



Turning Water Into Wine

John 2:1-11

It may seem strange that the very first miracle in John's gospel is Jesus turning water into wine. It certainly was customary in Jesus' Galilean context for wedding hosts to provide wine for guests throughout the duration of their wedding festivities, and breaking this custom would be a serious problem. However, making sure a wedding host has an abundance of wine seems to have very little significance in comparison to the other miracles of Jesus. And yet this miracle is portrayed as the "first of the signs through which he revealed his glory" (John 2:11).

Glorification

What could it mean for this miracle to reveal Jesus' glory? We often use the word "glory" in worship music and prayers to speak of God's magnificence and worthiness of praise, and the word can easily roll off our tongues without us giving it a great deal of thought. John uses his gospel narrative to help his community of Christ-followers understand certain words and concepts that are vital to Christian faith, and "glory" is one of those words. Throughout this book of the Bible, John pieces together an understanding of Jesus' glory that is grounded in Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and offering of the Holy Spirit to humanity. John portrays these four happenings as one complex movement that is often called Jesus' hour of glorification. For it is in this movement that Jesus fulfills God's mission of offering the world the opportunity to be made holy.

Reflect on this...

Read John 2:1-11. What are two things that stand out to you in the story of this miracle? What questions do you have?

Jesus fulfills God's mission of offering the world the opportunity to be made holy.

Throughout the gospel, John slowly reveals what Jesus' hour of glorification is all about. In one scene, Jesus is at the Festival of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, and a crowd is debating with Him about His identity and authority. Some in the crowd believe He is the Messiah and some are not exactly sure. Referring to God, Jesus explains that He will eventually ascend to be with the one who sent Him. However, the listeners do not quite understand how this makes sense or how this fulfills their hope for a Messiah. So Jesus gives a deeper insight. John writes, "On the last day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them'" (John 7:37). John explains, "By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time, the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified" (John 7:38-39). With this explanation, John lets the readers know that Jesus' glory has a great deal to do with God's mission of offering the world the Holy Spirit.

In another scene, John depicts a group of people trying to figure out whether Jesus is worthy of praise. They ask Jesus to explain His own significance, but Jesus responds, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me" (John 8:54). Here, Jesus is giving a subtle hint concerning the nature of His glory. At this point in the story, the other characters do not realize that Jesus is not only fully human but also fully God. And they do not yet understand that Jesus will be crucified and resurrected. Without saying more than they could comprehend, Jesus hints at the fact that His glory is not so much about being the winner on top of the world but being one who lives out God's mission.

As the story moves forward, both the characters and we, the readers, gain a clearer understanding of Jesus' glory.

After Jesus enters Jerusalem, He is with a crowd and tells them about His upcoming death. He says, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds" (John 12:23-24). He continues speaking among the crowd, "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" (John 12:27-28a). Here, Jesus begins to clarify that His glory is tied to His crucifixion, resurrection, and the new life offered to us through these events.

When Jesus says, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (John 12:23), He is saying the hour has come for His crucifixion, resurrection, ascension to the Father, and offering of the Holy Spirit to all humanity. As noted above, it is in this movement that Jesus fulfills God's mission of offering the world the opportunity to be made holy.

Reflect on this:

Read John 2:1-4. How do you think Jesus' response to Mary connects to the discussion of His "glory" and "glorification" throughout John's gospel?

Go through the gospel of John and highlight every time the word "glory," "glorification," or "hour" shows up. Consider the ways each of those stories point the reader to Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and offering of the Holy Spirit.



The Ultimate Purification

The question still remains as to how turning water into wine is a sign that points to Jesus' glory. When asked to bring wine to the wedding, Jesus is initially hesitant to concern himself with the task. He even suggests that it does not clearly connect with His mission to offer the world salvation. Responding to Mary, Jesus says, "Woman, why do you involve me?" . . . "My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4). But He suddenly makes a switch, and provides the wine. We would rightly be confused if John was seeking to highlight the importance of wine at a wedding. But this is not what John is emphasizing. Neither is he merely emphasizing that Jesus could perform miracles. Rather, John is emphasizing *the way* Jesus performs this miracle of getting wine to the wedding. It all comes down to Jesus' creative decision to use the six stone jars that were normally used for ceremonial washing (John 2:6).

Ceremonial washing was a common cleansing practice in Jewish tradition as a preparation for prayer and worship. For example, someone who touched an "unclean" animal or person would not be allowed into a temple nor would they be allowed close contact with someone in the community unless they first engaged in the purification practice of washing. In other words, one had to be purified prior to coming before God and close interaction with the people of God.

Water for purification would be collected from a flowing source, such as rain or a spring, and put into containers. According to the Jewish tradition, a stone jar would be the preferred container instead of a typical clay jar, because a stone jar could not become unclean and contaminate the water. Large stone jars designated for purification were rarely used for anything other

than purification, and the original readers to which John was writing would recognize that it would be quite abnormal to use these jars for getting wine to a wedding. So while Jesus' use of the large stone jars may not stand out with much significance to us, it would have been an eyebrow-raiser for John's community. It would be clear to them that Jesus' use of the jars has something to do with a central message John is trying to convey through his gospel narrative.

By using the purification jars to bring wine to the wedding, Jesus is able to perform the miracle in a way that serves as a sign that reveals His glory. Throughout John's gospel narrative, Jesus is among people who are constantly questioning His identity and authority. They want to know if He is the one promised in their scriptures. They want to know if He is King of the Jews. They want to know if Jesus is the one to offer validity to the faith they have been practicing and passing on for several generations. When Jesus uses water from the purification jars, He gives the people in the gospel narrative a major clue to understanding that He is the King. And Jesus also reveals that He is even more authoritative than they expected.

They were seeking triumph for the people of God and a declaration of validity for their Jewish faith in Yahweh. Jesus offers these things, but He shows that He is also the very fulfillment of their faith and practices. He has authority beyond the practices and the various elements of those practices—such as the water for purification. In other words, He is not simply one who understands the importance of purification in Jewish tradition. Rather, He is uniquely unified with the heavenly Father, who is the very Source of purification.

Reflect on this...

How does the miracle of Jesus turning water into wine serve as a sign for Jesus to reveal His glory?

After reading this story, what thoughts do you have about the authority of Jesus?

Conclusion

Through this first miracle in John's gospel, we get a glimpse—a sign—of Jesus' unique identity and authority to fulfill Jewish tradition and offer purification to all of humanity. He will offer all of the purification needed for anyone to be a part of the people of God.

May we be reminded of Jesus' ultimate purification when we go before God in prayer and worship. And may we be reminded of His ultimate purification as we build close friendships with both Christians and non-Christians. It is Jesus' commitment to His hour of glorification that makes all of this possible.●

NOTES:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal rows. Each row is defined by two dashed yellow lines, providing a guide for letter height and placement.

