

## Seven Signs: Water into Wine

Just because something is not true, doesn't mean that people don't believe it. There are many widely believed myths. Even in our modern age urban legends, propaganda, and old wives tales continue to thrive. In the case of the internet, they thrive because of this modern age.

For instance, Dr. Pepper doesn't contain and never has contained prune juice. According to a company release Dr. Pepper has 23 flavors and ingredients none of which has ever been prunes. Another commonly believed legend is that the Great Wall of China is the only manmade object that can be seen from space, even the moon. However, no manmade objects can be seen from the moon. From low earth orbit many manmade objects can be clearly seen, however since the Great Wall is made out of native materials and is only a few yards wide it is not discernable to the naked eye. Even China acknowledged this after one of their cosmonauts returned to earth and reported this fact.

It is also commonly believed that the children's nursery rhyme, "Ring around the Rosie" is a reference to the plague that killed many millions of people in Europe in the middle ages. However historians say there is no evidence for this, and the evidence, in fact, points to an entirely different origin for this little nursery rhyme. Another myth is that when you flush a toilet in the southern hemisphere the water swirls down in the opposite direction of toilets in the north.

But this morning we want to talk about another widely held misconception. That is the Christian life is dull and boring. Many think the more spiritual you are the more serious and somber you will be. They imagine that Jesus went through life with strict seriousness, giving formal teaching, issuing stern warnings, and never having a moment of levity or lightheartedness. In this view, following Jesus has all of the excitement of watching election results in Cuba.

One person who grew up in church, but has since dropped out says, "As I grew up, I believed no one had a good time in church. Everyone was so serious." Some Bible college students shared one of their jokes with me, "To be an elder you need gray hair to give you that distinguished look and hemorrhoids to give you that sorrowful look." A Gallup poll found that half of Americans do not believe that Jesus was fun-loving.

Some Christians have done their share to perpetrate this myth by going through life with all of the joy of a dill pickle. Sadly, many misguided Christians have taught this. One famous Christian leader in the 4th Century said, "Christ never laughed. Why are you so comfortable and

indulgent that you can laugh even while you are responsible for so serious sin and must stand at a fearful judgment seat and give account of all that you have done?"

Many other Christian leaders down through the centuries have echoed these sentiments. A church council in the 1400s consigned to hell any minister who spoke "jocular words such as to provoke laughter." I remember one church leader with whom I stayed while preaching in Bible College who believed all displays of enjoyment or merriment in worship were worldly and undignified. I know some of us grew up in churches where everyone seemed to have the spiritual gift of a permanent wedgie. Many of you have known elder grump or deacon grouch. It's little wonder that many people have the stereotype of Christians as joyless, dour types whose greatest fear is that someone, somewhere, might be having fun.

But in John 2 we see the very first miracle of Jesus. Jesus shows up at a wedding and changes water to wine and in the process shows us that this somber view of Jesus and the Christian faith is nothing but... sour grapes. Watch with me.

**(Show Video)**

Jesus' baptism had been only 4 days earlier. At this point Jesus has only a handful of disciples. John the Baptist pointed Andrew and John to Jesus. Andrew went and got his brother Peter. Jesus has also called Philip who also went and got Nathanael. At this point, though, they are more curious observers than disciples. They haven't placed their faith in Jesus yet.

After two days of travel they arrive in Cana of Galilee. Cana lies about 9 miles north of Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. It is Nathanael's hometown. It is also home to a wedding celebration to which Jesus and his disciples have been invited. Perhaps these are friends of Nathanael's, or even Jesus' mother as she seems to play some sort of key role in the wedding.

1st Century Jewish weddings were festive, joyful occasions. The celebrations could last as long as a week with a constant flow of guests coming and going. There was singing and dancing. There was feasting on fine food and the free flowing of wine. It was a time of celebration full of laughter and merriment.

Now anyone that has ever paid for a wedding knows that it takes a huge chunk out of your budget. Now imagine the festivities lasting a week. The groom's family was expected to pay for the celebration and provide for all of the guests. (Jason & Natalie you might wish it was that way now.) A weeklong wedding took lots of planning and preparation. Running out of wine was more than just a minor inconvenience. It was a major breach social etiquette. It was an

embarrassment to the groom, an insult to the guests, and a shame to the bride. It broke the strong, unwritten rules of hospitality. Imagine a wedding where someone forgets the cake or loses the rings. It's like that only worse.

This was an ordinary wedding gone wrong. Jesus was at this wedding, and he was about to turn into an extraordinary wedding that would never be forgotten, and it would change the lives of five disciples forever. It also reminds us how Jesus can change our lives. The first thing this miracle shows us is that Jesus is the life of the party.

### **I. Jesus is the Life of the Party**

Jesus was not the dour-faced Messiah that many imagine. Jesus' presence and actions at this wedding do not fit many of our preconceptions. Here is Jesus at home at a festive occasion. Here we see Jesus not only attending a party, but performing a miracle so the party can continue.

Jesus' 1st miracle reveals him in a most surprising way. This wasn't giving sight to the blind or casting out demons. This was making wine so a Jewish couple and their family and friends could have a party. But when you really get to know Jesus you find that he is always full of the unexpected. Following him is full of surprise and adventure. There is nothing monotonous or predictable about our Savior.

To fully appreciate what Jesus did here we need to understand the context historically. He was on a mission to save the world, to die for humanity's sin. Yet he takes time out to attend a wedding. The very first time He reveals his glory as the Son of God is add to that celebration.

There is a forgotten side of Jesus. He was the life of the party. I don't want to push this point too far. Jesus didn't intend on doing this miracle. It's not why he came to the wedding. He did this because his mother Mary pressured him. He did it for dear old mom. But there is something that we see throughout Jesus' ministry. People loved being around Jesus. Jesus attracted crowds wherever he went. People wanted to be near him. It was not his stern formality that drew these people. It wasn't his anger or bitterness. Jesus was fun to be around. The religious leaders criticized him for eating and drinking. They accused him of being a glutton and drunkard and a friend of sinners, and sinners like being near Jesus.

Also, remember the scenes of Jesus blessing the children. When was the last time you saw a bunch of kids attracted to a lemon faced sourpuss? How can you not laugh with a bunch of giggling kids? Many of Jesus' teachings contain humorous or ironic elements such trying to

remove a speck out of someone's eye while a log is sticking out of your own, or washing the outside of a cup while leaving the inside filthy.

Another thing that sticks out to me is how many of Jesus' stories end with parties, banquets, and celebrations. The lost sheep is found and so the shepherd calls his friends and neighbors and says "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." The lost coin is found. The woman calls together her friends and neighbors saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost." The lost son is found and the father says "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate for this my son was dead, and is alive again." In his parables, Jesus pictures the fullness of his kingdom as a great banquet and as a wedding feast. It is no surprise then that Jesus first reveals his glory, gives us the first glimpse of his kingdom at a wedding banquet.

Jesus' life is a profound statement against joyless Christianity. The joy that Jesus brings is not merely the momentary, superficial physical pleasure that we derive from food and drink and carousing. It is a deep, inward fullness and sense of satisfaction that we derive from being at peace with God and ourselves. We enjoy not only the small tastes of pleasure that creation provides, but we have the joy of knowing the Creator. In this view, life's little pleasures are that much more enriching. With Jesus at the center of our lives, life's pleasures aren't short-term fixes that deliver ever decreasing highs, rather they are gifts from our Creator that we enjoy with thanksgiving. Paul writes to the young minister Timothy about teachers who say that Christians must abstain from enjoying the things God created.

1 Tim 4:3-5

*3 They will say it is wrong to be married and wrong to eat certain foods. But God created those foods to be eaten with thanksgiving by people who know and believe the truth. 4 Since everything God created is good, we should not reject any of it. We may receive it gladly, with thankful hearts. 5 For we know it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. (NLT)*

There is nothing wrong with celebrating good times, with taking time to enjoy friends and family. Nothing we do is so important and so urgent that we can't take the time to enjoy the good things God has given. These times are not interruptions to what really matters. They are God-given gifts. We need to bring Jesus not only into our work, but into our pleasure and play as well. For some reason, people look everywhere but to God for excitement and celebration, and they end up missing the greatest joy of all.

## II. Jesus Lavishes Us with More than We Could Ask or Imagine

It's not just what the miracle was that is so amazing, but the unbelievable extent of it is mind-blowing. It reminds us of the important truth that Jesus lavishes us with more than we could ask or imagine.

Have you ever considered the scope of this miracle? John tells us that 6 water-pots filled to the brim with water. The text tells us that each one held 20-30 gallons. All in all, that's as much as 180 gallons of water Jesus changed into wine. There is no wedding party on earth that could drink that much wine.

Now if you're like me, you're not much of a wine connoisseur. So I did a little research. Jesus made the equivalent of 908 bottles of wine. Now I found wines recommended for weddings starting at about \$40. The average was about \$65. So Jesus made the modern equivalent of at least \$60,000 worth of wine.

In reality it was probably a lot more. The text specifies that the wine Jesus made wasn't the cheap stuff. It was the best stuff which can go for \$200 or more a bottle. So we're talking more in the neighborhood of \$182,000.

In Jewish culture, the best wine was served first, because you wanted to make a good impression, and taste buds become less sensitive the more you drink. The wine Jesus made wasn't the cheap stuff though. It wasn't good enough to get by. It was the finest vintage. Jesus lavishes us with his best. It's no surprise that He who created the grape, could make the choicest wine.

There is a super-abundance to all that Jesus does. Jesus is not a stingy giver. Paul tells us in Eph 1:7-8 that, "*In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.*" And in Eph 3:20 he says that Jesus, "*is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.*"

## III. Jesus Can fill Our Emptiness

I don't bring up all of these things to show that Jesus knew how to have a good time, or that he knew how to make good wine. But these things show us that Jesus can fill the emptiness of our own lives. If Jesus can take 6 ordinary water-pots filled with nothing but water, and fill them with the finest wine, then what can he do with your ordinary life filled with nothing but

your shattered dreams or highest hopes, broken relationships or deepest loves, and your biggest failures or greatest successes.

When Jesus performed this miracle he did more than fill the water-pots with wine, he filled five hearts with faith. This was the first of Jesus' miracles. With this miracle Jesus begins his public ministry. Although they have heard John the Baptist say that Jesus is the Promised One, these five future apostles do not yet believe in Him. However, with this one miracle, Jesus steps out from the shadow of John the Baptist, reveals his glory as the Son of God, and his disciples place their faith in the Son of God.

With this one miracle Jesus completely redefined their lives. He answered for them two of the most basic questions anyone has in life: Who am I and Why am I here? When John, Andrew, Peter, Nathanael, and Philip placed their faith in Jesus He invested their lives with meaning and purpose they never knew they had.

He can answer these questions in our own lives. He can fill your life with meaning and purpose we never thought possible. If he can take ordinary water and change it to extraordinary wine, he can take your life, no matter how simple, how ordinary and change it into something extraordinary.

I don't know if Jesus ever told a joke that started with a Pharisee, a harlot, and a Roman soldier walked into a bar, but I do know he can fill your life with true joy. In John 15 Jesus speaks of his love for us and calls us to remain in his love. In verse 11, he says, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." We try to fill our lives with so many things— money, pleasure, career, accomplishment, relationships. However, these things only give you fleeting amusement- a momentary happiness. Jesus fills you with joy. This wedding really is a picture of life. It's supposed to be filled with meaning and fulfillment, but so often it is empty. The joy has run out. But then Jesus shows up.

Jesus will give you His best even if all you have to offer him is water. If you're at a place of emptiness in your life and you're ready to experience the fullness Jesus can give to your emptiness, where do you start? Mary's simple action illustrates that receiving our Lord's filling and healing begins with recognizing our need. For Mary, it was easy -- the wine was gone. It may be more difficult for you to identify your problem. But left to our own resources, we will run dry. Life is too complex, its problems too challenging, and our own strength too limited to

allow us to cope without help. You must recognize your emptiness before Jesus. As Matt. 5:3 says, *“God blesses those who recognize their need for Him (NLT).”*

You also have to do as Mary instructed the servants, *“Do whatever he tells you?”* So often we don't experience fullness, because we're not willing to do what God says. What do we have to do if we want to experience God's fullness in our lives? It begins by surrendering our lives to him. Peter says in Acts 2:38, *“Each of you must turn from your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*