

Series: Receiving life by believing in God's Son (a Gospel of John study)

Sermon Text: John 2:1-12

Kids Word: Signs

(*This account is not in the other gospels)

John's stated purpose in writing was to help us "*believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so we can have life in his name.*" After covering the "intro/prologue" in **1:1-18**, we're now exploring the section of stories from **1:19-11:57** illustrating how it looks "*when people meet Jesus.*" Today's text presents the first miracle Jesus performed. On the surface, it's about Mary asking Jesus to solve an earthly problem. Beneath the surface, it clarifies God's purposes for Israel and the Old Testament and grounds our mysterious faith in tangible realities like marriage, water, and wine. Some people get weird and short sighted about miraculous signs; however, this passage proves this...

BIG IDEA: The point of the signs is to point us to Jesus.

Let's consider some key ideas and applications in our text.

Let's first consider the problem in verses 1-3: 1 On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. 3 When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."

- Unlike what we're used to, ancient near eastern marriages were "*arranged by the parents, a contract was prepared, vows were spoken in the synagogue, tokens were exchanged, and then the man and woman returned to their respective homes...Although legally considered married, they lived apart during a betrothal period (which lasted from 2 to 12 months!). At the end of the waiting period, the groom would take to the streets with his friends, usually at night, in a torch-lit procession from his home to the bride's in a grand parade accompanied by pomp and color and singing. After speeches of goodwill and blessings pronounced over the couple, the groom took his bride home, where family and friends feasted for as long as a week. The groom's family was expected to provide enough food and drink for everyone...To this day in the East, hospitality is considered a sacred duty and, in some cases, a cause for legal action if withheld!*" (Chuck Swindoll, pastor/founder of "*Insight for Living*").
- Jesus' attendance at this event implies He was [not an antisocial stick in the mud](#) with no time for parties. Our Savior valued marriage, enjoyed celebration; and to our surprise, attended an event where alcohol was served and provided more when it ran out! Running out of *wine* was a major social error in a culture where reputation was everything. Why did *Mary* turn this into a problem for Jesus to solve? She could have been related to someone involved (**2:12** proves her

other sons attended), or perhaps it was simply her habit to lean on her son for help after her husband's death (Mark 6:3 implies Joseph had passed).

Now, let's consider the dilemma in verses 4-5: 4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

- Despite how it sounds, Jesus was not getting snarky with His mom. Calling her “*woman*” was the equivalent of saying “*Ma’am*” or “*dear woman.*” It obviously expresses affection in John 19:26, “*When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near the cross, he said, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’*” John frequently used words as “*tiny signs*” to help us make mental connections. In chapter 1, “*In the beginning*” points to Genesis 1, and “*Lamb of God*” points back to the Exodus and forward to the cross. “*Woman*” also points to the cross when a dying Jesus tasked the Apostle John to care for His mother. Scholars often refer to this gospel letter as “[the book of signs](#)” because John included so many. [Biblical signs](#) always had specific purposes just like signposts we see on the road (they point to a place but are not the place) or like hyperlinks on the internet (they point to a page but are not the page). In both Testaments, God used them sparingly--always to verify He was doing a new thing. He provided *signs* to believers (Moses) and non-believers (Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar). In today's passage, *marriage* and *wine* are signposts pointing to Jesus and realities of His kingdom.
- Another signpost was the phrase, “*My hour has not yet come.*” Upon hearing it, *Mary* instantly realized her desire to help her friends [put her Son in a tough spot](#) that would forever alter His relationships. John's use of the terms, “*hour*” or “*time*” in reference to Jesus pointed to the moment “*the Father put His Son's full glory on display at His crucifixion*” (cf. 2:4; 7:6-8, 30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1). Everything Jesus did pointed to His *hour* (is this true for us?), which is why He was reluctant to do this miracle. He wasn't sent to be a maintenance man who fixed all 1st century problems. His first human appearance (advent) was designed to reveal His glory, but not the way Israel had hoped. It would be displayed in weakness and death, not shows of power; and when God saw fit, not upon human command (cf. 2 Corinthians 12; Galatians 4:4-7). While Jesus clearly felt for His friends, His special powers were not party tricks--they were proof of Him being God's “*new thing.*” While interpreting Bible passages can be challenging, this is not one of those times! The “*big idea*” is stated in *verse 11*, which forces us to interpret

and apply the *Cana* miracle as a *sign* of Christ's *glory* on the cross (apologies if you were planning to ask Jesus to cater your next party).

Verses 6-12 show how this sign points to Jesus' work: 6 Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus told the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 He said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So, they took it. 9 When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." 11 This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. 12 After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

- Why did Jesus give this *sign* at a *wedding feast*? To foreshadow a future feast celebrating the union of Jesus and His bride, the church (cf. Ephesians 5:21-33; Revelation 21:2). Why did He use *stone jars* commonly used in *Jewish purification rituals*? To prove God was doing a new thing (purifying the world) from within the old *Jewish* system. It seems obvious Jesus turned the [water into wine](#) to reveal His impact on those living under old structures. While Israel had expected Messiah to conform to their existing systems, this *sign* pointed to a different plan!
- Did you catch how surprised *the feast master* was? Our response to this *sign* should mirror His response. This was not the [old limited wine](#) (ways) of Judaism, rather it was the [new abundant wine](#) of God's kingdom coming to earth (note: Scripture uses "*wine*" to symbolize things like Eden, abundance, celebration, blood, the New Jerusalem, etc. See Isaiah 25). Jesus changed the *water* of [Judaism](#) into the *wine* of Christianity, which was the signpost John gave in *1:16-17*, "*From his fullness we've all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*" Faith is about trusting God regardless of how we perceive our present experiences, but the ongoing presence of sin and brokenness can lead us to question whether Jesus' first human appearance made any difference. While we may crave additional *signs* to prove God cares about us and our circumstances, the fact remains we already have ample proof that God is present and involved in common, tangible events like *weddings* and *wetting our whistles*!

Let's quickly consider one other point...this incident can also teach us about [prayer](#).

- While there are many types of prayer, prayer is essentially a conversation with God facilitated by His Son. *Mary's* prayer is considered an “*intercessory prayer*” because she went to God on behalf of others (cf. 11:3; 2 Kings 19:14). Since Jesus was God in a human body, His replies reveal how God will and won't respond to our prayers. Maybe you've heard John 15:7-8, “*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples*” or James 4:3, “*You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*” We should be careful what we demand from God because prayer is always about God's glory before it's every about fulfilling a desire, improving a party, or saving people from embarrassment. While God indeed wants to bless His kids, He sent His Son to save people, not parties. Jesus is not a genie who grants every whim nor a magician we hire to perform for our friends. He is God's *sign* that points to God's kingdom! Prayer is simple but not a blank check. Our generous Father invites us to bring all requests to Him, but with a faith that surrenders our wants to His higher agenda and thus trusting His response, non-response, or delayed response.
- I hope you also realize prayer is not always passive. Mary said, “*do whatever he tells you*”, which implies God may want us to participate in the outcome. Alluding to James 2, Canadian Pastor Bruce Milne wrote, “*Prayer without a willingness to obey is little better than faith without a willingness to work.*” God's power and our efforts aren't always mutually exclusive (cf. Philippians 2:12-13). Why might we need to participate like the *servants* here? Because Spirit-enabled participation often positions us greater learning. God is happy to handle our problems, but He seems to prefer working through us to help us know Jesus in fresh ways.
- One last thing we should not miss...if you're someone who thinks God doesn't care what we want or isn't moved by our needs, then you've totally missed the miracle in *Cana--it was love for family and friends that moved Jesus to start the countdown timer to the cross!* While all of history hinges on the hour Jesus died on the cross, He let a comparatively insignificant earthly concern be what set everything into irreversible motion! If you think your everyday concerns don't matter to the Most-High God, then you should read this story until you're convinced! New Testament Scholar, NT Wright suggests, “*You might want to pray through this story with your own failures and disappointments in mind – remembering that transformation only came when someone took Mary's words seriously: 'Do whatever he tells you.'*”

Let's pray...Father, as I come before you on behalf of this congregation, I should apologize for the way we misinterpret Scripture, twist it's meaning, and apply it with selfish intention. How can the world take your Word seriously when they see this from us? I pray we might repent of making your Word "*all about us and how we want you to be.*" May we confess that your Word is "*about who you are and how you've sent your only Son into the world, as one of us, to do new things!*" Grant us a fuller comprehension to grasp the higher and more glorious purposes of miracles and prayer. May we align ourselves with your will and purposes concerning signs and prayer, so we can discover true and abundant life in your name. Amen.

Please stand and join us as in singing a song that complements today's passage perfectly, "*It is Well with my Soul.*" As you sing, consider whether you believe what you're singing.

So, what's your NEXT STEP?

- Remember, our next step always begins with faith in Christ. Either placing faith in Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent, change, and grow. Either way, His Spirit will help you.

Quotes/Additional thoughts:

- **Context:** The Gospel of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, provides a clearly stated purpose. *John 20:30-31* says, "*Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*" Some people demand to have all their questions satisfied before bowing to Jesus, yet John claimed his limited account was enough to bring anyone to faith. As we read it, our Savior and friend emerges from the pages as a real person in the real world. Jesus shows us what we could become, if we too would rely on His infinite Father who will gladly supply whatever we need.
- **Clues in John:** "John's gospel is planned as a kind of treasure hunt, with careful and sometimes cryptic clues laid for us to follow. Now that he's set the scene with the opening stories about John the Baptist and Jesus' early followers, he gives us the first clue, telling us that it's the first one so we know where we are. He will tell us about the second one, too, two chapters later; from then on, we're on our own, and he wants us to use our initiative and imagination in following the clues to the very end...The word he uses for 'clue' is 'sign' (verse 11). He is setting up a series of signposts to take us through his story...They are moments when heaven is opened, when the transforming power of God's love bursts into the present world...The whole point of the 'signs' is that they are moments when heaven and earth intersect with each other. (That's what the Jews believed happened in the Temple.) The point is not that they are stories which couldn't have happened in real life, but which point away from earth to a heavenly reality." Professor NT Wright
- **The next day language:** Notice John's use of the phrase "*the next day*" in verses 29, 35, 43; 2:1. The Apostle John presented what he had observed over 5 consecutive days. Day 1: The baptizer announced Messiah was coming. Day 2: The baptizer told everyone Jesus was the Messiah. Day 3: Jesus recruited John, Andrew, and Peter. Day 4: Jesus recruited Philip and Nathanael. Day 5: The miracle at Cana that validated who Jesus was. Since John began this chapter with the words, "*In the beginning*", it's not a stretch to think he is now trying to

describe for us the re-creation. Pastor Chuck Swindoll offers this additional insight, “*‘On the third day’ most likely means on the third day after the events of 1:45-51, after He had ‘purposed to go to Galilee’, or perhaps this was the third day after His arrival in Galilee.*”

Pastor Bruce Milne offers the following suggestions: “*The noting of the time-link, the next day ..., may be significant (cf. 1:29, 39, 43; 2:1). In running the events together, John presents Jesus’ early ministry as a week-long activity culminating in the first sign at Cana in Galilee. Recalling the background of Genesis chapter 1 in the prologue, it is not inconceivable that John is consciously presenting the work of Jesus, the Word made flesh, as the week of re-creation, climaxed in the first of the signs which reveal his glory...John now shows the glory of the eternal Word intersecting with ordinary folk in the midst of their everyday lives, people with deep human needs, like John’s readers across the ages...Therein lies the wonder of Christ and the gospel. It brings together the heights of heaven and the depths of earth, the glories of God and the agonies of humanity.*”

- **The phrase, “What does this have to do with me?”:** “Elsewhere in Scripture, this phrase can be a sharp rebuke (cf. Judges 11:12; 2 Samuel 16:10; 1 Kings 17:18; 2 Chronicles 35:21), or it can be a gentle request to be left out of a matter (2 Kings 3:13; Hosea 14:8)” Pastor Chuck Swindoll
- **A new relationship with her son:** “While that hour of his self-oblation is not yet come, 7 already its demand lies upon him. As a result, all previous relationships, not least his natural ones, must be revised. When Mary is prepared to adjust to this new order her plea is accepted. ‘Mary approaches Jesus as his mother, and is reproached; ...she responds as a believer, and her faith is honoured.’” Pastor Bruce Milne
- **Cana and the cross:** “It is about transformation: the different dimension of reality that comes into being when Jesus is present and when, as Mary tells the servants, people do whatever Jesus tells them...This is one of only two occasions we meet Jesus’ mother in this gospel, the other being at the foot of the cross (chapter 19). This is important, because Jesus’ strange remark in verse 4, ‘My time hasn’t come yet’, looks on, through many other references to his ‘time’, until at last the time does come, and the glory is revealed fully, as he dies on the cross. That event, for John, is the ultimate moment when heaven and earth meet.” Professor NT Wright
- **A sign of Jesus’ identity:** “Jesus’ simple act of kindness was much more—it was a sign...This was a simple act of kindness done for the sake of love for His friends. He didn’t make this a sideshow spectacle... He calls this miracle of Jesus the first of many ‘signs.’ The supernatural display of power attested to His identity as God. Moreover, it was symbolic of what He had come to do: to transform all who believe in Him...While the time for Jesus’ ‘glory’ had not come, His disciples witnessed it nonetheless. And their faith was strengthened as a result.” Pastor Chuck Swindoll
- **Signs (a.k.a. miracles):** “John’s account of Jesus’ public ministry (from its commencement in Galilee to its climax in Jerusalem) is organized around seven miracles. John’s word for them is ‘signs’ (semeia), which is his alternative to ‘miracles’ or ‘wonders’...He is concerned, however, to see beyond the miracles to their significance; they are signs, i.e. special actions by Jesus which reveal his glory to those who believe and which confront others with the need to decide about Jesus...for the synoptic writers {Matthew, Mark, and Luke} Jesus’ miracles are actual occasions of the incursion of the kingdom of God. ‘Fundamentally [they] are acts by

which Jesus establishes God's reign and defeats the reign of Satan.' ...For John, the miracles, though no less real as historical acts of supernatural power, are more symbolic; they point beyond themselves to Jesus and his significance...Put more succinctly, the synoptic miracles are essentially eschatological, John's essentially christological. For John, faith based on miraculous signs is not regarded as satisfactory. It is, however, at least a step beyond those who willfully refuse to even see the signs... 'To attend a marriage feast and to cleanse the temple were among the first acts of our Lord's ministry at his first coming. To purify the whole visible Church and hold a marriage supper will be among his first acts, when he comes again.'"

Pastor Bruce Milne

- **The point of the signs is to point us to Jesus:** "We can look back on them to remember what Jesus has done for us, we can be comforted by them to know that Jesus is presently with us (his first one was at a normal wedding, not the transfiguration or some super event), and we can read about them to know our future is secure with Jesus." Pastor Russ Theisens
- **A powerful quote:** "*The modest water saw its God and blushed.*" Pastor Bruce Milne
- **Be willing to do whatever Jesus says:** Taking water to a guy that was expecting wine was a risky move. Was it water or wine that came from the pot? If water, then perhaps the miracle occurred sometime between the drawing and the tasting. The miracle certainly happened as they performed a mundane, everyday task of carrying water. While this was a public miracle, clearly not everybody at the party knew what happened--the servants were the ones with eyes to see; they're the ones who knew the secret. Jesus wasn't showing off for everybody because, as we'll see at the end of chapter 2, He doesn't have to. Most of the partygoers either never realized what happened, or they heard about it later, maybe even after John's letter was circulated. While the servants got to be part of the miracle, it was the guests who benefited from it. God does miracles like this in our lives every day, and sometimes seeing the work of His subtle and supernatural hand requires that we ponder our past. Often, as was said in this story, Jesus keeps the good stuff until last.

Articles/Songs/Videos:

Helpful thoughts for discussion leaders:

1. Go for a single, not a home run...don't drag the night out; realize more people = less deep sharing.
2. Keep discussion around 30mins. Once you hit the "sweet spot", spend your time there.

Challenge Questions

Review the BIG IDEA: The point of the signs is to point us to Jesus.

-Simple questions...What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Preparation questions for John 2:1-12.

- Why do you think Mary turned this wedding issue into Jesus' problem to solve? (2:1-4)
- What did Jesus mean by, "My hour has not yet come?", and what did that have to do with Mary's request? (2:4)
- Verse 11 says this event was the first sign to manifest Jesus' glory. What do you think these things are meant to teach us about Jesus and God's kingdom? (2:5-11)

Application questions from John 2:1-12.

- The Bible discourages evil indulgences and encourages celebration. Are you known to enjoy laughter and celebration or are you an antisocial stick in the mud? While we should always honor God, how could it help the gospel for Christians to be thought of as joyful, winsome, and celebratory? If you have examples, please share them.
- Why do you think people tend to demand new signs and fresh experiences from God when God has already done so much? How does faith inform our understanding of the miraculous and challenge us to entrust our future to a God who has already performed in the past?
- In our broken world, people frequently wonder if God cares and what God is up to. Are you upset with God due to His apparent silence or His refusal to answer a prayer the way you preferred? What does the miracle at Cana reveal about God's involvement in earthly matters and His concern for our basic needs and desires?
- The Bible contains numerous types of prayer. How often do you pray, and which type(s) of prayer do you tend to rely on most? What plan could you implement to improve the variety and frequency of your prayers?

Here are some great resources for digging deeper into community group life...

How life together looks <http://austinstone.org/stories/film/item/140-missional-community-lukes-story>

Rethinking what we do https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded

Numerous articles to provoke thought <http://toddengstrom.com/archives/>

What groups of 2-3 might look like <http://toddengstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/LTG-Overview.pdf>