression am I giving them about how important it is to me to meet my church family?

What impression am I giving them about how important Jesus is to me? And it's worth saying in a very real sense, if you're a Christian, you are always on a rota at church.

[29 : 07] You know, sometimes we might be on a rota for welcoming or music or children's work, but you're always on a rota every week. The rota, oh I'm on rota this week, the rota says, go to church to encourage my church family with the gifts God's given me to be encouraged by them, to praise God, to pray to God, and to receive from God by word and spirit.

He's going to encourage me as we look at the Bible together and hear his voice and his spirit gets to work in me. And I need that because God is changing me and preparing me by fixing my eyes on the coming feast.

And you see the motivation for that, it's not because Jesus wants to make us miserable by taking away the fun we'd have on a weekend. No, it's because Jesus wants us to have joy.

Joy because we know him better and joy because gathering with his people has made us yearn more for the day when we enjoy that feast with him in the new creation.

Meeting together helps get our eyes fixed on the feast. So that's the big challenge but also the comfort. Last of all, as we think about being people of hope, let's take comfort because this hope that we see at this wedding is the very best of news for when life is grim.

[30 : 38] We live in a culture that can't face death and can't even really talk about death and really struggles with suffering and sadness and the reason for that is because our society thinks it's only for this life that there's a feast.

So if life today doesn't feel like a feast for you then that's a real problem if you're only living for this life. But we, people of God, can face even the worst things we see happening in our world and we can face the trials and difficulties in our own lives knowing that our feast is still to come.

And as we do that let's just think about Jesus, our horse. There is a painting in the Louvre. It's one of the biggest paintings in the Louvre Art Gallery in Paris and I think it might be the biggest one.

A huge canvas and it's of this wedding at Cana and there's all the guests around enjoying the wine that Jesus has provided for them and in the middle he's sitting there on his own.

Just picture him at that wedding. As he brought the cup of wine to his lips it means something different for him doesn't it? When he drinks wine he thinks about his own hour the death he has to die to make his wedding a reality.

[32 : 04] The only way he can host us at that banquet is if he drains the cup of God's wrath against our sin down to his dregs. So picture him facing that for you and let him strengthen you to face the pain you face this week.

The writer Edmund Clowney says this Jesus sat amidst all that joy sipping the coming sorrow so that we can sit amidst all the present sorrow savouring the coming joy.

let's pray together. Lord Jesus we thank you so much for revealing your glory and we praise you for how glorious you are that you could do things no one else can do and so we say we believe help our unbelief.

We thank you so much for the promise in this great miracle of wine overflowing at the great feast you are preparing for us and so we pray that you will help us by your spirit to be people of that feast setting our hope on what is to come and we ask Lord Jesus that you would indeed enable us as we see you drinking that sorrow to provide that joy strengthen us to face the sorrow of the present day savouring the coming joy.

Amen. Amen.