

JESUS' FIRST SIGN

John 2:1-12

Key Verse: 2:11

“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.”

In his prologue, John introduced who Jesus is. Jesus is God. John testified, “We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John the Baptist testified that Jesus is God’s chosen one, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. Then Jesus’ first disciples encountered Jesus personally and testified that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of Israel. Thus far, Jesus has been revealed mainly through testimonies. In today’s passage, Jesus revealed himself as the Son of God through his action. This is the first miraculous sign that he performed on earth. The first in a series is always meaningful. Through his first sign, among seven in John’s Gospel, Jesus set the tone of his ministry and revealed the nature of his work as the Messiah. So we need to pay attention to this first sign: what Jesus did, where it happened, how and why he did it. The author calls Jesus’ act, not a “miracle,” but a “sign,” which revealed who Jesus is. We tend to pay attention to God’s gift, not God, the Giver. However, we need to see Jesus, who performed the sign. Then we can have a meaningful relationship with him. What does Jesus reveal through his first sign? Simply speaking, he came to make life joyful, and he has transforming power. Let’s think about what this means to us.

It is interesting to see how Jesus revealed his glory. His supernatural power worked through natural means. It was done in the context of his relationships with a few people: his mother, some servants and his disciples. Each of them had a significant role to play in revealing Jesus’ glory. We can divide this passage based on Jesus’ interactions with these people.

First, Jesus worked through his mother’s prayer (1-5). On the third day after Jesus’ encounter with Nathanael, a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee.

Cana was a small town about eight miles north of Nazareth, and it was the hometown of Nathanael (21:2). Most people love weddings, and lots of movies have been made about weddings. These days in America, the ceremony lasts about an hour and is followed by a reception that often goes well into the night. In Jesus' day, however, wedding celebrations lasted an entire week. They began with the bridegroom, accompanied by his friends, fetching his bride from her father's house. Then the bride and groom, beautifully dressed, made their way to the groom's house. Along the way, people sang from the Song of Songs: "Who is this coming up from the wilderness like a column of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and incense made from all the spices of the merchant?" (Song 3:6) When the procession reached the bridegroom's house, his parents uttered a traditional blessing, drawn from Scripture and other sources.¹ Then came a time of games and dancing. The next day the great wedding feast came, and it went on and on. It was a welcome respite for the Jews from the harsh realities under Roman oppression and the burdens of Jewish legalism. Usually, everyone in the village participated in the joyful celebration.

Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding (2). Nathanael must have been happy to return to his hometown. Jesus' hungry disciples ate the delicious food with gusto. The wedding guests blessed the bride and groom and presented them with gifts. They offered many toasts for their future happiness. The atmosphere was exuberant. However, the wine ran out much too soon. Generally, the Bible warns us about wine. Proverbs 20:1 says, "Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise." "In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper" (Pr 23:32). Ephesians 5:18 says, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." However, in the context of this wedding, wine was a sign of joy and God's blessings (Pr 3:10). Psalm 104:15 says, "Wine gladdens human hearts." So wine running out seemed to mean that joy and blessing were running out. This was to the shame of the host and the dishonor of the newlyweds.

¹ <http://blog.adw.org/2017/03/marriage-family-time-jesus/>

At this critical moment, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine" (3b). She did not ignore the problem or blame the host. She made the problem her own and brought it to Jesus, believing he could do something. This was her prayer. Prayer is to bring a problem to Jesus. Jesus replied, "Woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come" (4). Jesus did not call her, "Mother," but, "Woman." It was a kind and polite expression that implied a distance in their relationship due to its changing nature. As Jesus started his public messianic ministry, he made it clear to his mother that he was committed to God's will. Jesus was not free to do his mother's bidding; he had to carry out God's will based on God's time schedule (7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1). Jesus always sought the right time to reveal his glory as the Messiah, the Son of God. He did this to please God, not to please people.

His mother did not take his response as a rejection. She trusted him and quietly waited, believing he would do something. This does not mean that she withdrew in discouragement and did nothing. Rather, she made an environment for him to work in. She said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (5). It was her confident prayer. Her confidence was not based on her position as Jesus' mother, but on her faith in him as the Messiah. 1 John 5:14 says, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." We can learn here that when problems arise, we should not ignore them, or seek who to blame. Rather, we should bring them to Jesus, make an environment for his work, and wait for his answer with confidence.

Second, Jesus worked through the servants' obedience (6-10). "Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews in ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons" (6). So in total they could hold from 120 to 180 gallons. This water was used for Jewish purification rites before and after meals (Mk 7:2-4). As Jesus heard his mother's prayer, and saw that the servants were ready to obey him, he realized that the time had come to reveal his glory. For this, Jesus decided to work with the servants, who were ready to obey, using the water jars.

Jesus gave two commands. First, he said, "Fill the jars with water" (7a). So the servants filled the jars to the brim (7b). The servants worked hard and quickly. They were not reluctant, just doing the minimum; they filled the jars to the brim. Their obedience was willing. Furthermore, they worked together as a team. Then Jesus said, "Now, draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet" (8a). This was harder to obey, for there was a risk of rebuke. But they did so (8b). What happened? The master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine (9a). Suddenly his eyes widened and he said, "Wow! This wine is superb!" He immediately 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." This tells us that Jesus made the best wine. Whatever is "Made by Jesus" is the best. The joy and blessing on the wedding overflowed all the more. The bridegroom was highly honored as a most innovative host in Cana wedding celebrations. He made a big smile, and his new bride respected him as a great man.

However, none of them knew who made the wine, or how this had come about. Only those who participated in the miracle knew. Here we learn that a few people working behind the scenes to obey Jesus can be the source of blessing for many. Last Sunday the president of PUST, Dr. James Kim, reminded us that God has blessed America with great freedom which other nations, such as North Korea, do not have. We have freedom of worship, speech, conscience, assembly, and more. We also enjoy material abundance. Not many countries have been blessed like us. These blessings came through a handful of people who believed in Jesus and obeyed the word of God in the Bible. Many people enjoy these blessings without knowing the source. Sadly, many want to use the very blessing of freedom to renounce God and Christian virtue. This can be discouraging. But we need to remember that Jesus' blessing can overflow through a handful of people who believe him and obey the word of God. Though our ministry of serving a few people looks small, with Jesus' blessing it can overflow to our whole nation.

As the servants obeyed Jesus' words, even when it did not make sense, they could see a great miracle. Sometimes Jesus' words seem to be unreasonable. When Jesus said, "Follow me," he invited his disciples to

commit themselves to him without conditions (Jn 1:43). It was similar to God's call to Abraham to leave everything and follow him (Gen 12:1-2). Why should we obey Jesus? It is because he is the Creator God, the Author of life, our Savior, King, and the Sovereign Ruler of all. When we obey his word we can see his glory and experience overflowing blessing.

Third, Jesus reveals his glory to his disciples (11-12). In verse 11, the author John explains to us the meaning of this event: "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." The word "sign" indicates that this event has a special meaning. What is it? First of all, Jesus came into the world to bless mankind. His first miracle was performed at a wedding, not a funeral. It was to make the wedding more joyful. This means that life in Jesus is characterized by joy. Joy is essential to human beings. It is related to our well-being and health. According to research from the Mayo Clinic, joy stimulates many organs, relieves stress and soothes tension.² In fact, God made us to be joyful. That is why people seek joy: the joy of cooking, sports, music, a good movie, marriage, travel, shopping and so on. These are valid ways to seek joy. But the limitation is that it does not last and is often mixed with sorrow. Some people seek joy in unhealthy ways, such as using illegal drugs, engaging in sexual immorality, and the like. They may enjoy pleasure for a short time. But eventually they will experience serious and harmful consequences, perhaps even death, and leave a bad influence to others. Many people have lost the joy of life because of broken relationships, tragic events, a sense of failure, meaninglessness, fear of death and the like. Life without joy is too miserable to maintain. We really need pure joy, heavenly joy that lasts forever. Who can give it to us? Jesus! When Jesus was born, an angel of the Lord proclaimed that it was good news of great joy for all the people (Lk 2:10). Christian life is characterized by joy. However, some people think Christian life is not joyful. They think it is a matter of keeping many rules, in the midst of an already hectic life. They seldom laugh, and disparage others for doing so. But Jesus came to bless us with pure, lasting joy.

² <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044456>

Jesus' blessing of joy comes when we encounter him personally. This is a surprise to many people. When C.S. Lewis surrendered to Jesus, he felt himself "the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."³ But as he encountered Jesus personally, he experienced great joy. So he titled his autobiography, "Surprised by Joy." Anyone who encounters Jesus can have a similar experience. But we should know that this amazing joy is not cheap or superficial. It was costly to obtain. To give us true joy, Jesus became the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He bore all our sorrows in his own body so that we may live a joyful life. He rose from the dead to remove all the elements of death and give us eternal life. He sent us his Holy Spirit to dwell in us and enable us to bear the fruit of joy.

Secondly, Jesus has transforming power. The change of water to wine was more than a rearrangement of elements; it was a transformation of nature. The chemical formula for water is H₂O, and for wine it is C₁₄H₁₂O₃. How can water change into wine? Even if we start with grapes, it takes time to go through the fermentation process to become wine. But Jesus changed water into wine immediately. It was possible for Jesus because he is the Creator God! John already declared that through him all things were made out of nothing (1:3). Jesus is the Creator not only of the physical world, but also of the spiritual world. This Jesus can transform a sinner into a child of God. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!" A new creation implies new birth. This new birth is a true beginning of a joyful new life. In this new life we should grow steadily until we attain maturity in Christ. As Jesus changes us day by day, our joy increases. Christian life gets better and better as time goes by. When Jesus comes again we will be fully transformed. Our lowly bodies will be like his glorious body (Php 3:21). We can participate in the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9). There we will have pure and great joy that lasts forever. What a glorious hope!

When Jesus revealed his glory, how did his disciples respond? They must have been fascinated by Jesus' miracle power. But they saw beyond the miracle to Jesus himself. They realized that Jesus is God incarnate. They

³ <https://www.ewtn.com/library/SPIRIT/cslewconv.htm>

committed themselves to follow him and believed he would do what he had said to them. Jesus had given Peter the name “Rock.” Peter knew that he was too weak to be a rock. But when he saw Jesus’ transforming power, he could have hope to be a pillar of faith and a history maker. Jesus had told Nathanael that he would see a great vision of heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. Nathanael longed for such a vision. He could believe that Jesus’ transforming power would bring about a new era free from the constraints of Jewish legalism. Jesus has transforming power to change anyone into a dynamic new person. When I visited Romania last December, I met Sh. Monica Jung, a native Romanian woman who married Missionary John Jung from Korea. In the past she was somewhat dangerous due to her sinful desires. But she was totally changed by Jesus. She has become very gracious, godly and powerful. She served all of the European delegates joyfully and sacrificially. For the last few years she has run a private Korean Language Academy. It has grown from a few students to nearly 100. Native Romanians are very interested in Korean study due to the popularity of K-pop and K-drama. When they realize that Monica married a Korean man, they think she is the most fortunate woman in Romania. Then she tells them, “I married by faith in God. Have faith in God and he will give you the best husband.” In this way she has led some young Romanian students to begin Bible study.

When Jesus’ disciples believed in him, their relationship with him flourished and they became like family members. They traveled with him to Capernaum where they stayed with him for a few days (12). They must have been full of hope and vision that Jesus would do great things.

Jesus came into this world to make our lives joyful and to transform us into wonderful new people who can change the world. In this way Jesus demonstrates his power and love as the Messiah and reveals his glory. Let’s believe in Jesus and experience his glory.