

introduction

Over the coming months as we move toward Easter, we begin a new series together: **“Who is this Jesus?”** We’ll look at various passages in the Gospels to learn more about God the Son — one who reveals God’s heart, walks toward the hurting, and calls us to worship him for who he is. Through this series, our aim is to see Jesus more clearly — as beautiful, worthy, gracious, and powerful.

In today’s passage in John 2:1-11, we’ll see Jesus performing what John calls his first sign. In Jesus turning water into abundant wine, we get a glimpse of the new covenant he came to establish: salvation is not earned, but given by grace alone. At the very start of his ministry, we meet a Savior who restores joy as a gift, meets our need with mercy, and brings overflowing abundance where there was only lack.

read **John 2:1-11 (NIV)**

¹ On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.”

⁴ “Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.”

⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim.

⁸ Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.”

They did so, ⁹ 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 ¹⁰ 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.” 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.

Take a few moments to reflect on the Scripture. Share some insights, questions, or points that strike you. Then read what follows.

context

The wedding at Cana sets the stage for capturing life where it's meant to feel most whole — it is one of celebration, feasting, covenant, and community. Yet the story hinges on a sudden lack: *the wine runs out*. In first-century Jewish culture, wine was more than a drink. Wine was a symbol of gladness, abundance, and shared delight. But when the jars are empty and the feast falters, we are given a small but honest parable of the human condition: the joys we tether our hearts to (whether that's relationships, accomplishments, career, seasons of stability) are often fragile, finite, and fleeting. The ache in the narrative mirrors a deeper truth: good gifts can bring us joy, but none are strong enough to keep it secure for us.

joy redeemed

In verse 3, Mary brings the problem to Jesus personally: “*They have no more wine.*” At first glance, this story reads like a crisis of hospitality. But John seems careful to call this miracle a *sign* (v. 11) — a moment meant to reveal something deeper. The empty jars point beyond a mere social faux pas to a biblical truth woven throughout Scripture: circumstantial joys are real, good, and God-given, yet fragile when they are asked to bear more weight than they can hold.¹ The bridegroom’s shortage quietly echoes a universal human condition — we long for lasting joy, but we often turn to created things to provide what only God can give.

Jesus’ response reveals something beautiful about who he is. He doesn’t recoil from the disappointment or the looming shame of the bridegroom’s family; instead, he moves toward it. Even as he speaks of his coming “hour” (v. 4), Jesus steps into the situation with generosity and compassion. As the disciples witness what unfolds, they see not only his power, but his heart. This is the kind of Savior Jesus is: one who restores joy where it has run dry, shields the vulnerable from disgrace, and transforms what is empty and diminishing into something abundant and life-giving.

¹ Keener, Craig S. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary: Two Volumes*. Hendrickson, 2003.

discuss

1. Are there areas in your life where you're relying on people, achievements, possessions, etc. to "fill your jar"? What happens when those sources begin to feel thin or unreliable?
2. Jesus transformed a situation of lack into abundance. What would it look like concretely, to invite him to bring joy or renewal in areas of your life that feel empty or disappointing?
3. What does this passage reveal about the beauty, power, and loveliness of Jesus? Which aspects of who he is most capture your awe or admiration?

through grace alone

In vv. 4-5, Jesus responds to Mary's remark that the wine has run out with words that point far beyond a wedding dilemma: "*My hour has not yet come.*" Throughout John's Gospel, the word "hour" is significant as it looks forward to Jesus' death and resurrection — the ultimate act that inaugurates the new covenant. Even here, at a seemingly ordinary event, we see a glimpse of God's heart and his redemptive plan. Jesus, the true Bridegroom, is already anticipating the sacrifice required to bring lasting joy to his people.² What begins as a problem of empty wine quietly foreshadows the ultimate need for salvation. Humanity often seeks satisfaction in temporary, circumstantial things, but only Jesus provides what endures. In this first sign, we see that salvation is not earned, managed, or manufactured by human effort; it comes as a gracious gift, freely given through Jesus' willing self-offering.

We also see the contrast between the old and new orders in the details of the miracle. The large stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial purification, represent the old covenant — rituals that could point to God but could never accomplish true cleansing. Jesus transforms the water into wine, revealing a superior reality: the new covenant. Here, the servants' simple obedience to Jesus' command leads them to witness the glory of God. This is emblematic of the Christian life: grace is experienced, not earned, through simple trust and responsiveness to Jesus. The abundant wine signals overflowing generosity of God in Jesus — he provides fully,

² Carson, D.A., *The Gospel According to John*. PNTC. Eerdmans, 1990.

lavishly, and freely — replacing what is empty, inadequate, and fleeting — with joy that can't be exhausted.

Finally, this first sign points beyond itself into the deeper reality of Jesus' mission. The bridegroom, who expected humiliation, instead receives praise because of Jesus' intervention on his behalf. In the same way, we who deserve judgment are spared and celebrated, not by anything we do, but solely because of Jesus' finished work. The miracle at Cana is an archetype: it encapsulates the gospel in miniature.³ It reminds us that Jesus came to supply what we cannot, to satisfy what nothing else can, and to redeem our lives entirely — not through our striving, but through his grace. As we reflect on this passage, we are invited to place our confidence in Jesus alone, trusting that his provision is sufficient for every deficiency in our lives.

discuss

- 4. The bridegroom expects judgment but receives praise. What does this scene suggest about how forgiveness or grace might operate in the way Jesus acts here? Have you ever experienced — or hoped to — being met with grace instead of judgment? How does this moment in the story help you think about that kind of grace?**
- 5. Why do you think Jesus connects this moment of joy to his coming “hour” of suffering?**
- 6. The servants obey without fully understanding what Jesus will do. Is there a specific area of your life where Jesus may be inviting you to take a small step of obedience (even if you don't yet see the outcome), trusting him with the results?**

upcoming

- Saturday, January 18 | **Learning to Share Your Faith, 1:15-2:30 pm**

³ Carson, D.A., *The Gospel According to John*. PNTC. Eerdmans, 1990.

Participate in a 5-session cohort to become more at ease with, and more effective in, sharing your faith and the gospel of Christ with family and other New Yorkers.

redeemerws.com/sharingyourfaith

- **Sunday, January 25 | Membership Class, 1:15-2:30 pm**
This is a pre-requisite class for becoming a church member. This class is strongly encouraged of anyone who considers RWS as their “home church.”
redeemerws.com/membership
- **Wednesdays, starting February 11 | CFW Vocation Lab, 7pm at RES (150 E 91st St)**
Participate in a 5 week class designed to help you discern God's will for your vocational calling and gain clarity in how your work fits into God's purposes.
faithandwork.com/vocationlab