

The Water of Life

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[0 : 00] Today there will be two readings, one from John 2 verses 1 to 11 and that is on page 1064 of your Bibles.

And then the second reading is Isaiah 25 verses 6 to 9. And that is page 709.

Jesus changes water into wine. On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. 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. Woman, why do you involve me? Jesus replied. My hour has not yet come.

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 from 80 to 120 liters.

[1 : 10] 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 realize 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 till 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.

Isaiah 25, verses 6 to 9. On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best meats and the finest of wines.

[2 : 24] On this mountain, he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all people, the sheet that covers all nations, and he will swallow up death forever.

The sovereign Lord will wipe away tears from all faces. He will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.

In that day they will say, Surely this is our God. We trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord. We trusted in him.

Let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks so much for reading that, Matt.

And it would be a great help to me and to yourselves if you would turn back to John chapter 2, where we're continuing in our series on John's Gospel, page 1064.

[3 : 23] Let me add my welcome to Martin's, and let's join together in prayer before we get stuck in. Let's pray. Father, would you speak to each one of us here today?

Through the Holy Spirit, would you open the eyes of our heart, open up our eyes, so that we would see Jesus for who he truly is.

Would you reveal to us something of his glory, so that we would see and believe in him, and have our faith strengthened thereby.

In Jesus' name, amen. Well, I wouldn't have liked to have been in this guy's shoes, I can tell you. Last week, a bridegroom was in the news in court after being thrown off a flight at Manchester Airport ahead of takeoff, and arrested after drunkenly refusing to stop vaping on the flight, and ignoring repeated requests by the airline crew to do so.

His bride looked on, and you can imagine her dismay, how embarrassed, mortified she must have felt as he's dragged off the flight in front of her in a plane load of irate and frustrated passengers.

[5 : 01] The newlyweds had been due to go on a romantic stay in the Greek island of Santorini, but the newly married husband ruined their honeymoon. By his drunken antics.

He's had an absolute shocker. Now, don't suppose any of us here would have liked to have been in his shoes when he has to come face to face with his wife again for the first time after that.

Well, in John 2, we've got another story about another bridegroom having a shocker. It's another alcohol-related shocker, but this time it's not because he's had too much to drink.

It's because there's not enough wine to go around. So we arrive at a wedding in Cana in full flow. Jesus is there. His mother is there.

His friends are there. And you can imagine the joyful scene. The bride and bridegroom, half a village there, the whole community gathering together like that to join in the celebrations.

[5 : 59] There's wine and food and laughter. And the feast's set to go on for hours, if not days in that culture. And then all of a sudden, there's a situation.

There's a problem. The wine runs out. And it's potentially very embarrassing indeed. And indeed, I understand it also potentially could have attracted a lawsuit in that culture for the bridegroom.

Well, Jesus' mother gets wind of this and immediately turns to Jesus. So in verse 3, when the wine was gone, she says to him, they have no more wine.

And he turns around to her and he basically says, what's this got to do with me? So they have this slightly odd kind of an exchange. We'll come back to that later on.

But anyway, she enlists Jesus' help. And acting in faith, verse 5, says to the servants, do whatever he tells you.

[7 : 07] And so Jesus miraculously produces the wine. But doesn't this strike you here in John's Gospels is slightly odd at first glance.

It's sort of an odd thing for Jesus to do and a rather odd thing for John to record for us right at the beginning of his Gospel. We're kind of used to the idea of Jesus miraculously healing people.

We're used to the idea of Jesus miraculously feeding people even. But this strikes us as, well, just maybe a little bit frivolous, doesn't it? Turning water into wine.

So why does Jesus do this? Why does John include this? And fortunately, he tells us in verse 11.

If you look with me, 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.

[8 : 11] So what Jesus did was a miraculous sign, a pointer through which in some way he showed his glory with the result that his disciples believed in him.

And as you read on in John's Gospel, you discover that this book is a collection of signs, things which make you sit up and take notice of who this Jesus is.

And also John tells us why he recorded these events in John chapter 20. So why don't we keep a thumb in John chapter 2 and turn to John 20, page 1090.

John chapter 20, verse 30. Page 1090.

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book.

[9 : 16] But these signs are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the promised one, the Son of God. And that by believing, you may have life in him.

Well, the signs are very important in John's Gospel. Very important so that you can believe in him and have life in Jesus.

Well, maybe you're here this morning and you're skeptical about Jesus. Maybe you're here looking in on the Christian faith from the outside in, as it were. Well, John provides evidence throughout his Gospel about Jesus so that you can trust in him.

Maybe you're a Christian already. There's lots of us here who are already placing our trust in Jesus. So John wants to show you more of Jesus so that your faith will be strengthened.

So whoever you are, John wants you to share in the disciples' conclusion about Jesus, that he is who he says he is. So he records for us the evidence that convinced them about Jesus.

[10 : 29] And the purpose of a sign is to point, to point beyond itself to something with a deeper meaning.

Sign points to something else. So what's the significance of this sign here at Cana? What's the significance of Jesus turning water into wine?

In what ways does it reveal Jesus' glory? We've got two headings this morning. In the notices, if you find that helpful. Two headings.

Looking first at the sign itself in its own right and then thinking about the wider significance of the sign. So first heading, divine wine.

Thinking about the surprisingness of the sign. And then the true bridegroom. The significance of that sign. So firstly then, the divine wine.

[11 : 26] The surprisingness of this sign. In turning water into wine, Jesus clearly performs a miracle. He does the impossible.

In fact, it's less about what he does. He doesn't really do anything. He simply speaks and it's done. So did you see that in verse 7? He simply speaks and it is done.

Jesus said to the servants, fill the jars of water so they filled them to the brim. And then in verse 8, Jesus told them, now draw some out.

And they discover that this water is turned into wine. Now clearly, this is impossible according to the ordinary workings of nature, according to the laws of science.

Water is a stable substance. You can put it in a jar. It doesn't matter what size. If it's a small jar in your fridge or large stone jars like here in Cana, it doesn't really do anything if you leave water in a jar.

[12 : 33] You can heat it up and it evaporates. You can cool it down and it freezes. You can turn water into ice or steam, but you can't turn water into wine.

And I understand from chemists that H₂O into C₂H₅OH simply doesn't work.

Water to ethanol cannot be done in a lab. But this isn't water into vodka. And that would have been relatively easy compared to turning water into wine because wine is a much more complicated business than that.

Chateau Muzar is a Lebanese wine seven years in the making with vineyards in the Bika Valley cradled between two mountain ranges that run parallel to the Mediterranean coastline in Lebanon not too far from Cana.

And they've been cultivating wine in that region for at least 6,000 years. So at least 4,000 years before the wedding at Cana. And the Phoenicians I understand first discovered there in the Bika Valley the perfect conditions for wine making.

[13 : 53] So nestled at 1,000 meters above sea level the Bika Valley is blessed with sunshine fresh mountain breezes average temperatures of 25 degrees in winters that encompass snowy winters and very hot summers.

just the right kind of gravelly stony chalky soil too for producing the highest quality grapes. And the grapes are to this day I believe harvested by local Bedouins and then aged for 12 months in French oak barrels before the blending process begins.

the final blending is aged for a further three to four years and then the wine is released in the seventh year. The point is the process of making wine is seriously complicated.

What Jesus accomplished at Cana was ordinarily impossible. So why would Jesus do this? Well back in chapter 1 John has made some extraordinary claims about Jesus.

So just turn back a page to the first verses of John's gospel. John chapter 1 verses 1 to 2.

[15 : 19] In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

And then just scan down to verse 14. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.

So here John is claiming that the creator of the universe revealed himself in history by becoming a human being the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that is quite a claim. Quite a claim. And if it's true we would expect him to be able to do a few exceptional things.

We'd expect him to back his chat. In fact you'd probably be more suspicious about a claim to divinity by someone who couldn't demonstrate supernatural power.

[16 : 20] just imagine the conversation somebody coming up to you I'm the creator. Oh really? Can you do anything that would make me believe that you are the creator?

Not really. No. That wouldn't go very well would it? If Jesus is who he says he is you'd expect him to be able to do things that back up his claims.

And so John wants to give us access to believe in the evidence that convinced them. Let's note this isn't the wine version of the emperor's new clothes.

This isn't people at Cana are drinking water and just pretending it's fine wine. No. John's at pains to point out that the master of the banquet didn't even know that the miracle had taken place.

Though the servants and the disciples did. So did you see that in verse 9? Let's look at verse 9 again of chapter 2. When the master of a banquet tasted the water become wine he didn't realize where it came from.

[17 : 32] This isn't a fake miracle. This is a bona fide miracle. Jesus does something impossible and he doesn't hold back. Both the quantity and the quality are superior.

They're astonishing. We're told in verse 6 there are 6 gigantic stone water jars each holding from 20 to 30 gallons of liquid.

That's some amount of liquid. We're talking about 60 to 80 cases of wine. That's something like 750 to 1,000 bottles of wine and that I would suggest is more than enough to go around the town the size of Cana and then some.

There's plenty of it and it's very good wine. In fact the master of the banquet marvels at its quality. He tastes the wine and he's so astonished that he draws the bridegroom aside for a little chat.

He says verse 10 everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guest had a bit too much to drink but you've saved the best till now.

[18 : 42] Writing back in the 1970s the English novelist and literary critic Kingsley Amos offered the following guidance to the amateur wine collector to the novice inclined to start a wine cellar.

First he advises finding a decent wine merchant. Then he writes having found your man trust him only shutting your ears when he starts rhapsodizing about white burgundies because they're too expensive.

Ask him for a drinkable red you'll enjoy yourself and can offer to guests without shame. These days this will cost you one pound a bottle. Resign yourself to that.

Also ask for a treat wine for anniversaries and when old Mr. Winebuff comes to dinner. This will cost you three pounds a bottle.

Resign yourself to that. Clearly these are 1970s prices but afflation aside the point is there's two tiers the fancy expensive stuff and then the run of a mill plunk and at the wedding at Cana the master of ceremonies something of a connoisseur himself he's amazed that it's the vintage vino that's brought out in reserve and not the other way around.

[20 : 05] So Jesus provided such exquisite wine that the wedding guests thought that the bridegroom simply saved the best till last.

Now don't you think that this is amazing? It's a little bit surprising. We tend to think of a God certainly our culture tends to think of a God who's a bit of a spoil sport a bit of a drag a little bit of a killjoy a God who we imagine to be a rather dure character against the very idea of having fun.

And if we're not careful we can have that view of Jesus a Jesus who'd be going around weddings turning wine into water and not the other way around making sure nobody had any fun.

Well the Jesus we meet in Cana confounds our 21st century sceptical expectations about him. When was the last time you were at a party and heard it said you're at a party it's not really getting off the ground and you heard somebody said this is a bit dull when are the Christians going to arrive get things going liven things up Jesus confounds our expectations he breaks the stereotype now don't hear me wrong the Bible nowhere condones drunkenness we're not to enjoy these things without limits and the abuse of alcohol is rife in the west coast of Scotland and in Glasgow in particular it's a serious problem in our society causing all sorts of problems responsible for marital breakdowns for ruining people's health and livelihoods for tearing families apart sits behind much violent crime and domestic abuse there is a place for abstinence scripture nowhere condones drunkenness but the

Bible isn't against drink and certainly not against enjoyment per se the Jesus we find in the Bible is more than capable of having a good time capable of fun and friendship joy and laughter of kick starting a party even and John has given us this sign so that we can believe in Jesus put our trust in this Jesus but for us to see the wider significance of this sign and the ways that it reveals Jesus' glory we need to move on to our next heading the true bridegroom and think about the significance of this sign the wedding at Cana is going wrong the reception is a disaster we're about to run out of wine and by the way my wife Alice informed me only this week that we narrowly avoided a similar situation a similar kind of faux pas at our own wedding reception in Latvia my father-in-law had taken on his shoulders the sole responsibility to supply the drink at our wedding reception so I'm off the hook on this one at least but he'd taken responsibility in a role that he assumed with great gusto and considerable enthusiasm but he had not however taken into account the differences in the cross-cultural tastes and preferences and with only days to spare he laughed heartily in Alice's face when it was gently suggested to him that unbalanced the British guests might not prefer his homemade brandy to a glass of wine he did however bow to pressure and would later acknowledge that much to his genuine surprise the wine had proven more popular than his homemade brandy at least amongst the British delegates there and when it comes to thinking about the significance of the sign at Cana a good place to start is to ask yourself at this particular wedding whose role does

[24 : 31] Jesus assume at the ceremony whose shoes does Jesus step into so follow along with me from verse nine again the master of a banquet tasted the water become wine he didn't realize where it had come from though the servants knew then he called the bridegroom aside and said everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine but you have saved the best till now the bridegrooms had a shocker Jesus steps in he sorts out the bridegrooms job the bridegroom gets the credit for what Jesus has done did you notice that in verse 10 Jesus stands in for the bridegroom he steps into the bridegroom's shoes as you read on in John's gospel you'll see that this becomes very significant so in the next chapter if you flick on to chapter 3 verse 29

John the Baptist says chapter 3 verse 29 the bride belongs to the bridegroom the friend who attends the bridegroom is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice that joy is mine so basically John the Baptist is saying I'm the best man Jesus is the bridegroom it's the same idea Jesus steps into the shoes of the bridegroom and we'll see how this develops further when we come to chapter 4 in a couple of weeks but there's a couple of little details in our passage that add significance to Jesus stepping into the role of the bridegroom and it's easy for us to skim over these but look again at chapter 2 verse 1 on the third day a wedding took place at

Canaan on the third day and that's significant John begins and ends his gospel with two weeks he bookends his gospel with two carefully set out weeks at the end of the gospel there's a week leading up to Jesus death and resurrection and at the beginning of the gospel the whole narrative from verse 19 of chapter 1 to verse 11 of chapter 2 covers precisely one week we can even count the days so just flick back page to page 1063 chapter 1 verse 19 day one the Jewish leaders interrogate John the Baptist and then skip down to the bottom of page verse 29 the next day that's day 2 over the page to verse 35 the next day that's day 3 and down to verse 43 day 4 the next day and then right the way down to chapter 2 verse 1 beginning of our passage on the third day that is the third day counting from day 4 in other words what takes place at

Cana happens on the seventh day at the end of the first week so what what's that got to do with this right from the outset of John's gospel John has very deliberately drawn attention to the creation account in the book of Genesis in both books in Genesis and in John the opening words are the same in the beginning in both books in Genesis and John they set out a week of activity culminating in a marriage Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 the wedding at Cana in John chapter 2 in both accounts the bridegroom fails dramatically in his respective responsibilities and so it is in our chapter that Jesus steps into the scene and steps into the shoes of the bridegroom and when we zoom out and see that

John's making significant reference to the Old Testament it helps us understand something of the significance from a much wider perspective as we zoom out we find that this idea of the bride and the marriage feast is super important we've already read in Isaiah 25 in our second reading this morning that Isaiah promised a feast of rich food and aged wine on the mountain of Jerusalem later on in that same prophecy Isaiah chapter 54 there's an astonishing promise that your maker is your husband Israel has made a mess of their relationship with God but God nevertheless promises to betroth himself to her and then these incredible words in chapter 62 as a bridegroom rejoices over the bride so God will rejoice over you

[30 : 04] God describes himself as the bridegroom Jesus does something miraculous at Cana to reveal an extraordinary truth about himself this is God coming to betroth himself to his people coming to offer the closest possible relationship with his people the bridegroom is here the paintings come up on the screen did you know the largest painting at the Louvre in Paris is the wedding feast at Cana by Paolo Veronese it's a monumental painting about 10 meters by 8 meters and weighs a ton literally one and a half tons and it depicts the wedding scene at Cana for us and it's a clever painting in all sorts of ways you can see Jesus in the middle with the halo in the foreground there are stone jars filled with wine and the terrace just above

Jesus a lamb is being slaughtered a sacrificial lamb and in the foreground there's musicians playing on their instruments around an hourglass so if we zoom in and see the painting in detail we can just about make out that hourglass the artist the painter noticed something we can easily miss in this passage in verse four Jesus says why do you involve me my hour has not yet come my hour has not yet come it's not time yet and on first reading you're thinking what's he talking about yes Jesus the hour has come we're literally about to run out of wine you need to do something my hour has not come of course that's not what he means this phrase you'll find keeps recurring throughout John's gospel so chapter seven they didn't arrest him because his hours not yet come chapter eight nobody sees them because his hours not yet come all the way through the gospel it's like the clocks ticking the stopwatches counting down until we get to

John chapter 12 verse 23 and Jesus declares now the hour has come for me to be glorified the hour has come he's about to meet his death and so the question that we need to be asking ourselves is if the hour is about Jesus' death and the hours not yet come then why does Jesus do this now why turn water into wine it's because what he does at this wedding at Cana is our foretaste in anticipation of what will be achieved by his death and resurrection when his hour does come a foretaste of the marriage supper of the mountain on the new Jerusalem where we will feast on rich foods and chateau muslin where we see Jesus face to face in glory the true and perfect bridegroom the bridegroom who will never let you down this the Jesus who turned water into wine in Cana his disciples believed in him about whom

John writes so that you too can say surely this is our God we trusted in him and he saved us let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation let's pray father we thank you so much for this amazing extraordinary event this miraculous sign at Cana for all the ways it demonstrates that Jesus is who he claims to be the creator the son of God the messiah the bridegroom thank you father for all the ways it challenges our assumptions that you're not against enjoyment but are preparing instead a sumptuous feast for us we can look forward to meet at last the Lord Jesus face to face our true and perfect bridegroom in his name we pray amen well we're going to respond now in worship with a couple of songs that give expression to some of these sentiments and of our hope of that eternal future after have I thank you