

Water into Wine

John 2:1-12

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John chapter 2, and we'll read the first 12 verses. On the third day, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."

Now there were set there six water pots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, "Fill the water pots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it. Now the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew). The master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!"

At this beginning of signs, Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory. And His disciples believed in Him. After this, He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days.

Can you picture this famous event? The Jewish wedding celebrations, a weeklong festivity, full of feasting and food. Can you hear the laughter? Can you see the rows of tables laden with food, as friends and family rejoice with the bride and groom? Can you imagine the horror of Jesus' mother, who seems to have been quite invested in the preparations of this particular wedding, when she realizes that the wine has run out? Those at the tables haven't realized yet. So Jesus' mother pulls Jesus aside and asks Him to help, which is a staggering request. This is the first thing John records of Jesus' actions. And we've got Mary asking Jesus to fix this wine problem. What did Mary expect Jesus to do? Did her knowledge of His divinity mean that she thought He'd be willing to flex His God muscles just

to make some more Shiraz? Why on earth would she expect Jesus to help with such an insignificant thing? She's been told He's come to save the world, and she's like, "Jesus, Merlot, please."

And Jesus, after strangely calling His mother "woman"—don't try that at home, also doesn't work on wives—Jesus calmly issues a command, and the servants rush off to fill six large stone jars with about 400 odd liters of water. But as John paints the picture for us, he mentions that these jars are there because they're used for the Jewish rites of purification. Why would he mention that? The servants are then told to draw out some and give it to the master of the feast, the MC if you like.

Can you see the servants' surprise as they ladle the water out of the stone jar and pour it in the cup, and realize it's not a clear liquid anymore? It's colored and has a beautiful bouquet, something like black currants and dark cocoa or something, whatever they put on the bottle. Can you see the MC's face as he tastes this outstanding drop? Can you hear his shock as he speaks to the bridegroom, "Hey, what are you doing serving the good wine at this time? Everyone's had their fill. Everyone's taste buds are dulled a little bit. Why are you serving the good wine now?"

Why did John place this miracle in his gospel? The first thing that Jesus does, does it seem a little odd to you? A wedding in Galilee, a lack of wine, a request from Christ's mother, Jesus calling her "woman," purification jars, water turned to wine, a compliment to the bridegroom. What is John doing? Some say that this miracle teaches us that it's okay to have a party every now and then. It's often quoted at weddings to prove that Jesus was pro-wedding, in case we needed proof. Some will point to the incredible power it must have taken to turn the water into wine without even a word. Jesus simply willed that these stone jars that contain hydrogen and oxygen atoms would now have all the chemical compounds that you need to have a delicious glass of wine. He just thought it, and it was so. These things are all true. Jesus does like us to party every now and then. He's all pro-wedding, and He has remarkable power. But are these really the reason that John put this in the gospel? Is that what John was trying to communicate?

I believe there is a far greater message in our text. And to begin understanding what John is doing, we must pay close attention to the details of what he says. Firstly, notice in verse 11 that John says this is the beginning of signs that Jesus did. This miracle is a sign. What would it be a sign of? Well, John's gospel is all about us understanding that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in His name. He tells us that at the end of John.

But notice also that this sign took place in Cana of Galilee. He actually mentions it twice. He wants you to know. He wants you to pay attention. Verse 1: "On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee." And then in verse 11: "This is the beginning of signs that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee." This gives us a clue as to exactly what Jesus is showing us in this sign. A reference to Galilee should have made any good Israelite go, "Hang on, I've heard that name not many times before, but I know it's there." And they would have gone to Isaiah chapter 9, which we read. It's a striking passage because it's the only prophecy that references Galilee.

Isaiah 9, as Liam mentioned, is spoken to a people who are about to head into an area of gloom and darkness and anguish. They're about to be exiled. And to these people, to an Israel who is lost and wandering away from the presence of God, the Lord declares that He's made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. And then He proceeds to tell them how He would send a great light into a place of deep darkness, and how He would increase their joy as of the joy of harvest. And as we keep reading, we find that this joy would come because of those famous words that we all know because of Handel's Messiah, because unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. There's going to be a new king, a new kingdom, an ushering in of an entirely new order, where there would be joy and feasting. And where's this going to happen? And light, by the way, which again, remember John's been talking a lot about light so far. Where's all this going to happen? In Galilee. John is calling us to think about this promise. This sign is pointing to the fact that Jesus is the great king who has come to bring light to a dark world. He's the great king who's come to bring joy to a place of gloom. He's the great king who's come to bring about a kingdom that will know no end.

And so I believe in this sign, what we're seeing is a contrast similar to Isaiah 8 and 9, where we see a contrast between Israel going into a place of gloom and anguish and darkness, and then God sending someone to bring about light and joy and peace. Here, John is calling us to think, "Hang on, we're seeing a contrast here between a world and an order of doing things that is full of gloom and anguish and darkness, and a new way of doing things, a new way of understanding the world, a new kingdom where there is life and joy and peace and light."

And this is true in several ways, but I'd like to just focus in on what I believe is the most important point of this passage. That Jesus takes an old world that is full of uncleanness and reminders of our uncleanness into a new world that is full of joy and peace and feasting. So let's start with the old world. Let's spend some time considering how the world before Jesus was filled with uncleanness. And that's what I believe John's reference to the jars of purification is meant to cause us to think about. What is the

significance of the purification jars in this miracle? They should cause us to think about the laws of uncleanness and the laws of washing that you read all through Leviticus in the Old Testament. And we're not going to go there today, but if you want, you can go to Leviticus and you can read chapter after chapter after chapter about how all these day-to-day events that would happen in your life as an Israelite would cause you to become unclean. And if you were unclean, then you were barred from the presence of the Lord. You couldn't go into the temple. Other people weren't allowed to touch you because you would make them unclean. And you would have to perform these ceremonial washings. Some of them could take weeks for you to become clean again, and then come back into fellowship with God's people and fellowship with God.

They had to wash themselves after touching dead animals. Women had to wash themselves after their monthly cycle. You had to wash yourself if you got sick in a particular kind of sickness. Priests had to wash themselves before they went into temples. This world of purification that God had given them was a blessing. Have you thought about that? It was a good place to be. Because in a world where you're given laws about cleanness and uncleanness, you're very aware of the fact that you need washing. And you've got provision to get clean. But they were also a great burden because the washings and the ceremonies of these laws of purification never actually made you clean. And any one of these Israelites would have known that. Not only because they know that washing your skin isn't going to clean you from defilement before God, but also because they had to keep doing it. They'd go from clean to unclean to clean to unclean to unclean to clean to unclean, time and time again. It's clearly not working. And so can you imagine the burden of it? Why would God put them in this situation? Well, it was a graphic picture of our state before God. It's a graphic picture of our sinfulness. Our sin makes us unclean before God.

When we lie, we put a black mark on our soul, which we feel as guilt and shame. When we hate or lust or covet, we corrupt ourselves. We defile ourselves. Oscar Wilde captured this idea in his book "The Picture of Dorian Gray." You might be familiar with this story. It's about a young man who's beautiful and handsome, who has a portrait painted of him. Somehow, the painting is endowed with sort of magical properties. The painting ages, and he stays the same. But Wilde notes that it's not time that is primarily aging Dorian Gray's portrait; it's his sin.

"What the worm was to the corpse, his sins would be to the painted image on the canvas. They would mar its beauty and eat away its grace. They would defile it and make it shameful. And yet the thing would still live on. It would always be alive." And as you go through the story, Dorian, because his image in life is never marred, indulges himself in sin after sin after sin.

And as he returns and looks at the portrait, he notices that when he tells a lie, his eyes have just suddenly become deceptive. And when he fills himself with bitterness and rage, there's a look of malice on his face. And when he even starts to murder, his hands have blood on them. His pride causes an ugly grin on his mouth.

This is the state of our soul without Christ. This is the darkness and gloom of our life. This is the state of my soul without Christ. Black, marred, tainted, corrupted, ugly, guilty, shameful, unclean, defiled. Every sin marring its beauty and leaving a shameful stain. And yet, just like the portrait, my soul lives on. There's nothing I can do. Every black mark stays there another day. Have you ever felt that about yourself?

This might be a little weird, but I actually encourage you to try it. Sometimes I stand and look at a mirror and I just look myself in the eyes and I think about all the things that I want in my heart, all those wicked desires. I think about all the things I've done, and I look myself in the eyes and I think, "How do you put up with yourself? How do you live with yourself?" And I look behind those pupils and I see my soul, and I think, "You are corrupt."

Have you stopped and considered the state of your soul? Do you look at your heart honestly? Think back on your last week. Think about those things you've done that you regret. The sting of that regret may have faded, but its mark on your soul has not. The wine has run out. That sin that promised you joy, its joy is gone. And your sin, my sin, is right in front of our face. This is the darkness that this passage reminds us of. There is no wine, and the purification jars are there, declaring our guilt before us.

But there's more darkness than this because these purification jars at the wedding point us to an even deeper problem. Although they make us think of the ceremonial washings that the Israelites had to do, they're actually jars you won't find in any passage in Leviticus. God never commanded the Israelites to wash their hands before they eat. You won't find it. So why do they have these purification jars at this wedding? Well, it's because the Pharisees made a tradition. Mark 7 tells us that they were the traditions of the elders. Let me read it for you, actually. It's quite helpful.

Mark 7:1-5 says this: "Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. Now when they saw that some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the

washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?"

The Jews still do this today. You can look it up. There's a ritual called Netilat Yadayim, I think. It's a handwashing ritual. They do it before every meal. And listen to this. This is the blessing that they declare when they wash their hands, according to the tradition of the elders: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us concerning the washing of our hands." Do you see what this is?

The laws that God put in place about cleanness and uncleanness in this old world, the Pharisees have looked at it and said, "Actually, this is true; we're unclean." And they want to be clean. They want to wash themselves and wash their guilt. And so what do they do? They make more laws. "I know how we can be clean. We'll wash ourselves some more." But God will sanctify us how? By His commandments. And we'll make up our own commandments to pile on top of these commandments to wash ourselves even more clean, so that we will have that guilt and that stain washed away.

Oscar Wilde once again picked up on this very point in "The Picture of Dorian Gray." As Dorian wrestles with the devastating stain that sin is on his soul, as he watches his painting carry visibly the inner spots and wrinkles and the uncleanness of his sin, Dorian decides to try to deal with his sin by being good. He does what he thinks is a good deed to a girl to try and save his soul and undo the ugly marks that were forming on his painted face. And this is what he says: "A new life! That's what he wanted. Yes, he would be good. And the hideous thing that he had hidden away would no longer be a terror to him. He felt as if the load had been lifted from him already. He went in quietly, locking the door behind him, as was his custom, and dragged the purple hanging from the portrait. A cry of pain and indignation arose from him. He could see no change, save that in the eyes there was a look of cunning, and in the mouth the curved wrinkle of the hypocrite. The thing was still loathsome—more loathsome, if possible, than before. No, there had been nothing more. Through vanity, he had spared the girl. In hypocrisy, he had worn the mask of goodness. For curiosity's sake, he had tried the denial of self."

Do you see what he's saying? As you look at your uncleanness and say, "I want to be clean, so I'm going to try and be good. I'm going to stack laws on top of this. I'm going to do things to try and cleanse my own soul," your soul becomes more tainted, more corrupt. And this is what we all do as we become aware of the fact that without Christ, our souls are stained and full of sin. We try to cleanse ourselves. We feel that what God has commanded

is too little, so we impose laws upon ourselves. "I'll wash my lie away by fasting tomorrow. I'll pray every day this week to make up for the fact that I blew off at my kids. I'll come to church every week. Surely that will pay for some of my guilt and my shame." We think we can trade with God. We think we can cleanse our own soul.

This legalistic, self-imposed religion is a burden, it's a weight, it's a yoke that is heavy to bear, and it's so heavy that it will become a millstone that drags you down into the judgment of God. Because keeping a strict, disciplined, good life cannot wash away the black marks of sin upon the portrait of your soul. They will only add to the disgrace. And so this world that Isaiah was speaking of, a world of darkness and gloom and anguish, can you see it? Can you see it that John's evoking it in our mind as he calls us to think of Galilee, and as he puts the purification jars right in front of us and says, "Look at your uncleanness and look at your pharisaical laws that you try and keep to make yourself clean"?

So what is it that Jesus brings into this world of darkness and anguish and hopelessness and uncleanness? What does He do? Well, He brings in a new order, a new kingdom. And the first thing that He does is He shows us that these purification rituals are passing away. The waters of purification that constantly remind the Israelites of their uncleanness and their sin, causing them to move from being separated from God to the presence of God only to return again and again—that age is passing away. In place of water in the purification jars, Jesus brings wine.

And before we get to the fact that Jesus makes this wine for feasting, I want to consider the relationship between wine and blood. Throughout the Bible, wine is connected with blood, starting all the way back in Genesis 49, when Jacob blesses Judah and says he washed his garments in wine and his clothes in the blood of grapes. That phrase, that idea, the connection between blood and wine, happens at least four more times throughout the Old Testament. And John continues to reference this idea as we keep reading his gospel. I want to take you to one of them to show you the significance of what Jesus is doing here.

Over in John 19, we see Jesus engaging with His mother and with wine once again. We won't read it, but if you turn there, you can scan and see that what I'm saying is true. Look at verse 25 through to 37. Notice what you see here. In verse 25 to 27, we see Jesus speaking to His mother. And what does He call her John 2:1-12. On the third day, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not

yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."

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Can you picture this famous event? The Jewish wedding celebrations, a weeklong festivity full of feasting and food. Can you hear the laughter? Can you see the rows of tables laden with food as friends and family rejoice with the bride and groom? Can you imagine the horror of Jesus' mother, who seems to have been quite invested in the preparations of this particular wedding, when she realizes that the wine has run out? Those at the tables haven't realized yet. So Jesus' mother pulls Jesus aside and asks Him to help, which is a staggering request. This is the first thing John records of Jesus' actions. And we've got Mary asking Jesus to fix this wine problem. What did Mary expect Jesus to do? Did her knowledge of His divinity mean that she thought He'd be willing to flex His God muscles just to make some more Shiraz? Why on earth would she expect Jesus to help with such an insignificant thing? She's been told He's come to save the world, and she's like, "Jesus, Merlot, please."

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I believe there is a far greater message in our text. And to begin understanding what John is doing, we must pay close attention to the details of what he says. Firstly, notice in verse 11 that John says this is the beginning of signs that Jesus did. This miracle is a sign. What would it be a sign of? Well, John's gospel is all about us understanding that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in His name. He tells us that at the end of John.

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John is calling us to think about this promise. This sign is pointing to the fact that Jesus is the great king who has come to bring light to a dark world. He's the great king who's come to bring joy to a place of gloom. He's the great king who's come to bring about a kingdom that will know no end. And so I believe in this sign, what we're seeing is a contrast similar to Isaiah 8 and 9, where we see a contrast between Israel going into a place of gloom and anguish and darkness, and then God sending someone to bring about light and joy and peace. Here, John is calling us to think, "Hang on, we're seeing a contrast here between a world and an order of doing things that is full of gloom and anguish and darkness, and a new way of doing things, a new way of understanding the world, a new kingdom where there is life and joy and peace and light."

And this is true in several ways, but I'd like to just focus in on what I believe is the most important point of this passage. That Jesus takes an old world that is full of uncleanness and reminders of our uncleanness into a new world that is full of joy and peace and feasting. So let's start with the old world. Let's spend some time considering how the world before Jesus was filled with uncleanness. And that's what I believe John's reference to the jars of purification is meant to cause us to think about. What is the significance of the purification jars in this miracle? They should cause us to think about the laws of uncleanness and the laws of washing that you read all through Leviticus in the Old Testament. And we're not going to go there today, but if you want, you can go to Leviticus and you can read chapter after chapter after chapter about how all these day-to-day events that would happen in your life as an Israelite would cause you to become unclean. And if you were unclean, then you were barred from the presence of the Lord. You couldn't go into the temple. Other people weren't allowed to touch you because you would make them unclean. And you would have to perform these ceremonial washings. Some of them could take weeks for you to become clean again, and then come back into fellowship with God's people and fellowship with God.

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selves before they went into temples. This world of purification that God had given them was a blessing. Have you thought about that? It was a good place to be. Because in a world where you're given laws about cleanness and uncleanness, you're very aware of the fact that you need washing. And you've got provision to get clean. But they were also a great burden because the washings and the ceremonies of these laws of purification never actually made you clean. And any one of these Israelites would have known that. Not only because they know that washing your skin isn't going to clean you from defilement before God, but also because they had to keep doing it. They'd go from clean to unclean to clean to unclean to clean to unclean, time and time again. It's clearly not working. And so can you imagine the burden of it? Why would God put them in this situation? Well, it was a graphic picture of our state before God. It's a graphic picture of our sinfulness. Our sin makes us unclean before God.

When we lie, we put a black mark on our soul, which we feel as guilt and shame. When we hate or lust or covet, we corrupt ourselves. We defile ourselves. Oscar Wilde captured this idea in his book "The Picture of Dorian Gray." You might be familiar with this story. It's about a young man who's beautiful and handsome, who has a portrait painted of him. Somehow, the painting is endowed with sort of magical properties. The painting ages, and he stays the same. But Wilde notes that it's not time that is primarily aging Dorian Gray's portrait; it's his sin.

"What the worm was to the corpse, his sins would be to the painted image on the canvas. They would mar its beauty and eat away its grace. They would defile it and make it shameful. And yet the thing would still live on. It would always be alive." And as you go through the story, Dorian, because his image in life is never marred, indulges himself in sin after sin after sin. And as he returns and looks at the portrait, he notices that when he tells a lie, his eyes have just suddenly become deceptive. And when he fills himself with bitterness and rage, there's a look of malice on his face. And when he even starts to murder, his hands have blood on them. His pride causes an ugly grin on his mouth.

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This might be a little weird, but I actually encourage you to try it. Sometimes I stand and look at a mirror and I just look myself in the eyes and I think about all the things that I want in my heart, all those wicked desires.

I think about all the things I've done, and I look myself in the eyes and I think, "How do you put up with yourself? How do you live with yourself?" And I look behind those pupils and I see my soul, and I think, "You are corrupt."

Have you stopped and considered the state of your soul? Do you look at your heart honestly? Think back on your last week. Think about those things you've done that you regret. The sting of that regret may have faded, but its mark on your soul has not. The wine has run out. That sin that promised you joy, its joy is gone. And your sin, my sin, is right in front of our face. This is the darkness that this passage reminds us of. There is no wine, and the purification jars are there, declaring our guilt before us.

But there's more darkness than this because these purification jars at the wedding point us to an even deeper problem. Although they make us think of the ceremonial washings that the Israelites had to do, they're actually jars you won't find in any passage in Leviticus. God never commanded the Israelites to wash their hands before they eat. You won't find it. So why do they have these purification jars at this wedding? Well, it's because the Pharisees made a tradition. Mark 7 tells us that they were the traditions of the elders. Let me read it for you, actually. It's quite helpful.

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The Jews still do this today. You can look it up. There's a ritual called Netilat Yadayim, I think. It's a handwashing ritual. They do it before every meal. And listen to this. This is the blessing that they declare when they wash their hands, according to the tradition of the elders: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us"—sounds good so far—"with His commandments, and has commanded us concerning the washing of our hands." Do you see what this is?

The laws that God put in place about cleanness and uncleanness in this old world, the Pharisees have looked at it and said, "Actually, this is true; we're unclean." And they want to be clean. They want to wash themselves and wash their guilt. And so what do they do? They make more laws. "I

know how we can be clean. We'll wash ourselves some more." But God will sanctify us how? By His commandments. And we'll make up our own commandments to pile on top of these commandments to wash ourselves even more clean, so that we will have that guilt and that stain washed away.

Oscar Wilde once again picked up on this very point in "The Picture of Dorian Gray." As Dorian wrestles with the devastating stain that sin is on his soul, as he watches his painting carry visibly the inner spots and wrinkles and the uncleanness of his sin, Dorian decides to try to deal with his sin by being good. He does what he thinks is a good deed to a girl to try and save his soul and undo the ugly marks that were forming on his painted face. And this is what he says: "A new life! That's what he wanted. Yes, he would be good. And the hideous thing that he had hidden away would no longer be a terror to him. He felt as if the load had been lifted from him already. He went in quietly, locking the door behind him, as was his custom, and dragged the purple hanging from the portrait. A cry of pain and indignation arose from him. He could see no change, save that in the eyes there was a look of cunning, and in the mouth the curved wrinkle of the hypocrite. The thing was still loathsome—more loathsome, if possible, than before. No, there had been nothing more. Through vanity, he had spared the girl. In hypocrisy, he had worn the mask of goodness. For curiosity's sake, he had tried the denial of self."

Do you see what he's saying? As you look at your uncleanness and say, "I want to be clean, so I'm going to try and be good. I'm going to stack laws on top of this. I'm going to do things to try and cleanse my own soul," your soul becomes more tainted, more corrupt. And this is what we all do as we become aware of the fact that without Christ, our souls are stained and full of sin. We try to cleanse ourselves. We feel that what God has commanded is too little, so we impose laws upon ourselves. "I'll wash my lie away by fasting tomorrow. I'll pray every day this week to make up for the fact that I blew off at my kids. I'll come to church every week. Surely that will pay for some of my guilt and my shame." We think we can trade with God. We think we can cleanse our own soul.

This legalistic, self-imposed religion is a burden, it's a weight, it's a yoke that is heavy to bear, and it's so heavy that it will become a millstone that drags you down into the judgment of God. Because keeping a strict, disciplined, good life cannot wash away the black marks of sin upon the portrait of your soul. They will only add to the disgrace. And so this world that Isaiah was speaking of, a world of darkness and gloom and anguish, can you see it? Can you see it that John's evoking it in our mind as he calls us to think of Galilee, and as he puts the purification jars right in front of us and says, "Look at your uncleanness and look at your pharisaical laws that you try and keep to make yourself clean"?

So what is it that Jesus brings into this world of darkness and anguish and hopelessness and uncleanness? What does He do? Well, He brings in a new order, a new kingdom. And the first thing that He does is He shows us that these purification rituals are passing away. The waters of purification that constantly remind the Israelites of their uncleanness and their sin, causing them to move from being separated from God to the presence of God only to return again and again—that age is passing away. In place of water in the purification jars, Jesus brings wine.

And before we get to the fact that Jesus makes this wine for feasting, I want to consider the relationship between wine and blood. Throughout the Bible, wine is connected with blood, starting all the way back in Genesis 49, when Jacob blesses Judah and says he washed his garments in wine and his clothes in the blood of grapes. That phrase, that idea, the connection between blood and wine, happens at least four more times throughout the Old Testament. And John continues to reference this idea as we keep reading his gospel. I want to take you to one of them to show you the significance of what Jesus is doing here.

Over in John 19, we see Jesus engaging with His mother and with wine once again. We won't read it, but if you turn there, you can scan and see that what I'm saying is true. Look at verse 25 through to 37. Notice what you see here. In verse 25 to 27, we see Jesus speaking to His mother. And what does He call her? "Woman, behold your son." This is the second and only other reference to Jesus calling His mother "woman" in John's gospel. So I think John's calling us to think about that. Jesus then, after that, cries out, saying, "I thirst," and a vessel full of sour wine is brought to Him. And Jesus drinks—not delightful wine, not the best wine, not good wine, but sour wine. Wine mixed with gall, bitter, foul, harsh wine. Not the wine of celebration, but the wine of wrath is what Jesus drinks.

And then in verse 31 through to 34, we see Jesus dead on the cross, pierced with a spear. Look at the end of verse 34. Blood and water come out. This sequence has too many similarities to John 2:1-11 for us to ignore. John, as he's writing, wants us to notice the common features. Instead of a wedding, we have a cross. Instead of the best of wines, we have the cup of bitter wrath. Instead of water turning to wine, we have Jesus' side pouring out water and blood, which Jesus tells us in John chapter 6 is for us to drink.

The point is this: Jesus' blood is the replacement for the water of purification. In place of condemning washings telling us that we are constantly unclean, Jesus bled and died to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, to wipe our slate clean, to cast our sins as far as the east is from the west. In place of legalistic, self-inflicted laws where we attempt to wash our own

soul clean, Jesus' death has water and blood flowing from His side to wash us and make us pure.

The same John who wrote this gospel returns to this theme in Revelation 7:14, where he sees a great multitude of saints standing before the Lamb of God, dressed in white garments. He hears that these are people who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. It's this cleansing that Jesus is prefiguring in the miracle of turning the water into wine. He's pointing us to the fact that in His new world, in His new age, He's bringing about a world in which blood cleanses from sin. This is the only cleansing that can truly set you free—free from the uncleanness that plagues your soul.

His blood has the power to wash away every stain and spot, every sin and all the shame. His blood shows you that your sins are paid for. The guilt that stands accusing you, like Dorian Gray's portrait hanging in your bathroom mirror, looking back at you saying, "Liar, backbiter, greedy, selfish, lustful, angry sinner, you are." That guilt has no leg to stand on anymore when you trust in Jesus Christ because you can look that guilt in the face and you can say, "Yes, I know I need washing. Yes, I know I am stained and unclean. Yes, I know I'm defiled, but Jesus took my place. He has made water that cleanses me properly. He has turned the water into wine, into the wine of His blood that flowed from His side. His blood was shed for me."

As the hymn writer says, "Are you washed in the blood, in the soul-cleansing blood of the Lamb? Are your garments spotless? Are they white as snow? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?" But Christ's first sign here in Cana of Galilee doesn't just stop there. He doesn't just turn the purification water into wine, a symbol of His cleansing blood. He turns it to wine at a wedding feast. In John chapter 6, Jesus connects these images, saying that His blood is the wine that we're invited to drink, and that in drinking His wine, His blood, we will be full of life and joy.

Can you hear the connections back to Isaiah chapter 9? Peter Leithart comments on it and says it this way: "By turning that water to wine, Jesus reveals that He comes to transform the old order with its purity rules into a new order of joyful celebration. A better Moses, Jesus doesn't change water to defiling blood in the Nile, but to festive wine. He draws wine, not water, from the rock." Jesus comes onto the scene in John's gospel not only offering cleansing, not only removing the burden of legalistic traditions of the elders, but ushering in a kingdom of life and joy and peace. This is the kingdom of God—a wedding feast full of abundant provision.

I was asking myself this week, where in John's gospel is the Lord's Supper? I don't know if you've ever noticed that, but John doesn't recount to us the

Lord's Supper. He spends a lot of time in the upper room, chapters and chapters, but he never tells us about the Lord's Supper. I think the Lord's Supper is woven throughout John's gospel. It is highly significant that Jesus begins His activity in John's gospel by turning legalistic purification water into life-giving, joy-giving wine of celebration at a wedding feast.

It's striking to me that Jesus is the only person named in this account. His mother is just called "his mother." There are His disciples, the servants, the master of the feast, and the bridegroom. And the bridegroom, by the way, is the hero of the story. "The master of the feast called the bridegroom and he said to him, 'Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now.'" Who is this bridegroom? Well, interestingly, John tells us in the very next chapter. In the next chapter, John the Baptist declares this about Jesus: "He who has the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom, speaking about himself, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is fulfilled."

Do you see it? The way that Jesus works is He serves inferior wine first, and then He delivers superior wine. This old covenant of cleansing rituals was good. It was wine. It enabled the Israelites to live with God, to have a way to be made clean before Him. But it was inferior. It was not enough. It fell short. It failed. It ran out and turned into a burden, an added burden as the Pharisees piled on their laws on top of it—a place of gloom and darkness. God was a husband to His people in this old time. He was a bridegroom, but His people were adulterous harlots who ran after other gods time and time again.

But now Jesus has come, and He's the new bridegroom, setting up a new, renewed wedding feast. The old wine ran out, but Jesus has come to put new wine on the table—better wine, richer wine, the wine of His blood, poured out as a cleansing for all, and poured out as a joyful celebration of His abundant provision. Look at the feast you are invited to. We often think that the Lord's Supper is meant to be a solemn occasion, a time of reflecting on our own sinfulness, a time of looking at the portrait and going, "Oh, look at the corruption of my soul." I think there's a place for that, but I don't think it's the main thing.

As we come to the Lord's table this morning, we come as those whose portrait has been cleansed. We do not come to a time of somber self-reflection. We come as guests of the bridegroom, who rejoice like John as we see our husband prepare a table before us—a table of expensive, superior food and wine. He has set the table, and He's served it—a wine that cleanses us from sin, a wine that saves us even from our own attempts to save ourselves, a

wine that does not just cleanse but brings fullness of joy.

Let's pray.