

Jesus Transforms **John 2:1-11**

Today we continue our VBS series on the wonder and workmanship of God. Last week we looked at the story of creation. The key word or key concept shared by Pastor Gebel was “makeover.” At creation God gave nothing a makeover. Our keyword today is “transformation.” At the wedding in Cana Jesus transformed water into wine. That miracle showed that Jesus really was the all-powerful Son of God. But an even greater miracle takes place within us as we are transformed into people of God. So today we consider the transforming power of Jesus.

Years ago when Johnny Carson was the host of “The Tonight Show” he interviewed an eight year old boy. The boy was asked to appear because he had rescued two friends in a coal mine outside his hometown in West Virginia. As Johnny questioned the boy, it became apparent to him and the audience that the young man was a Christian. So Johnny asked him if he attended Sunday school. When the boy said he did Johnny inquired, “What are you learning in Sunday school?” “Last week,” the boy replied, “our lesson was about when Jesus went to a wedding and turned water into wine.” The audience roared, but Johnny tried to keep a straight face. Then he said, “And what did you learn from that story?” The boy squirmed in his chair. It was apparent he hadn't thought about this. But then his eyes lit up and he said, “If you gonna have a wedding, make sure you invite Jesus!” The little boy was on to something. Weddings are a time of Joy.

For the Jews in Jesus’ day, a wedding was not just a brief ceremony, but an experience shared by the entire community. The typical wedding feast could last up to seven days. That sounds strange to our modern way of thinking, but this offered a bright interlude in an otherwise dreary existence. The ceremony would begin on Tuesday at midnight. After the wedding the father of the bride would take his daughter to every house in the village so that everyone could congratulate her. It was a community experience. Weddings were a time of joy.

At the wedding, that Jesus attended in Cana of Galilee, there was great joy but a problem developed. There was a shortage of wine. Not only was that a social embarrassment, it was also a symbol. For a wedding to run out of wine was an omen that there was little chance of this particular marriage reaching its full potential, maybe joy was not meant for this couple.

So Mary approaches Jesus and asks him to do something. His response? “Why do you involve me woman?” Sounds harsh, so unlike him, and it has long puzzled biblical scholars. But you have to look at this scene in its historical context. Jesus, at this moment, had not performed a single miracle. He was

thirty years old and had just begun to gather his disciples. In fact, most scholars say six were following Jesus at this point. (Andrew and Peter, James and John, Philip and Nathaniel). He knows that if he performs a miracle, a clock will start ticking and it will not stop until he gets to Calvary. Crowds will flock; investigators will be dispatched from Jerusalem. Is this the appropriate moment? He concludes that it is, everything seems to be in place, so he makes his move and gives his first public sign that he is different; not just man but God and man; he transforms water into wine.

I. Jesus performs a miraculous sign.

It is a crucial moment for Jesus and the disciples. First, let's take a look at this sign, this miracle. It was a custom in that time to serve the best wine first and the lesser at the end of a celebration. Now let's be honest. We are not talking about taste. The "best wine" contained the higher percentage of alcohol. It takes time to ferment wine and time is money. So when this fermented wine is presented to the master of the banquet near the end of the festivities he is impressed. The earlier wine had been good but this was even better.

But that was not the miracle. The miracle was known only to a few: the disciples and the servants who brought the water in, and, it seems, to Mary who made the request in the first place. Turning the water into wine has long been viewed as one of Jesus' more unique miracles. Poor planning has caused this wedding to grind to a halt. Mary asks Jesus to resolve the issue. It is an imposition on son but mothers are use to imposing upon their children. Jesus is not pleased, "What has this to do with me. I'm not a wine steward, I'm not the caterer." It makes you wonder if Mary knew Jesus could whip up a batch of wine at will or whether she simply expected him to go out and get some. I tend to think she knew. Mary knew that Jesus was special. The angel told her that before he was even born, this child was to be the Son of God. She saw the shepherds come and bow down before her Son, she heard the words of Simeon in the temple, she was there when the Wise Men came to worship Him, and Scripture says that she pondered these things in her heart. For years she wondered what it all meant. How would Jesus reveal that He's the Son of God? Our text tells us this was the first of his miraculous signs. He transformed water into wine.

II Jesus reveals His glory.

At this crucial moment, the beginning of his ministry, a second thing is done. His glory is revealed. It is remarkable that Jesus chose to start his ministry with this miracle. By all measures it is not one of the more flamboyant. It wasn't on the scale of parting the Red Sea and crushing the Egyptian army. It

certainly isn't as verifiable as raising Lazarus from the dead. In no way is it as public as the feeding of the 5000. The servants and the disciples seem to be the only ones who know. In the end, Jesus' first miracle, the one that lets us know that the Messiah has arrived, simply corrects a bit of poor planning on the part of the wedding planner.

It's almost anticlimactic. The story ends in this way: In this, the first of his miraculous signs, he revealed his glory. Why this one? Why not a more theatrical sign? Maybe because this miracle defines Jesus' ministry. It is not packed with persuasive power; Jesus was not a showman like P.T. Barnum. His purpose was not to put on a good show for the crowds. His purpose was to serve others, to help others, those lost in sin and hopelessness. This act, turning water into wine, was done out of love and concern for the needs of others. It's a foreshadowing of the ultimate act of humble service that Jesus would perform for you and me at the cross where he offered his life as the payment for our sins. One died so that many might live.

Phillip Yancey in his book "The Jesus I Never Knew" describes it this way: the wine came from huge thirty-gallon jugs that stood full of water at the front of the house, vessels that were used by observant Jews to fulfill the rules on ceremonial washing. Even a wedding feast had to honor the burdensome rituals of cleansing. Jesus, perhaps with a twinkle in his eye, transformed those jugs, ponderous symbols of the old way, into wineskins, symbols of the new. From purified water of the Pharisees came the choice new wine of a whole new era. The time for ritual cleansing had passed; the time for celebration had begun...Prophets like John the Baptist preached judgment. Jesus' first miracle, though, was one of tender mercy. (Adapted from Phillip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1995, p. 168.)

Remarkable isn't it? That His glory is revealed in this simple act. It is a small gesture made all the more remarkable because of who He is. The master of the banquet being served by the Master of All Things.

III Faith is Begun (Jesus Transforms)

It is a crucial moment. And in this moment three critical things are set in motion. First, a miracle is performed. Second, Jesus' glory is revealed. And third, faith is begun. There is a transformation.

Let me ask you: Why do the disciples put their faith in Jesus? Is it simply the miracle? You must remember they have only been with him a few days. They have seen no proof that he is anything else but a teacher and only heard a bit of his teaching? Is it the miracle that wins their devotion or something else? It seems to me that the miracle is part of it but not all of it. Something else is at work here.

Think of the history of Israel. How long had they been around? At this time in history they have been around for about 2,000 years. Think of all the things they been through: The beginnings with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Joseph and the hundreds of years of slavery in Egypt. Moses and the Exodus. The wandering in the wilderness and the giving of the Law. Joshua and the conquest of the promise land. The years of tribal wars to gain possession of the land. The rise of the Kings: Saul, David, and Solomon. The work of the prophets. The civil war and division of the Kingdom. The Babylonian captivity. The return from captivity and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. And now Israel is a province of the Roman Empire. The Jewish nation never gained independence again.

It is into this world that Jesus steps. It is the world of Jesus' disciples. It is a Roman world. In a word: the nation's wine has run out. God seems to have abandoned Israel. The disciples along with the nation have lost hope. The people of Israel longed for a return to the glory days of Israel. Many were looking for a Messiah who would drive the Romans out of their land. But there was a bigger problem. Spiritually the nation of Israel had drifted far from God. What are you going to do when the wine runs out?

It happens in our own lives. The wine runs out. We find ourselves out of energy, out of hope. Lifeless. What are you going to do when the wine runs out? It is a sad truth that we usually don't come to God until we have a need. Jesus was not approached until there was an emergency. We are the same way. We usually come when we have a need. I am not saying that this is right or even desirable. I am simply saying that it is a fact of life that religion for most people is a 911 affair. Mary came to Jesus when the wine jars were empty. You will come too, but not before you are drained, and exhausted, and when life's unpredictable demands bring you to your wit's end.

The disciples put their faith in Jesus not solely because of a miracle, turning the water into wine, but because the nation of Israel, the people of God were ready. The Nation's wine was gone. The disciple saw in Jesus new wine, a new way, a new teaching. Who knows! Perhaps even he could be the Messiah, the One who would save God's people from their sins. Jesus changed water into wine, but soon he was to transform them from people who were searching for a Messiah to people who had found the Messiah.

Jesus changed water into wine. That was an amazing transformation. Even more amazing is the transformation that has taken place in the heart and life of every Christian. Jesus turns sinners into saints, death into life, despair into hope. Jesus turned water into wine many years ago. Today He uses the water of Holy Baptism and the Word of God to change hearts and transform lives. In baptism, through faith in Jesus, we are changed from lost and condemned sinners to forgiven and redeemed children of God. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can believe in Jesus. We know with great

certainty that He alone is our Savior from sin. We have forgiveness. We have life. We have hope and a future. And now we can live as people of God, loving and serving in His name.

Today we rejoice in the transforming power of Jesus. He touches the wedding and lifts it not just with the miracle but also by his presence. He takes this ordinary wedding and he transforms it into something extraordinary. He takes a fisherman by the name of Peter and transforms him into the great preacher of the crucified and risen Christ. He takes a Pharisee named Saul, who persecuted Christians and had them thrown into prison, and transforms him into a great evangelist and church planter. He takes ordinary people like you and me and transforms us into His children, His saints, His servants who go out and humbly serve others and tell about Jesus' power in our lives.

Dan Weber came home to Texas in February of 2008 after serving fifteen months in Iraq with the First Cavalry Division of the US Army. Dan served bravely and faithfully, even reenlisting the day after his vehicle was hit by explosives.

Dan's roommate during those long months was named Brandon. They often sat around the fire in the evenings with their commanding officer, an avid atheist, listening respectfully to his opinions about God and Christians. One evening, Dan couldn't take it any more. He said, "Sir, you say you hate religious people and the way they wave religion in your face. Yet, you're the most religious person I know. Atheism is your religion and night after night we have to sit here and listen to you shove it down our throats. I mean no disrespect, but I'm tired of it." The officer was quiet the rest of the evening. Brandon, also an atheist, was surprised to see Dan's courage.

Later, a friend of Dan's family sent him a copy of *The Case For Faith* by Lee Strobel. He thought it would help Dan understand the officer's thinking and defend his faith when attacked. Dan read the book and then gave it to Brandon, saying, "Read it, and if you have any questions, ask me." Two days later, Brandon had finished the book. He talked to Dan about who Jesus is, and Brandon asked, "So, all I have to do is believe?" "That's right," Dan replied. Brandon responded, "I have only one question. Dude, why did you wait so long to tell me?"

Jesus has the power to transform lives. We have Good News to share with the Brandons in our lives. That lesson was not lost on the disciples who joined Jesus that day in Cana. Don't let it be lost on you!

Amen.