

WEEK 2: JESUS TURNS WATER INTO WINE

John 2:1–12



The Place of the Passage

While the Gospels do not reveal a precise chronological order of the miracles of Jesus, the Gospel of John specifically calls Jesus' miracle at the wedding in Cana the "first of his signs" (John 2:11). In the ministry of Jesus this miracle seems to take place right after the calling of the disciples, at a family wedding to which he and his disciples have been invited. In John's Gospel this passage follows a theologically rich introduction to Jesus that employs a prologue and two passages to set the ministerial context for his person and work (1:1–51). The miracle opens the second chapter of John and serves as the formal beginning of the ministry of Jesus. In addition to its purpose in the narrative this remarkable story is loaded with very intentional biblical symbolism. This includes a few short statements from Jesus that can be difficult to understand but serve readers by helping them connect the miracle beyond this particular wedding to the larger marriage taking place between God and man. This is not only a miracle of fertility (i.e., "provision") but also an "old creation" miracle, which means it is a sign with operations fitting the current world. In this miracle Jesus reveals a central purpose of his ministry and how he intends to unite the world to God through his purifying work.

The Big Picture

Jesus has been sent by his Father to purify the children of God, preparing the church, the bride of Christ, to receive its bridegroom.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, John 2:1–12. Then review the following questions and record your responses. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2022–2023, or visit esv.org.)



The Setting (John 2:1–5)

Weddings in the ancient world did not occur over a single afternoon but lasted seven days, and it was common for a teacher’s disciples to be invited (2:1–2). How might Jesus, the incarnate Word (1:14) and teacher of new disciples, have been torn between his divine identity and mission and his role as a son and family member?

The seemingly odd response of Jesus in 2:4 is an ancient way of seeking to distance oneself politely from the needs of another, in this case the need for wine (2:3). For Jesus the need of his mother is a lesser priority than the mission of his Father, which he describes as “my hour.”¹ According to John what were the purposes for which God the Father had sent Jesus the Son into the world?

How does the setting of the miracle lay both needs at the feet of Jesus: the mother's request to her son for wine at a family wedding and the Father's mission for the Son for a much larger family (the church)?

The Miracle (John 2:6–8)

What was the religious purpose of the water for Jewish rites of purification² (read Mark 7:3–4), and why is it significant that Jesus changes that particular water into wine (for help see “Final Purification” in *Gospel Glimpses* below)?

If the water for purification reflects God's provision for his people in the old covenant (in the Old Testament), how does its transformation into wine reflect God's fuller provision for his people in the new covenant?

How does Jesus address both his mother's desire and his Father's mission when he turns the water intended for the Jewish rites of purification into celebratory wine for the wedding?

The Conclusion (John 2:9–12)

The anonymous master of the feast and the bridegroom are clueless about the appearance of the wine. How does Jesus fulfill the roles of both characters, especially in regard to the bridegroom? Moreover, how does this fit the depiction of Jesus elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., Eph. 5:22–33; Rev. 19:6–9)?

The apparent strategy mentioned in John 2:10 is that the better wine would get used first until the palate had been numbed and cheaper wine could be used unnoticeably. How does this reversal reflect the way in which Jesus gives the world the final and fullest provision of God in redemptive history?

In light of the purpose of miracles, what does this miracle teach us about the person of Jesus (who he is) or the work of Jesus (what he has done for us)?



Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

FINAL PURIFICATION. The implications for stone jars in Jewish purity laws (e.g., clay jars could become unclean) and the water for ceremonial washing traditions become obsolete the moment Jesus appears on the scene. He alone is the perfect and pure sacrifice, fulfilling every purity law. And Jesus alone offers the perfect and final ceremony washing, a washing “with the Holy Spirit” (John 1:33; 13:8). When Jesus transforms the ceremonial water into celebratory wine, he communicates this truth to the wedding guests and, through John, to all Christians.

CHRIST’S HOUR. The term *hour* in John is a technical term that points to the death of Jesus on the cross (John 4:21; 7:30) but also more generally includes his resurrection (5:25, 28) and ascension (13:1). Jesus’ seemingly odd interaction with his mother regarding wine for the wedding is due to the fact that Jesus has a clear and more significant mission from his Father required for a greater sacred wedding—the marriage between Jesus the bridegroom and his bride, the church (Eph. 5:22–33). Not only the ministry of Jesus but also the clear message of Scripture present to Christians the importance of his death, resurrection, and ascension. Christians are tempted, like Jesus’ mother was, to desire Jesus’ working on their behalf in a variety of material ways. But, while Jesus does provide for our physical needs, we should never forget the primary purpose Jesus has been assigned to accomplish on our behalf. His divinely appointed hour saves us—body and soul—from sin, death, and eternal judgment.

Whole-Bible Connections

THE GREATEST WEDDING. Through Jesus’ fulfilling the role of the master of the feast and especially the bridegroom, this miracle story teaches the reader to see the far grander wedding depicted through Scripture: the wedding between God and humanity. The church, the bride of Christ, has enjoined herself to the true bridegroom, Jesus Christ, and waits for the full and final celebration to begin—the future marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:6–9).

THE GOOD WINE. In the Old Testament an abundance of wine is used regularly as a symbol for the coming kingdom of God (e.g., Amos 9:13–14; cf. Gen. 49:11). In the context of this miracle recorded in John the abundance of wine (six massive containers filled to the top!) declares that Jesus’ person and work are the full blessing of God’s activity in the world. As the prophet Isaiah foretold, “The LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine . . . wine well refined. . . . It will be said on that

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day, ‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation’” (Isa. 25:6, 9).

Theological Soundings

THE MISSION OF THE FATHER. The clear bond between Jesus and his mother is defined properly in this passage by the eternal bond between Jesus and his Father. Jesus carefully and respectfully locates his response to his mother within the loving confines of the mission he has received from his Father. The distance Jesus must place between his mother and himself is an obedient expression of the love of God. The call of every Christian is to make the will and wisdom of God the foundation of every human plan and purpose; it is to have the petition “your will be done” (Matt. 6:10) be the scaffolding of every thought and of every decision and action.

GLORY MANIFESTED. This miracle story states explicitly that the “signs” of Jesus “manifested his glory” (John 2:11). In Scripture the glory of God is his majestic splendor and power, as well as the manifestation of his being, nature, and presence. Through miracles this reality about God’s glory is made “manifest” in a manner accessible to human experience. While the fullest experience of God’s glory will have to wait for the new creation, the miracles of Jesus allow Christians to experience an aspect of the worthiness and weightiness of God, the God-ness of God. Christians are correct in pursuing the glory of God, giving God the worth of his God-ness in our words and deeds, and in Christ and through the Spirit they can even see God’s glory in real, even if partial, ways.

Personal Implications

Take some time to reflect on what you have learned from your study of John 2:1–12 and how it might apply to your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. John 2:1–12

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Jesus, our bridegroom, ministers to his bride, the church. Bring out the celebratory wine! Take a moment to look back through this study and reflect on the key things the Lord may be teaching you.

Definitions

¹ **Hour, the** – A technical term in the Gospel of John for the climactic ministerial acts of Jesus: his death, resurrection, and ascension.

² **Purification** – The religious act of removing spiritual uncleanness, as defined by the purity laws of the Old Testament, by means of prescribed ceremonies or rites.