

A Joy That Never Runs Dry (John 2:1-12)

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I have sorely missed sharing lunch on Sundays with all of you. Food is an incredible gift from God. When we're feasting on his provision together, the joy we experience is nothing less than a taste of heaven. And I'm not just talking about what is on your plate. I'm talking about the whole thing – the conversation, the laughter, the thanksgiving, the celebration of God's goodness.

At risk of losing your attention, think about the best meal you've ever had. At the top of my list are some of the dinners I've enjoyed with my wife, Aliza, on our anniversary. First, the waiter brings the 1895, a Jefferson small batch bourbon with a sugar cube and orange bitters, served over ice. Then the Manakintowne Farms lettuce arrives with squash, roasted tomatoes, crispy quinoa, fresh cream of ginger. Herb roasted cobia follows with Carolina gold rice, stone fruit, radicchio, walnut, tomatillo salsa, accompanied by a glass of Domaine Vincent 2014 chardonnay. The final course is a slice of layered double chocolate cake with Valrhona ganache, baileys anglaise, and vanilla whipped cream, along with a hot cup of coffee.

It's the sort of evening you wish would never end, isn't it? Feasting on good food and wine is an incredible gift. But part of what makes it so incredible is that it points to something even greater. Listen to how the prophet Isaiah describes the joy of life with Jesus in the new heavens and the new earth.

Isa 25:6-9, "On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that 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.'"

Friends, that is exactly what Jesus came to accomplish. He came to make us glad, both now and for ages to come. In Jn 1, we saw that to be a Christian is to know and follow Jesus. But why, I ask, should you do that? The beginning of Jn 2 provides the answer.

You should know and follow Jesus because he alone can fill your heart with a joy that never runs dry.

In other words, Jesus came to get the party started. There are a lot of people who think he represents anything but good times. Maybe you think of him as being anti-pleasure, anti-joy. If it feels good, Jesus probably doesn't like it. He always has that parental face, the tilted head with the stern frown, the kind of person who's always walking in at the worst possible time and telling people to stop having so much fun.

If that's your notion of Jesus, then you don't really know Jesus, because the miracle Jesus does at the beginning of his public ministry, the first of the great signs in the fourth gospel pointing to his divine identity and glory, is preventing a party from running out of booze. It's hard to think of a louder statement of desire for people to enjoy themselves.

But the point of Jesus' actions here isn't to give you a proof text to throw in the face of your teetotaler friends. The real meaning runs deeper. Jesus isn't a frat boy. He's the Son of God. And he's tapping here (no pun intended) into a recurring symbol in the Old Testament where wine represents not only a physical gift from God, but also the joy of life under his favor and blessing.

Amos 9:13–14, "Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel...they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit."

But John ch. 2 doesn't start with abundance. It starts with poverty. It starts with deprivation. It starts with shame. I want us to focus on two spiritual principles in this passage and the first is this.

1) THERE IS NO ENDURING JOY IN THIS WORLD

In v. 2, Jesus and his disciples are invited to a wedding at Cana. His acceptance of the invitation is an implicit endorsement of the institution of marriage, which comes as no surprise since God is the one who created marriage in the first place. Weddings in 1st century Palestine were even bigger social events than they are in America today. The wedding feast (what we might call the reception) could last up to 7 days. And it was the bridegroom's responsibility to pay for the entire event.

Suffice it to say, it was not an event where you wanted to run out of food or drink. The social stigma and shame would have been enormous. We can relate somewhat in our own culture. For those of you who are married, imagine if you invited 200 people but

only had money to feed 100 of them. A sign at the buffet saying, "Sorry, we're out of food." wouldn't be very hospitable.

Jesus' mother, Mary, was also invited to the wedding. She appears to have been a close family member or friend because she soon learns the dreaded news. The wine has run out. So what does she do? V. 3, "The mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.'" It's a statement of physical truth. The barrel is empty. It's also a profound picture of spiritual reality, of the human condition apart from God.

Every cistern of pleasure in this world is broken. Eventually, it runs dry. Take the joy of physical health or beauty. Whatever you manage to avoid injuring in your youth old age will inevitably strip away. How about the joy of material wealth or prosperity? Even if you avoid a market crash or business failure, you'll leave all of it behind when you die.

Besides, have you ever noticed it's never enough? You get a raise, your standard of living goes up, and before too long your sights are set even higher. Our hearts are never satisfied. And if you think the joy of intellectual achievement is a more reliable bet, talk to someone who's caring for a spouse or parent with dementia or Alzheimer's.

But what if you're not there yet? Maybe you grant the pleasures of this world won't last, but hey, at least enjoy them while you can, right? Consider this. Ultimately, the wine we lack isn't something this world can provide, even on its best day. The wine we lack is the joy of intimate relationship with God. Listen to how the prophet Isaiah describes the depth of sorrow of all who die alienated from God and fall under his judgment.

Isaiah 24:5–11, "The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt...No more do they drink wine with singing; strong drink is bitter to those who drink it. The wasted city is broken down; every house is shut up so that none can enter. There is an outcry in the streets for lack of wine; all joy has grown dark; the gladness of the earth is banished."

The absence of wine is a picture of the utter absence of joy. There is no greater joy than the joy of eternal life with God and there is no greater sorrow than the sorrow of eternal separation from God.

You don't have to be a Christian to know the second half of what I just said is true. You're tasting it even now. No matter where you go, no matter what you do, no matter how much you accomplish, you're never really and truly satisfied. If anything, the

emptiness grows with every achievement because the work required to reach the next level gets harder and harder.

That nagging question in your mind, "Will I ever be happy?" is a gift from God, friend. For it alerts you to longing only Jesus can fulfill. In fact, it's the whole reason he came to earth in the first place. Jesus tells his mother as much in v. 4 when he says, "My hour has not yet come."

The "hour" is a recurring phrase in John's gospel. In Jn 12, we discover it refers to the crucifixion, the hour when Jesus absorbed in his body and soul the judgment of God against our sin. His death makes a way for the sin that separates us from God to be completely forgiven so our relationship with God can be restored.

When Jesus said, "Woman, what does this have to do with me?" it was his way of gently correcting his mother, reminding her that what she really needed from her Son wasn't a winemaker but a Savior! That was a work Jesus had yet to accomplish in Jn 2. But the action he takes in vv. 6-11 point us in the right direction, foreshadowing the abundant joy Jesus provides by restoring our relationship with God.

2) EVERLASTING JOY IS FOUND IN JESUS

In v. 6, Jesus sees 6 stone water jars nearby "for the Jewish rites of purification." Both the Old Testament law and additional rules Jewish religious leaders established on top of it strongly emphasized the importance of ceremonial purity, including practices like washing your hands before a meal or priests bathing in water before ministering in the temple. External rituals of this sort reminded the Jewish people on a daily basis of their deeper need to be spiritually cleansed from the guilt of their sin.

Jesus tells the servants at the party to fill them with water to the brim, then (v. 8) "draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." The master of the feast lifts the cup to his mouth and tastes a wine that is superior to all that had been served thus far at the wedding. So he calls the bridegroom over and says (v. 10), "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now."

John tells us in v. 11 this was "the first" of Jesus' "signs" or miracles that revealed the glory of his person and work. So what does the water turned into wine teach us about the Lord? I think we see at least three things, each of which explains why everlasting joy is found in him.

First, Jesus is the fulfillment of the law. Remember, Jesus didn't just turn water into wine. He turned water in the very jars reserved for ceremonial purification into wine. That's incredibly significant which is why John is careful to identify them as such in v. 6. It was a loud statement on Jesus' part that the external and temporary cleansing from sin afforded by all the various ceremonial guidelines and sacrifices required by the law under the Old Covenant had come to a decisive end.

And it wasn't because God decided our sin isn't such a big deal after all. No, it was because the sacrifice Jesus was about to make, the atoning power of his shed blood, would prove wholly sufficient to cleanse us from sin once and for all. Turning the water of purification into the wine of celebration was Jesus' way of saying the one to whom all the rituals and sacrifices pointed is finally here!

Heb 9:9-12, "According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation. But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come...he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption."

I love how Leon Morris sums up this point. Jesus turns "the water of the law into the wine of the gospel." Water used to cleanse us from without is replaced by wine which nourishes us from within.

It's a picture of the fundamental change in the way God related to his people under the Old Covenant before Jesus versus the way God relates to his people under the New Covenant after Jesus. The law of Moses focused on external conformation is replaced by the law of Christ focused on internal transformation. What the law of Moses demanded from without the indwelling Spirit now produces from within.

Second, Jesus is the decisive outpouring of God's blessing. I love how John records the servants filled the jars with water "up to the brim." They couldn't hold anymore. They were about to overflow.

And think about the quantity of wine Jesus produced! It wasn't a case or two of bottles. It was 120-150 gallons of the best wine, more than the bridegroom or the master of the feast could have asked or imagined. It was the same volume as 8-10 kegs of beer. We're not talking about a happy hour special before heading home after work. We are talking about an off-the-charts party.



Friends, God isn't a miser. He's a generous King. The spiritual blessings he gives us through the person and work of Christ are not meager or limited. They are abundant and overflowing. Eph 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places..."

Jesus didn't make all that wine because he wanted the wedding guests to get tipsy. He made that exceedingly good wine to teach us something about himself. He did it to give us a picture of the overwhelmingly abundant, off-the-charts joy of life with God through faith in Christ. God created you to know him, friend. God created you to enjoy him.

In relationship with God through Christ you are completely known, perfectly loved, and eternally secure. You have an identity that can't be lost and a mission guaranteed to succeed in a kingdom that will never fail. Christianity isn't an insurance policy to get through the Pearly Gates. It's life as it was meant to be. Fullness of joy. Immeasurable blessing. Gladness forevermore. Knowing Jesus. Loving Jesus. Serving Jesus. It doesn't get any better than that, except one day, it will.

For Jesus, finally, is the bridegroom who comes for his own. The wine in Jn 2 is loaded with symbolism, but so is the wedding. In the Old Testament prophets, the Lord repeatedly describes his relationship with his people Israel in marital terms. Isaiah 62:5, "For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you."

That's why the Lord describes Israel's disobedience as spiritual adultery. In our continued struggle with sin as Christians we're no different. Every time we wander from the path of God's commandments, we play the whore. But where we are faithless, God remains faithful. If you're a Christian, you have been eternally united by faith to Christ such that you are part of his body. On earth, that body is represented by the church, which the Apostle Paul teaches us in Eph 5 is the bride of Christ.

Contrary to much of what takes place on social media today, Jesus doesn't slander his bride. He doesn't tear down his bride. He doesn't deride or mock or belittle or ignore or abandon his bride. He nourishes us and cherishes us until the day he returns to bring us home.

Rev 19:6-8, "Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it

was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure'— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints."

Friends, the feast on that wedding day will not have a budget. It will not be restricted by the event calendar. And we will most certainly not run out of wine. Even now, Christian, Jesus is working in you individually and working in us corporately to make you ready, preparing you as a bride adorned for her husband. He has spared no expense to do so.

One of the remarkable mercies in Jn 2 is the way Jesus protects the unnamed bridegroom from humiliation. The wine he provided more than covered the shame of the man's poverty. As the bridegroom *par excellence*, Jesus does the same for us. His salvation, blessing, and joy overwhelm our sin, poverty, and sorrow as the sea swallows a grain of sand. But that gift is only possible because he was willing to walk a road of humiliation. Pursuing us, cleansing us, cost him nothing less than his own life.

CONCLUSION

The price he paid reveals the depth of his love, which is why we look to the cross whenever the sorrows of this life threaten to shipwreck our faith and swallow up our joy. For there we see the face of our bridegroom who came once and is coming for us again, proving and ensuring that nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God. Such is the inheritance of all who turn from sin to follow Jesus.

When Mary declares, "They have no wine." we hear the truth of our condition apart from God. We are more sinful than we will ever know. And when the master of the feast declares, "But you have kept the good wine until now." we hear the joy of what Jesus has done, is doing, and will one day complete. We are more loved than we could ever imagine.

So why should you choose to know and follow Jesus? Because Jesus came to fill our hearts with a joy that never runs dry. He's the fulfillment of the law, the decisive outpouring of God's goodness, and the bridegroom who comes for his own. Believe and rejoice in him accordingly, friends.

There is no better witness to the truth of our faith and the goodness of our Savior than the unflagging joy of his people. Reflecting on Jn 2, J.C. Ryle wrote, "The Christian who...walks the earth with a face as melancholy as if he was attending a funeral does injury to the cause of the gospel. A cheerful, kindly spirit is a great recommendation to the believer. It is a real misfortune to Christianity when a Christian cannot smile."



No matter what happened to you last week or is about to happen to you this week, brothers and sisters, we have in Christ a cause to smile. May the Lord empower us to continue to rejoice in him, knowing that through Jesus, the real party has already begun.