

Sermon notes

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John 2:1-12

Saving the Best For Last: A Sign of the Coming Glory

There are a lot of intriguing connections between John 2 and the OT, but there is simply no way to bring them all out in a sermon. A sermon can only be so long and cannot get too technical. But in these notes, I will try to make some of these connections.

1. Jesus has called 6 disciples in John 1: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Phillip, and Nathaniel (some of this is implied). Thus, as I pointed out in the sermon, we should connect the 6 stone waterpots with these 6 disciples. We were all empty pots, but are now filled with glory. What Jesus does to the pots is what he does to humanity (at least those humans who follow him). A disciple is a glorified human because the Father, Son, and Spirit have come to dwell in us, making us their temple home (Jn. 14-16). The law leaves us empty. It commands purity, but cannot purification of our impurities. Jesus has come to bring grace and truth the law could not provide. He came to fill the empty and cleanse the dirty. He came to glorify the gloryless, even the shamed. He came to bring wine to a party that had none – and a party with no win is no party at all!

2. The sign reveals glory. John has already told us “the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we beheld *his glory*” (Jn. 1:14). In the old covenant, the glory of God was housed in the tabernacle/temple. But now Jesus is the tabernacle/temple of God’s glory (cf. 2:21). Jesus is the house/tabernacle/temple in which God’s glory is found. He houses the shekinah. When Jesus does his sign in John 2, it is the beginning of the *unveiling* of the glory.; is as if the shekinah-glory is coming out from behind the veils of the temple to be Israel’s midst. The glory that was hidden in the temple is becoming visible in the flesh-life of Jesus, the Son of God. The veil will finally be torn for good when Jesus dies on the cross, fulfilling and transforming the Day of Atonement liturgy (e.g., he is crucified between two thieves, and was apparently between two

angels in his tomb, just as the shekinah dwelt between two cherubim above the ark of the covenant, which means his cross and tomb become a new Most Holy Place; his High Priestly prayer in chapter 17 is akin to the ministry of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement; his putting on and putting off his garments in John 17-20 corresponds to the vestment usage of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement; etc. – see here: <http://trinity-pres.net/audio/sermon13-03-31.mp3> and <http://trinity-pres.net/audio/15-06-21sermonnotes.pdf>, and note also that James Jordan, A. W. Pink, and others have pointed out that John's gospel is basically a tour through the temple).

3. John the Baptist is the best man, Jesus is the bridegroom. This is a theme that is developed throughout John's gospel (e.g, 3:28-30). But how can Jesus be the bridegroom since he apparently has no wife? Surely, this was a riddle the original audience of John the Baptists' claims about Jesus would puzzle over. Why refer to a single man as a groom? Where is his bride? The answer emerges through the course of the gospel: Jesus is the divine messianic bridegroom who has come to marry Israel in a new nuptial covenant (cf. Jer. 33:10-17, which describes the messianic wedding party, with the voices of bride and Davidic groom rejoicing together; note the 'voice of the bridegroom' in Jn. 3:29). He came to marry Israel, to make her his bride, by laying down her life for her. The cross is not just an act of sacrifice, it is a husband bleeding and dying to rescue his bride. It is an act of marital love, a covenant-forming/marriage-making act. The Last Supper is not just a sacred meal, it is the wedding feast of the Lamb. If you look carefully at how Jesus interacts with women through the gospel (e.g., the woman at the well in chapter 4; the woman caught in adultery in chapter 8; Mary Magdalene in chapter 20), you will see Jesus playing the role of symbolic husband again and again. These scenes are all archetypal, with Jesus as the husband and the women as figures of the bride, the church.

It would be the role of the best man in ancient Jewish custom to prepare the bride for the groom. This tradition traced back to Gen. 2:22, in which God acted as best man, preparing a bride for Adam. John prepares Israel as bride by giving her a baptism washing in the Jordan. Jesus then pursues the bride to marry her through the rest of the gospel as he carries out his ministry to Israel, culminating with the hour of the Last Supper + the cross + the resurrection.

4. A little more on Jesus calling his mother “Woman.” On the one hand, Jesus does address other females as “woman” (e.g., Jn. 4:21). These generic references are important in their own way and should be looked at within each story in which they occur. But this is still an unusual way to refer to one’s own mother, and thus we need to give it some thought. Note that he calls her “woman” again when hanging on the cross (Jn. 19:26f). Going back to Genesis, Eve is originally called “woman” several times in Genesis 2, and it seems quite plausible to make a connection: Jesus is connecting Mary to Eve, even regarding her as the new Eve, who has given birth to the promised “seed of the woman.”

5. Jesus responds to Mary, literally, “What is it to me and you?” Whatever his answer means, it is obviously not a complete refusal to do as she has asked because he does it. He solves the wine problem. But it also seems he wants only some of those at the wedding party to know what he is up to; the miracle is not exactly a secret but neither is it a full public revelation of who he is and what he’s come to do. The time for a full public revelation of his glory – his “hour” – is not yet. Glen Scrivener likens this sign to pulling off the emergency brake and letting a car start rolling down a hill:

Jesus doesn’t want to be drawn into this. If you imagine Jesus parked at the top of a steep hill and the car is pointed down the hill and Mary is asking Jesus to take off the handbrake. “Jesus reveal your glory.”

And Jesus knows as soon as He performs this miracle, life can never be the same again. Through these signs, Jesus’ glory will shine out like a spotlight and the people will be moths and bats. The moths will flock to Him and the bats will flee shrieking. And as He shines brighter and brighter His enemies will hate Him more and more until He gets to the bottom of the hill and His **time** will come.

What does that mean – His TIME.

Well it’s very solemn. It’s literally the word “hour”. And all throughout John, Jesus keeps speaking about His hour. His hour is coming. His hour is coming. Until in John chapter 12 Jesus says this

²³ Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Finally the hour. And there’s the word “glory” as well. Jesus’ HOUR is when He would be GLORIFIED. And what is His glory? Jesus will tell them – He will die on the cross, lifted up from the earth to endure the judgement of heaven. And when He is lifted up, He will draw all people to Himself.

That’s what He says in John 12. Jesus’ hour is the hour of His death – and that’s His true glory. It’s the glory of utter self-giving love – the glory of the Bridegroom protecting His bride from danger. Taking their judgement for them. Spreading His arms to all people to draw them to Himself. You see the only way you or I can be invited to Jesus’s Cosmic Wedding Banquet, the ONLY way, is for Jesus to die for His bride.

All the love songs speak of how much the singer is going to do for his girl. I’d swim every ocean, I’d climb every mountain, Baby I’d die for you. And of course in real life the singer can’t hold down a relationship for more than 6 months. But Jesus actually did it for His bride. He actually shed His own blood and suffered godforsaken hell on the cross to win His beloved – you and me. That is His glory and that was His hour.

Here in John chapter 2, Jesus knows that as soon as He performs this first sign of His glory, He’s letting off the hand-brake. And at the bottom of the hill is the cross.

Verse 4: “Dear Woman, why do you involve me, my time has not yet come.”

The question is: Would Jesus release the hand-brake and head towards His death? Would He reveal His glory – the glory of the Bridegroom who will die for His bride. Yes.

6. So Jesus fixes the wine shortage which is what his mother wanted him to do. And yet the response, “What is it to me and you?” suggests that Jesus is at least refusing *some aspect* of what she has asked him to do. Apparently, it had to do with his “hour.” We can perhaps better grasp what is happening if we note that Mary’s word, “they have no wine,” is actually echo an of an OT text. In Isaiah 24:7ff, Israel’s exile/curse is described in terms of lacking wine, the wine of God’s salvation and joy: “No more do they drink wine with singing...There is an outcry in the streets for the lack of wine.” But In Isaiah’s prophecy, the Lord solves

the problem of wine-lessness. Isaiah 25 goes on to describe the Lord providing a great feast for his now-redeemed people, a “feast of wine and fat things.” This is the promised kingdom banquet, as the people enjoy sacrificial food and drink in God’s presence (the “fat things” and “wine” are part of the sacrificial officering in Lev. 3, 23). Isaiah indicates this is a feast “for all peoples,” so it includes Gentiles (note that John 2:1ff takes place in Galilee *of the Gentiles*). The reason God’s people can feast is because the Lord himself has feasted on death, swallowing up the curse forever (Isa. 25:8). Obviously, this is what Jesus will do (as the Lord incarnate) at the climax of the gospel. Putting all of this together:

“They have no wine” = condition of curse/exile

The Lord who provides wine in Isaiah = Jesus the Messiah in John
The groom who should provide wine = Jesus, the true groom and the new Adam (cf. Isa. 62:4-6, which indicates the true groom is the Lord)

Wine provided = abundant blessing, curse removed, death defeated

The one missing piece to fill in this: *How* will the Lord/Messiah provide wine for his people? *How* will he defeat death? By the end of the gospel we know: Through his death he will defeat death and swallow death up forever. The shedding of his blood will provide the blood of grapes (wine) for his people.

7. According to prophecies like Amos 9, one way Messiah would be identified would be through his provision of abundant wine. In this miracle, that’s what we see happening. Amos 9:11-13 are fulfilled! We simply cannot escape the picture of abundant – abundant life! – Jesus gives in this story. He doesn’t provide just enough wine to avert disaster; he provides so much wine that the party can go on and on and on....

8. The duty of providing food and drink (including wine) for the wedding party would be the bridegroom. Why, then, does Mary mention the lack of wine to Jesus? Why not go to the actual bridegroom, who was the host? Obviously, it all sets up a rather ironic situation when the (apparently clueless groom) is summoned by the head waiter and praised for providing the best wine last! But it also sets up a link between the groom (who is given credit for providing the wine) and Jesus (who has actually supplied the wine). So putting all of this

together, we must assume that when Mary brought the issue to Jesus' attention, she was actually asking him to play the part of the groom at this wedding, which means she must have known that Jesus was in some way going to be the promised husband the "widowed" nation of Israel needs.

9. The "hour" is much more than the time of Jesus revealing his identity. It is the time in which he is glorified. But in the rest of John's gospel we find the hour of his glory is the hour of his passion and death. His glorification – his lifting up – takes place on the tree of the cross; it is a paradoxical and ironic exaltation. (See John 12:27-28, 13:1, 17:1; cf. Mk. 14:35, 41f). But from another angle, the hour can be viewed as the time in which he provides for the messianic wedding feast. When Jesus says, "My hour is not yet," perhaps he means not just "The time for to die isn't yet here" but (more fittingly, given the context?), "The time for me to provide the wine of the messianic wedding feast has not yet arrived." Or even more specifically, "The hour of my wedding is not yet arrived."

So when does that hour arrive? John 13:1 answers: the hour is the hour of the Last Supper (or at least that's when the clock starts ticking). If this correct, several new lines of connection are opened up. John 2 and John 13 are linked, and the Last Supper (and thus all subsequent Eucharists) are to be understood as wedding banquets, in which the divine groom provides for his bride. The sign he does in John 2 points ahead to what will be consummated in the Last Supper and the cross, now understood as Messiah providing for and dying for his bride. To put it another way: At the wedding in Cana, Jesus will provide wine as a sign of what is to come. But it is not until he provides wine at the Last Supper that his hour arrives. The Last Supper is a wedding banquet in which the groom's hour to die for his bride finally comes.

Many men have jokingly referred to their wedding as a kind of funeral, a death to the self and of the self. But for Jesus his death day is actually his wedding day. In dying, he marries. As his side is pierced on the cross, his bride is formed out of the water (baptism) and blood (Eucharist) that flow (cf. Gen. 2).

Note also: At the Last Supper, the words of institution about the blood – "the blood of the covenant" -- echo Exodus 24, a passage in which God

“marries” Israel in a kind of bridal covenant ceremony. Jesus, as YHWH incarnate, is uniting himself to the disciples at the table the same way YHWH united himself to Israel in Exodus 24. The “hour” of John 2 is thus also to be understood as the hour of Jesus wedding to his bride the church, celebrated at the table and sealed at the cross. (This too clever by half, but it has been pointed that whereas Jesus turned water to wine at the wedding feast in Cana, he turns wine to blood at the Last Supper. Whatever the wisdom of putting it that way, both events involve wine miracles and thus help justify viewing the Last Supper in marital terms.)

10. There are many connections between John 2:1-12 and John 19:25-30. Jesus, his mother, and John are present; Mary is called “woman”; there is wine; and there is a reference to the “hour”; there are family relationships emphasized (cf. 2:12). Jesus drinks wine on the cross and then shouts out “It is finished” (or “it is consummated” or “it is paid”). The use of hyssop makes another link, since hyssop was used in the Passover (Ex. 12). Hyssop was dipped in blood in Ex. 12, but in John 19 it is dipped in wine. Hmmmm....yet another sign that the wine is his blood and his blood is wine to us!!

11. Peter Kreeft is the one who has pointed out that Mary gives the sum of practical wisdom when she says, “Whatever he tells you to do, do.” J. P. Heil points out that this language is actually an echo of Israel (as a submissive bride) pledging marital loyalty to God in the Torah.

12. Heil finds a number of other interesting connections. For example, he connects the third day to Ex. 19:11, 16, in which God manifested himself in the giving of the law. John 2 records a different kind of theophany, and one that shows messiah has come to fulfill and transform the law given through Moses. Just as the law was God’s wedding gift to his bride Israel, the wine (= the Spirit?) is Jesus’ gift to his bride. As Heil points out, this fits well with Jn. 1:17, which draws a contrast between the law given through Moses and the grace and truth (= fulfillment of the law’s shadows) that came to be through Jesus.

Heil also points out that the imagery of God as groom, his people as bride, and feasting at their nuptials (e.g., Amos 9) is common in the OT. Wine is linked not only to the wedding celebration but to victory over death itself (Isa. 25). Jesus transforms water used for cleansing and

purifying into wine used for drinking and celebrating. The water was used to purify the people as preparation for worship; the wine will be used in worship. Whereas in the old covenant, drink offerings had to be poured out before God, now the people are getting to drink in the presence of the One who is God incarnate. John 2 shows in narrative form what Hebrews argues at length: Jesus has brought in a new and better covenant.

Like many commentators, Heil notes that the empty water pots (associated with Jewish purification) point to the inadequacy of the law. The law cannot provide the wine needed to celebrate eternal life. Heil points out that Jesus and Mary assume symbolic roles as groom/bride and Jesus' statement, "my hour has not yet come" introduces dramatic tension into the story, filling us with anticipation about what Jesus will do when his hour finally does arrive. If he turns water to wine when it is *not* his hour, what great deed will he do when his hour *does* arrive?

More uniquely, again, as already noted, Heil points out that the statement, "Do whatever he tells you to do" echoes the promises of obedience the Israelites make at their own wedding ceremony to God in Exodus (cf. 19:8; 24:3, 7). This (once again!) links John 2 with the bridal and covenant forming imagery used in the OT. The servants are to be members of a bridal community, submissive and obedient to their husband, Jesus.

Finally, Heil points out that 2:12 suggests the followers of Jesus are now being formed into a new household, a family gathered around Jesus and offering him obedience/worship. If he is the tabernacle (1:14), they are now priests, communing with God as they are with him. But note he is a roving tabernacle, always on the move (often in the wilderness!). This is a recurring theme in John, e.g., John 6 in which he provides bread that is likened unto the manna from heaven in the wilderness.

13. Note that John the Baptist (the "best man"/friend of the bridegroom) came that Jesus might be *manifested* (1:31). When Jesus performs the miracle at Cana, his glory is *manifested* (2:11). The best man can now begin to get out of the way so that bridegroom can become the focus and enter the spotlight (3:30).

14. Scrivner has some excellent thoughts on how this passage shows us the glory of God in the face of Jesus. Seeing and seeking Jesus' glory is not so much a matter of duty but of delight:

Imagine the conversation between a father and his son, Dutiful Derek. The father says "One day son, you're going to meet a girl who'll steal your heart and you'll fall in love." Dutiful Derek says, "Do I *have to* fall in love?" The father says, "What an odd question. It's not so much a case of '*have to*', but when you meet the right person you will fall in love." Dutiful Derek sighs and says, "Alright, I'll try my best to fall in love."

Later his father says to Dutiful Derek, "We're going on holiday to Switzerland. And we're going to watch the sun rise over the snow-capped Alps. And we will be awe-struck." Dutiful Derek says "Do I *have to* be awe-struck?" The father says, "What an odd question. It's not so much a case of '*have to*', but when you see the view you will be awe-struck." Derek sighs deeply and says, "Alright, I'll try my best to be awe-struck."

Again the father comes to his son, "We're going to read the bible together, and we're going to see the glory of Jesus, and we will put our faith in Him." Dutiful Derek says "Do I *have to* put my faith in Him?" The father says "What an odd question. I guess in one sense: Yes. But it's not so much a case of '*have to*', but when you see His glory you will trust in Him." Dutiful Derek sighs once more, "Alright," he says, "I'll try my best to trust in Jesus."

Well Dutiful Derek grows up. And when he sees sunrise over the Swiss Alps he just IS awe-struck. And when he meets the right girl he just DOES fall in love. But as he sits in church Sunday by Sunday he feels like he *has to* trust Christ. And he tries his best to be a dutiful believer in Jesus.

Derek still hasn't learnt that the beautiful woman, the beautiful view and the beautiful Saviour are all alike. They are beautiful and if our response is simply dutiful we've lost the plot. When they are beautiful and we are dutiful we must be blind.

The beautiful woman doesn't want her husband to ***dutifully*** admire her.

"You look lovely" – he said

"Thank you" – she said – "what made you say that?"

"Oh, I thought I ought to compliment you."

Slap

Or

“Flowers, why did you buy me flowers?”

“I felt it was my duty,” he replies.

Slap

Or

“Kiss me” – she says

“Do I have to?” he asks.

Not now he doesn't. He won't be getting a kiss for a very long time!

When she is simply beautiful and her husband is simply dutiful he has lost the plot. He must be blind.

And likewise, when someone says “You MUST see sunrise over the Alps” they don't mean for you to dutifully traipse across Europe and stare at the view as a demonstration of will-power. No when the Alps are simply beautiful and you are simply dutiful you have lost the plot. You must be blind.

But here's the thing. Churches are full of people like Derek – people who are simply dutiful when Jesus is simply beautiful. In fact it's a big temptation for all of us. It's a trap I fall into, and I wonder if you do too. It's so easy to think of Christianity as my duty – trusting Jesus as something I've got to summon up by my will-power. But John's Gospel was written to tell us – if we are simply dutiful when Jesus is simply beautiful, we've lost the plot. We must be blind.

And this miraculous sign before us has been written down to open our eyes to the wondrous glory of Jesus.

Do you see what verse 11 says. After reading about the miracle, this is the summary of it:

This, the first of His miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed His glory, and His disciples put their faith in Him.

Jesus reveals His glory in these signs and His disciples put their faith in Him.

That's what Jesus is doing in all these signs: revealing His glory – He is making plain what kind of beautiful Saviour He is. The disciples see that and they put their trust in Him. They don't sit back and consider the evidence for and against and then decide on balance that they will choose to believe in Jesus. That's not how it

works. These disciples are swept off their feet by seeing the glory of Jesus. That is how faith comes. Faith comes when you see the glory of Jesus.

And the whole of John's Gospel was written so that you and I might believe in Jesus. Turn on to John chapter 20 and verse 30.

³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these [miraculous signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31)

John could have written about countless other miracles. Instead he chooses these 7 or 8 – why? Well they are SIGNS. They are whacking great signposts with a big arrow on them and the arrow is pointed to Jesus. Every sign says – Look at the glory of Jesus, see how He really is the Christ, the Son of God. And the expectation is – SEEING IS BELIEVING. When you see His GLORY you will trust Him. Just like when the young man sees His beautiful young bride or the nature lover sees the beautiful scenery – your heart is won by the glory of it. When you see Jesus you will believe in Him and find life in His name.

The bible is VERY clear – you **must** believe in Jesus. Life – true life, eternal life – is found ONLY by trusting in Jesus. Jesus Himself will say in John 3:18 – “whoever does not believe stands condemned.” We must believe in Jesus.

But how will we believe in Jesus then? Like Dutiful Derek?

Summoning up the will-power to trust in Jesus? No! We'll do what John wants us to do. Look at the signs and allow the signs to point us to Glorious Jesus. And when we see the glory of Jesus we simply will trust Him. That's the kind of response John is going for.

Beautiful!

I found a number of sources on this passage. I have preached and taught on it before, but each time, I like to draw out different emphases.

Scrivener, Keller, Heil, Pitre, and a host of others have illuminated the text for me (as seen above in these notes as well as the sermon itself).

