

## **“Joy”**

**John 2:1-11**

**July 9, 2023**

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

The second fruit of the Spirit is joy. When God works in our hearts to make us like Jesus, he fills us with joy. Our sanctification is the process by which God produces in us the family likeness of the trinity. Since our God is a God marked by joy, he produces in our lives this same quality. If judged by the frequent repetition of the joy word family in the New Testament, the case could be made that it is the book of joy. The Greek verb usually translated “rejoice” appears seventy-two times while the noun “joy” sixty times. One of the words for “greeting” means literally “joy be with you!” Christians are to be those who are both marked by joy themselves and who bless others with prayers for such joy.

Throughout human history in every culture, weddings are noted as times of joy. In John’s Gospel, he selects seven signs that are particularly powerful pointers to who Jesus is, and the first one of these signs takes place at a wedding. Wine in the Bible is a metaphor for joy. So it is significant that at the wedding in Cana Jesus turns water into wine. It’s not just a little bit of wine, but many gallons. And it’s noted in the text that this wine was of a particularly fine quality. So Jesus’ miracle here speaks to us powerfully about his gift to us of joy.

Ancient weddings such as this wedding in Cana were different from our modern American weddings. For one thing, the groom and not the bride was the central focus. It was also the groom and his family who paid for the whole affair. Weddings were the highwater mark of Jewish ceremonies. It was considered the grandest event in life, and this was especially the case among the poor. The wedding itself typically occurred in the evening following a feast, which is the reverse order of the way we do weddings in our culture. It was during this feast prior to the wedding that the events of our text took place.

### **I. The Absence of Joy**

John begins his account of this miracle with a time stamp. It happened on the third day, which is referring to the previous passage when Jesus called his first disciples. So this happened very early in Jesus’ ministry, and it happened in a little Galilean village named Cana, less than ten miles north of Nazareth. Jesus’ mother had been invited to the wedding, along with Jesus and his disciples. It was during the feast portion and prior to the wedding ceremony that the wine-shortage crisis became evident. It was indeed a crisis. To the

Jewish mind wine symbolized joy, and it was an essential part of every wedding. This was not only an embarrassment to the groom and his family, but also opened him up to a lawsuit from the aggrieved relatives of the bride. We're not told the cause of the wine shortage. Perhaps the family was too poor to afford an ample amount, and they were simply hoping that their guests would not be too thirsty. Or maybe there were just more guests than expected. In any case, the wine ran dry.

Since wine is a metaphor for joy, the deficit of wine in this story could be viewed as a deficit of joy in our world. In the spring semester of 2018, Yale University offered a class on happiness taught by psychology professor Laurie Santos. The course's formal title was "Psychology and the Good Life," and over 1200 students signed up for this elective class. There was such keen interest in the topic that the professor decided to offer it as a ten-week course available for free over the internet. By now, almost 4 million people have signed up for it. It is a curious thing that the joy that is universally sought in our world is such an uncommon thing.

Why is it that something so universally desired and sought after should be so elusive? There are at least three reasons that come to mind. One is the prevalence of depression. Over 17 million Americans suffer from major depression, with many more fighting less severe cases. We need to be careful here, because depression is a general term with complex causes. Some depression is caused by sin, while some other cases of depression are caused simply by the fallen and broken world in which we live. In no way do I want to suggest that those who battle depression are not walking by the Spirit and cannot have this fruit of joy ripen in their lives. As humans, we are capable of complex emotions. For example, according to the Bible, we can grieve with hope (1 Thess. 4:13). We can live, as Paul taught, as those who are **"sorrowful, yet always rejoicing"** (2 Cor. 6:10). There is an imitation joy in which Christians put on a happy face to cover up deep sadness. That is not a fruit of the Spirit, and it is not healthy. There is nothing unspiritual about being sad when sad things happen. Remember that Jesus wept. But the joy that is a fruit of the Spirit is possible even in times of sadness and grief. Christians can fight depression, using without guilt the medical treatments available in this battle, and also give evidence of the fruit of joy in their lives.

A second reason for the lack of joy is the prevalence of self-pity. This is a quiet killer of joy, often going undetected in our hearts while growing in size and strength. It dries up joy like the thirsty wedding guests dried up all the available wine in Cana. What is self-pity? It is a form of unbelief by which we deal with life's difficulties and challenges by viewing ourselves as victims and others as victimizers. So it's often joined with anger at those seen as guilty perpetrators of my suffering. Trust in God is completely missing when the heart is filled with self-pity. Such trust would have a person acknowledge that God is always sovereign over the sufferings of this life, and he always gives us a way

forward that is filled with hope. I find a stirring example of this in the apostle Paul's second letter to Timothy. This was a letter he wrote toward the end of his life while he was in prison. **"Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen"** (2 Timothy 4:14-18). He is describing a situation where self-pity could flourish, with enemies attacking him and friends abandoning him. Instead, he trusts God and moves forward in faith.

A third reason for the lack of joy, though it is sought universally, is that it is sought in the wrong places. It is sought in pleasure, in money, in sexual expression, in accomplishments, in some hobby, or in the approval of some person or group of people. These are all dead ends. One of the tragedies of these dead ends is that many of them take years to come to the place where it becomes evident that they are in fact dead ends. There is one path that never leads to a dead end, a path that is guaranteed to bring joy, and that brings us to our next point.

## **II. The Gift of Joy**

It's interesting that when Mary becomes aware of the wine shortage, she comes to Jesus. It's not the kind of need a mother would typically bring to her son. What would a normal son be expected to do? Though this was early in the ministry of Jesus, perhaps Jesus had performed miracles in his household prior to this. In any case, it is clear that the widowed Mary was accustomed to depending on her eldest son. The simplicity of her approach to Jesus is significant. She doesn't tell him what to do, but presents him with the need in the simplest words possible. **"They have no wine"** (2:3).

Jesus' response to her must have puzzled Mary. **"Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come"** (2:4). It sounds like a refusal to help, but Mary clearly didn't interpret it in that way. She immediately tells the servants to **"Do whatever he tells you"** (2:5). It also sounds, to our cultural ears, like a rude response from Jesus. Jesus was not being discourteous. Rather, he was giving her a measured, but courteous rebuke. The key to the whole thing is in understanding what he means when he says, **"My hour has not yet come."** Though it was unlikely that Mary understood his meaning at this early point in his ministry, when Jesus uses this word "hour" he is always referring to his death on the cross and the exultation following that death through his resurrection and ascension. But how does

that answer Mary's request? "Please do something about this wine shortage," to which Jesus replies, "The time of my death and resurrection has not yet arrived." It may not have been clear to Mary, but it is crystal clear to us. True and lasting joy comes to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Perhaps it can be made clearer by asking this question. What do single people usually think about when attending a wedding? They think about their own wedding. The Bible describes the wedding of Jesus elsewhere. **"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"** (Rev. 19:7-8). In order to provide wine for that wedding, Jesus would have to die on the cross and be raised again, but it wasn't time for that just yet.

The point here is that joy comes from Jesus. Specifically, it comes because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. We saw last week how John views the cross as central to the fruit of love, and we see here how it is also central to the second fruit of joy. In a world in which everyone is looking for joy along dead-end paths, Jesus is telling us here where it can be found. No money is demanded, and no herculean effort is required. What is required is humble faith in Jesus. What that looks like is giving up on trying to appease God by your own effort and instead resting on Jesus. We come to Jesus not by what we can offer him, but by what we need from him. What we need is forgiveness, someone to pay the debt owed to God's justice because of our sin. Jesus pays this by his substitutionary death. It is the foundation of all that God seeks to bring to us.

Years ago the Art Linkletter show had a segment on each show where he would question a group of children. On one show, he was asking the kids to tell about their favorite Bible story, and one little girl said her favorite story was when Jesus turned water into wine. Art said, "Yes, that is a wonderful miracle, isn't it?" He then asked her what that miracle tells us. She said, "When you're out of wine, all you have to do is get down on your knees and pray." I think she spoke better than she knew. Are you fresh out of joy today? Jesus is the source of joy. He can turn the plainness of life into the finest wine of joy. He does so in abundant fashion. The volume of wine provided by Jesus was so astounding that John made sure to mention it. Six water jars, each holding between twenty and thirty gallons, were filled with the water that was turned to wine. That's between 120 and 180 gallons of wine. Perhaps this newly wedded couple would have been able to sell the excess and be provided with a significant financial windfall early in their marriage. That speaks also of the abundant joy we find in Jesus.

### **III. The Permanence of Joy**

The master of the feast didn't know where this wine came from, but he did know his wine. When he tasted it, he remarked on how unusual it was for the host to serve the best wine last, although it was customary to serve the good wine first and the cheap wine when people would not be as discerning. John reports on this because of the important spiritual truth it teaches. For the Christian, the best is yet to come. The marriage supper of the Lamb awaits.

The prophet Isaiah writes of the joy of God's people in Isaiah 51. **"The ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away"** (51:11). Think with me for just a moment about that phrase "everlasting joy." Whenever we experience some joy in this life, it is often tainted by the knowledge that it will end. The joy of the wedding leads to the challenges experienced in every marriage. The joy of a newborn baby leads to some sleepless nights. The joy at the beginning of a much-anticipated vacation is clouded by the realization that major responsibilities await upon the return from the vacation. Imagine a joy that will never end. Even more, imagine a joy that exceeds the joy of the previous day. Eventually, we lose the memory of what sadness was like. Sorrow and sighing, tears and death, will only be found in museums. They will be ancient relics completely removed from daily experience.

## **CONCLUSION:**

One conclusion we can draw from this passage is that the joy of heaven will not be of a different nature than the joys we experience on the earth. What gives us joy now? There are joys associated with families. Our grandchildren have been here for a week, and they certainly provide us with joy (along with some trials as well). Feasting together with friends and loved ones provides joy. Faith provides joy. I can think of times in worship where my heart is flooded with joy in God's goodness, grace and love. And knowing there is a good and secure future also provides us with joy even in this life. These are the same sources of heavenly joy. We have a family we belong to and a heavenly feast awaiting us. In heaven, we will experience the everlasting joy we just spoke of. We can begin to taste all of these joys even now, though in the next life our experience of them will far surpass this life. And these future joys will be ours right here on the new earth. Heaven is not a place ultimately that we go up to, but heaven will come down to us. Until then, may God fill you with his Spirit and ripen the fruit of joy in your life!