

SAVING A WEDDING

JOHN 2:1-11

One Friday night ole Bubba was running moonshine across the county line. A state trooper pulled him over. To make matters worse, he had an open jug sitting on the seat next to him. He'd been drinking the contraband. As soon as Bubba rolled down his window the officer could smell the alcohol on his breath. He said, "Boy, have you been drinking moonshine?" Bubba answered, "No Sir, all I drink is water!" The trooper responded, "Well, why do I smell moonshine?" Bubba looked down at the empty jug sitting next to him, and shouted, "Praise the Lord, He's done it again!" Ole Bubba knew just enough of the Bible to be dangerous. He was referring to our text this morning. In John 2 Jesus turns water into wine. The success of a wedding party, and the honor of a bride's family are in serious jeopardy until Jesus steps in to work a miracle that saves the day!

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 waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots 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.

When 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 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!" This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him."

In 2010 the average wedding in America cost a whopping \$24,066. A wedding will send a daughter into blissfulness and a daddy into bankruptcy. Weddings today have become real extravaganzas. And apparently, not much has changed in the last 2000 years. In fact, it's possible a wedding may've been more expensive in ancient times...

Historians tell us weddings in ancient Babylon lasted an entire month. During that month the bride's father supplied the wedding party with all the mead they could drink. Mead was a honey beer. Since the Babylonian calendar was lunar-based, this period got the name, "the honey month" In modern times it's now called, "the honeymoon."

Today, wedding festivities last a few hours, and at best a single meal gets served. But in Jesus' day it lasted a whole week. The wedding party was provided seven days of food and drink. It was like feeding an army... And this was the problem at the wedding Jesus attended... The host ran out of wine. His cellar was depleted. He was bone dry. He had probably even cleaned out the shelves at the local grocery store. This was a huge embarrassment. In antiquity hospitality was an exalted virtue. The inability to care for one's guests was the ultimate humiliation.

The mother of Jesus must've been a friend of the family because she asks her Son to intervene on behalf of the host. Mary then tells the servants of the house to follow Jesus' instructions precisely. She says, "Whatever He says to you, do it." Jesus tells the servants to fetch the six water pots standing nearby. Verse 6 tells us these jugs were more like barrels. They held 20-30 gallons each. Jesus says to the servants, "Fill the waterpots with water."

Understand, Jesus doesn't tell them why. He doesn't explain what will happen if they do. There's no clue as to the miracle that's about to ensue. They just obey... In verse 8 they draw some out and take it to the host. Verse 9 confirms the transformation. Usually at such a party the best wine was served first - then once the crowd was a little tipsy the cheaper wine was used. At that point few people were sober enough to notice. But here, the host is surprised. He's impressed. The bridegroom kept the best to last. No one but the servants knew it was all thanks to Jesus. A molecular miracle occurred. What went in as water came out as wine! On that day in Cana, Jesus saved a wedding... and down through the centuries, in similar ways, He's been saving marriages ever since!

John's Gospel is full of miracles with a message. Beyond revealing the deity and power of Jesus they also teach us important lessons about life... Jesus opens the eyes of a blind man as proof He can remove spiritual blinders from our perspective. He calls Lazarus from the grave, and says to us that He can overcome our spiritual deadness, and give us new life. He feeds 5000 with bread and a few fish to teach us that He can satisfy our spiritual hunger. And here too is another miracle with a message...

Jesus is still in the business of turning water into wine. Just as He took zero-calorie water and turned it into a full, rich wine - He can take the drab, mundane, boring duties of everyday life, and suddenly make them sweet. One of the leading, but most overlooked illnesses in our society is boredom. Even in a world where people are surrounded with amusements and media - entertainment everywhere - people still suffer from boredom. In the words of every teenage girl - "bor-ring!" Has your life been infected with boredom?

It reminds me of the flight attendant who announced, "For lunch today you have a choice of chicken Marengo, beef burritos, or fruit salad." Then she commented, "And if you don't get your first choice, please don't be distressed. All our entrees taste very much the same." After a while that's what happens in life - it all tastes the same. Experiences become blah. Pleasures bland. It's the same ole same ole. Life tastes like water. But Jesus has the ability to turn water into wine... Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus adds supernatural fermentation to life. An interaction occurs between His Spirit and our spirit. He replaces our blahs with His bubbly. He restores sparkle and flavor to life. He lifts us out of our rut, and turns our lives into an adventure.

And let me also say, Jesus can not only deliver you from a boring life - He can also spice up and transform a boring marriage. Jesus could've turned water into wine at Jacob's well... or at the pool of Bethesda... or by the Jordan River... But He chose to perform this miracle at a wedding! I think this was Jesus' way of honoring marriage - showing us His respect for marriage. Proverbs 18:22 tells us, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing." Jesus agrees. He loves marriage - even your marriage - and is willing to work miracles if necessary to make it the best it can be. This was Jesus' very first miracle! He saved a wedding by turning water into wine - and He's been saving marriages the same way every since... Jesus is able to take a workable marriage and make it a wonderful marriage - turn a tolerable marriage into a thrilling marriage. Jesus can turn water into wine! I think many married couples have set their sights too low. They muddle through marriage - the couple's goal is to survive rather than thrive.

Once, an old man – past 90 - asked his pastor to officiate his wedding. The following conversation ensued... The pastor asked him, “Wow, you’re pretty old to be getting married. Do you love this woman?” The old man answered, “Nope.” “Is she a Christian woman?” “I don’t know.” “Well, does she have lots of money?” “I doubt it.” “Well, why are you marrying her?” The old man answered, “Cause she can drive at night.” Some marriages are arrangements of convenience, rather than celebrations of love. Jesus wants to turn your watery marriage into wine. He wants to bless your marriage with a miracle that will restore the excitement, and thrill, and tang, and sparkle, and sizzle, and bubbly! In fact, let me emphasize an important point... I believe from time to time every marriage needs a miracle. Even good marriages have problems because every marriage is made up of two fallible, sinful, selfish people – and you know who those two people are... Of course, they’re your spouse and your mother-in-law. I’m always astonished when I hear of a marriage that broke up because of **Incompatibility!** Every marriage is made up of two incompatible people – one’s a man, one’s a woman. We’re incompatible from the start! As one fellow put it, “**The only thing my wife and I have in common is that we got married on the same day.**”

My friend Wayne Taylor says this about husbands and wives... “**It’s a bit like putting a dog and cat together, there are different temperaments and different ways... there’s bound to be a lot of barking, biting, clawing, and scratching.**” Speaking of comparing husbands and wives to cats and dogs.

What is a cat?

Cats do what they want.

They rarely listen to you.

They’re totally unpredictable.

When you want to play, they want to be alone.

When you want to be alone, they want to play.

They expect you to cater to their every whim.

They are moody.

They leave hair everywhere.

They drive you nuts and cost an arm and a leg.

Conclusion: Cats are tiny women in fur coats.

What is a dog?

Dogs lie around all day, sprawled out on the most comfortable piece of furniture in the house.

They can hear a package of food opening half a block away, but they don’t hear you when you are in the same room.

They growl when they’re not happy.

When you want to play, they want to play.

When you want to be alone, they want to play.

They are great at begging.

They will love you forever if you rub their tummies.

They leave their toys everywhere.

They do disgusting things with their mouth; then try to kiss you.

Conclusion: Dogs are little men in fur coats.

Recently, I read some startling statistics... Did you know that “54% of American women don’t know that a touchdown counts six points? And 70% don’t know that a safety counts two points?” That shows how far apart men and women really are.

Husbands and wives are like dogs and cats – they’re obviously incompatible – that’s why it takes a miracle to keep a marriage at its best. It takes a work of God to help us understand, and tolerate, and show patience – to learn to celebrate our differences, rather than bemoan them. After being married to Ruth for five decades, Billy Graham was asked to describe his marriage. Billy said, “We are happily incompatible.” But here’s what it takes to be happily incompatible... You have to die to your selfishness – and your pride – and your expectations of how your mate should behave – and your prejudices - and even some preferences. You have to love your spouse enough to give them room to be themselves.

Moses represented the Law - and the Law found fault. It was picky. It exposed our sin and deficiencies. It ultimately brought condemnation. Moses was the Law-giver, and recall his first miracle? Moses held up his staff and turned the Nile River to blood. He turned water into blood. And if your marriage is grounded in Law. If you treat each other with strict, unbending expectations – if you’re judgmental and always finding fault – if you insist on standards that are bound to be broken... It’ll get ugly and bloody.

But Jesus, the Grace-bringer. His first miracle was turned water to wine. And if you’ll forgive your spouse, and choose to look past their inevitable faults. If you’ll treat each other with grace - and love each other with love you don’t deserve - as Jesus loves you... miracles will happen.

This is why my suggestion for every marriage is a lot of kissing. Lots of kissing is a strategic habit. Here’s why? “When two people kiss they’re so close together they can’t see anything wrong with each other.” It’s been said, “The formula for a happy marriage is the same as living in an earthquake zone... when you find a fault, don’t dwell on it.” Living under Law – especially your own set of laws – will kill a marriage. But grace and forgiveness sets a marriage free to be what God intended.

The wedding at Cana teaches us that every marriage needs a miracle... and it teaches us why? Marriages over time tend to run out of wine. Marriage can go flat. Like life in general, marriage can lose its pop, and sparkle, and bubbly. “Holy matrimony” can turn into “holy monotony.”

It’s the day in - day out - the daily grind.
It’s the pressure-cooker world we live in and all its distractions.
It’s the responsibilities, and our failure to say thank-you.
It’s our tendency to take each other for granted.
It’s the familiarity and loss of adventure.
It’s forgetting the little things.
It’s a million things... that causes a marriage to go flat.

It's been said, "Marriage is like a violin – after the music stops the strings are still attached." How do you start plucking the right strings again? How do you restart the music? The answers are in today's passage... If you want Jesus to save your marriage from mediocrity... just like He saved the wedding at Cana... there are three steps for you to take... First, **Invite Jesus**. Second, **Obey Jesus**. Third, **Trust Jesus**. Notice first, the simplest step, yet the one that's most overlooked. Verse 2 tells us, "Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding."

Years ago, when Johnny Carson hosted "The Tonight Show" he interviewed an eight year old boy who had rescued two friends from a collapsed coalmine outside his hometown in West Virginia. As Johnny questioned the boy, it became apparent the young man was a Christian. He asked him if he attended Sunday school. When the boy said he did, Johnny inquired, "What are you learning in Sunday school?" The little boy replied, "Last week, we learned that Jesus went to a wedding and turned water into wine." The audience roared with laughter. Johnny tried to keep a straight face. "What did you learn from that story?" After thinking for a few seconds, the little boy smiled, and said, "If you're going to have a wedding, make sure you invite Jesus!" Great advice!

The names of the man and woman who were married that day in Cana are never mentioned, but we know they were a very smart twosome. They did the best thing they could do for their marriage... **They invited Jesus to their wedding**. Have you done the same?

Here's what you get when you **invite Jesus** to your marriage...
A pastor who'll remind you of your vows and coach you to keep them.
A wedding director who'll keep you in step...
A marriage counselor who'll help you through your problems...
A family planner who'll provide you wisdom for important decisions...
A motivational speaker who'll fire you up and energize you...
A friend who'll be there for your kids...
A parent to parent them when you're not there...
I'll tell you, invite Jesus to the wedding, and you'll never regret it...

Yet I can hear some of you saying, "Pastor Sandy, I wish we had invited Jesus. That's our problem. We were married before we knew Jesus. We didn't think to invite Him, and if we had, He might not have been welcome. We started out all wrong! And that's why there's no hope for us now?" Who's to say you can't invite Jesus to your marriage today? It's never too late. Remember, Jesus didn't work this miracle until the wedding party was almost over... This wedding also looked like a hopeless situation...

Over the years, I've done numerous vow renewal ceremonies – and I like the idea of renewing your vows. You renew your driver's license – and your fishing license – and your library card – why not your marriage vows? And you don't need a ceremony to do it. This morning, in your heart of hearts you can invite Jesus to your marriage. In fact, I'm praying you will!

The second step to take to turn a watery marriage into wine is to **obey Jesus**. In verse 5, Mary says to the servants, "Whatever He says, do it." Get on your knees today, invite Jesus to your marriage - then whatever He tells you... just do it! Fill six water pots and fill them to the brim. There are two things I see in Jesus' command, "Fill the waterpots with water."

First, He tells them to **take what they have and present it to Him**. Yes, they're out of wine. It's wine they need, not water - but every miracle starts with what you've got. Jesus miraculously provided enough bread and fish to feed 15,000 people, but the miracle started with just five loaves and two fish. **Take an inventory of your marriage - what you got?** "Well, we're faithful to each other. We don't like each other, but at least we honor the fact we're still married." Good! That's a good place to start... Take that faithfulness and put it in the pot.

What else you got? "We've got kids..." Good again - put it in! "Well, there are some rare moments when we both are still physically attracted to each other..." That's real good. Put that in the pot also. "We have a few hobbies we enjoy doing with each other – it's been a long time since we've done them, but when we do..." That's good too.

Take whatever you've got – no matter how meager... pour it in the pot. Present it to Jesus. Pray, "Lord, we believe You want to work a miracle in our marriage, so we give you what we've got left as a place to start. Here're our 5 loaves and 2 fish. We trust You to multiply our meagerness."

And the second point I glean from Jesus' command... **be enthusiastic**. In verse 7 the servants obeyed Jesus, but with gusto... "They filled (the waterpots) up to the brim." These servants got serious - made an extra effort. They didn't just fill the pots – they filled them until they sloshed over. Hey, give Jesus all you've got left... but give it to Him enthusiastically. Don't just mouth a prayer about your marriage, without really expecting Jesus to do a miracle. You'll never taste wine if you're not sincere.

I hear couples offer the excuse, "Yea, this sermon might be a good idea, but I don't feel the way I use to... I don't really love him anymore..." And that's okay! You don't have to love your spouse for Jesus to turn water into wine. Jesus never asks you to fake it... just take it - whatever it is you do feel... Perhaps, it's just the desire not to fail... or a commitment to principle... or a simple stubbornness... or a hatred for divorce... or the recollection of your vows... or some vague hope... or maybe it's the example of a friend... or it could be a willingness for the kids' sake... Whatever it is your marriage has going for it – no matter how small or insignificant - pour it in the pot – and do so, enthusiastically. Re-engage yourself in the marriage – fill it to the brim - and Jesus will work a miracle.

I'll never forget the man in our church who left his wife and moved in with a younger woman. The estranged wife called me, crying, "Pastor Sandy, this just isn't right. My husband has violated his marriage vow, and he's breaking my heart. You need to reach out to him and confront him..." So I did. I took two of the elders and went to the apartment where the man was living and read him the riot act! We threatened to kick the guy out of the body of Christ if he didn't repent and come back to his wife. We showed the guy some tough love! The next day I got a call from the man's wife. I thought I'd get a thank you, but she was angry. She was livid at me. She wanted to know how I could be so mean to her husband. She shouted over the phone, "Who did you think you are to tell my husband you'll kick him out of the Church?"

And neither this husband or his wife ever came back to CC, but I see this couple from time to time. They're still married – over 25 years later... Here's what happened... They both got so mad at me, for the first time in months they had something in common. I brought them back together. **God used me to save a marriage... in a way I never would've dreamed**. The same can happen in marriage... You don't have to get lovey dovey. I'm not asking you to get mushy, just find a pastor to get mad at together. Take whatever commonality you got and enthusiastically pour it in the pot.

When the wedding party in Cana faced their situation they must've thought, "Jesus, why are we putting water in the pots – it's wine we need?" But Jesus knew what he could do with water. Jesus could do with water what no one else could do. He could take mere water and end up with all the wine they wanted. All Jesus needed was for the servants at the wedding feast to get the water into the pots. Guys, first, invite Jesus to the marriage – and second, obey Jesus.

The third step to turn a watery marriage into wine is to **trust Jesus**. Mary told the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." Jesus told them to take six water pots and fill them up with water. Until this point, there was no talk of a miracle. Jesus tells them what to do, but not why... In fact, His instructions seem silly. They make no sense. If you need wine what are you doing messing around with water? This is the problem you'll run into if you really want God to work a miracle in your marriage...

There are some things Jesus has already told you to do... In fact, they're so vital He wrote them down. The Bible tells wives to forgive, and submit to their husbands as the Church submits to Christ... And husbands need to forgive, and love their wives as Jesus loves us. But submitting to an imperfect man seems about as silly as putting water into water pots, and expecting wine... And loving an ungrateful gal seems about as silly as putting water into water pots and expecting wine... Some of you might say, "I don't want a miracle enough to do that..." And maybe that's why your marriage lacks the miracle it needs!

For this wedding party to receive their miracle, they had to follow Mary's instructions, "Whatever He says to you, do it..." They had to trust Jesus enough to do exactly what He told them. And we have to do the same... To receive a miracle – to turn a watery marriage into a bubbly, sparkling romance - you've got to believe Jesus loves you, and will take care of you, and will use your simple obedience to work a wonderful miracle.

Today, Jesus is going to get very specific with you... He always does. Pay attention to what He's already told you in His Word, then when He gives you specific instructions, trust Him enough to follow Him precisely. Jesus saved a wedding in Cana... And He can save your marriage...

Invite Him... to enter your marriage and rearrange your attitudes.

Obey Him... Give Him all you've got left, and do it enthusiastically.

Trust Him... even if He doesn't explain how or why... just do it!

Jesus is able to put a wow back into your vow... **Invite Him, obey Him, trust Him** - and watch Jesus turn your watery marriage into vintage wine!