



## INTRO:

C.S. Lewis said that we ALL have ideas about God, BUT that those ideas aren't necessarily, what he called, "divine ones," meaning in line with who God actually is. And so from time-to-time and really time-AFTER-time, they have to be shattered. WHICH is one of the things, Lewis says, that God's up to in your life - shattering and leaving in ruins, ANY belief you have about Him that's NOT rooted in Him being your Messiah.<sup>1</sup> And of course, Lewis derives that idea from just reading Scripture; most notably, the *Gospel of John*, in which John tells us in **ch.20, v.31**, that he's written this Gospel "*SO THAT you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing have life in his name.*" That's why we've titled our series "***That You Believe.***"

Now if you've been with us, you know that in ch. 1 we saw Jesus not only *revealed* in a number of different ways BUT having gained real *publicity* through the ministry of John the Baptist, and last week, the calling of His first disciples... TODAY, we're continuing this theme of *publicity*/the public ministry of Jesus BY looking at Jesus' first ever miracle, or as John calls it there in **v.II**, "*sign.*" "*The first ever sign Jesus did to manifest His glory.*" And this idea of a "*sign*" is really important because ya think about inaugural signs/public presentations like this, ESPECIALLY from leaders of great movements, of which Jesus was certainly the greatest and ya think about tremendous CARE being given to it *right*? Ya know ensuring that the atmosphere is right and that the correct message is communicated/even that people are energized and get bought-in! I mean certainly from Jesus, we'd expect that His inaugural sign would be something dramatic like walking on water, raising the dead; I'd even take a lighting bolt or two. But certainly NOT helping a party...go longer than previously scheduled...Wow! So not only does the fact of this force us to say, "*this event must've happened,*" since as one scholar says, "*If (you're) inventing a life of Jesus, you'd wanna make sure His first miracle was especially quintessential (and this is not that).*"<sup>2</sup> BUT it leads us to ask, if you're taking notes: 2 "Why's" and 2 "What's": **Why This Happened?**, and **Why Jesus Did It?** AND **What He Meant By It?** and **What He's Teaching Us WITH It?**...*So Let's Pray* and then study this passage under those 4 headings: "*Lord Jesus, we thank you this morning for providing us with this miraculous and historically preserved sign - which really serves as an enacted picture of everything you are and all that Christianity is. Help us now to drink of its riches, taste of its beauty, and in so doing really grasp the joy of all that we have in You our Savior. We pray this in your name...Amen!*"

## TEXT:<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "*My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast. Could we not almost say that this shattering is one of the marks of His presence? The Incarnation is the supreme example; it leaves all previous ideas of the Messiah in ruins.*" - From *A Grief Observed* - Cited in Lewis, C. S.. *A Year with C. S. Lewis* (p. 303). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in "Lord of the Wine - The Real Jesus, Part 2; His Life"—November 17, 1996 - John 2:1–11 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Message aided by insights from numerous sermons including:

- "Lord of the Wine - The Real Jesus, Part 2; His Life"—November 17, 1996 - John 2:1–11 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).
- "Jesus at His Friend's Feast - The Vision of Redeemer"—November 27, 2005 - John 2:1–11 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).
- "The Feast - Seeing Jesus"—January 12, 2014 - John 2:1–11 - Timothy J. Keller, "**The Feast.**" in *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive, 2014–2015* (New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2014), Jn 2:1–11.
- "Episode 50: The Good Wine" - Larkcast - June 21, 2022 - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000567251214>

So 2 “Why’s” and 2 “What’s”: **First, Why This Happened?**/why do we even have this sign of water-into-wine in the first place? And the short answer is: Because there was about to be a HUGE party-fowl. **Anyone ever been to a wedding or fancy banquet in which they didn’t serve food and drink?** Yeah, it’s the worst! Ya get all dressed up, foot the bill for an Uber or Taxi, usually have to suffer through some boring presentation, but ya do it, **why?** Cuz you assume you’re gonna be well-fed **right?** Like, I’ll pretty much suffer through anything if you promise me a steak and an open bar. But you make it a couple carrot sticks and a cash bar...well that’s just rude...THAT is merely a shadow of the rudeness and lack of hospitality that was about to go down at this wedding. Cuz ya gotta understand weddings in ancient Israel, quite often, lasted multiple days. Even today when, according to “[weddingstats.org](http://weddingstats.org)”/yes, I did look this up - the average wedding costs \$30,000 - even WITH that in mind, weddings in Ancient Israel were still MUCH bigger deals. They were the central event of a village. And FOR these weddings, the Groom was on the hook to provide the wine and food, so that when the wine ran out, the party was over! Not to mention, because we’re talking about a wedding in the context of an “honor-shame” culture - if the Groom’s family didn’t fulfill the social expectation of providing a multi-day good time, then we’re not talking about minor catering issue; we’re talking about a disaster!

And we KNOW this, because of the simple fact that Jesus’ mom - Mary - requests Jesus’ help. And when I say “requests,” that’s putting it lightly cuz you see in **v.3** and **5**, there’s really no request, so much as there is a telling. Mary telling Jesus, “*the wine’s out,*” giving Him a moment to rebut, but then basically turning to the servants/the catering team and saying, “*do what He tells you.*” In other words, she pulls a move that only a mother could pull: “*Jesus I know you’re God, cuz ya know while most people find out they’re preggers by peeing on a stick; I found out through an angel...as a virgin. So I get it, and I’ll let you handle this any way you want. But you’re handling it. Boys, listen to what he says.*” So quite simply the reason we have this sign is cuz a rescue was needed; specifically, a rescue from the guilt and shame that was about to ensue!

So **Second, Why Then Did Jesus DO This Sign?** Cuz you notice in **v.4**, He didn’t want to. When Mary asks Him for help He says, “*Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour hasn’t yet come.*” ...Let’s be clear here: If telling the Son of God what to do, is something only a mother can pull; then calling your mother “*woman,*” is something only the Son of God can pull. Cuz that’s really what He says. Some translations’ll add “*dear*” so that Jesus is saying, “*Dear woman,*” cuz they can’t fathom Jesus being terse, but in the Greek, it’s literally just “*woman*”!<sup>4</sup> **Why does He speak this way?** Well, let me ask ya: When you catch yourself seemingly being impatient with someone, but they haven’t really done anything, **why is it?** Isn’t it often because you’re thinking about something else - maybe something that already has you down? I’ve enjoyed the privilege of officiating a number of weddings and one of the things I’ll occasionally encounter is someone who says something rude to the bride. Maybe the bride asks a bridesmaid if she’ll help with something...totally reasonable, but then kinda outta nowhere, the bridesmaid says, “*fine!*” What I’ve learned is that the reason that bridesmaid “snapped back” isn’t cuz of anything the bride did per se, but because that bridesmaid was...maybe thinking about how she

<sup>4</sup> γυνή, αὐτός, ἡ (Hom.+; loanw. in rabb.) - an adult female person, woman - William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 208.

wished SHE were the bride, or that it was HER wedding day... Tim Keller says that the reason Jesus appears to snap at Mary here is because He, too, is thinking about something else; specifically, HIS wedding day - that day when He would unite you and me to Himself. What He calls here "*His hour.*"... He's thinking about that day when as the **OT prophets** spoke - we won't just relate to God as subjects relate to a King, but relate to Him as a child relates to their Father. When the church proper, as **Ephesians** calls us, can rightly become "*the bride of Christ,*" and evermore when as **Revelation** says, we're "*invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!*" Jesus is thinking about HIS wedding day! But as such, ALSO thinking about what it's gonna take to make that day happen... namely, His death on the Cross!... So Mary asks Him for help and He says, "*my time hasn't come. I'M NOT READY!*" Cuz of course, the MINUTE Jesus starts doing miracles, is the minute that wheel toward His crucifixion starts spinning. Cuz you remember, John the Baptist got blowback from just baptizing people with water. Imagine the blowback Jesus'll get if He starts turning water...to wine? He doesn't wanna do it!

But here's the thing: He DOES. **Vv.6-8** He tells the catering staff to "*Fill the 6 stone jars...with water...And then draw out a cup to give to the master of the feast*"... He does it anyway! **Why?... Listen... To reveal God's heart!** To reveal God's heart!/To show these servants and YOU and me, that even when it might not be the most opportune time/even when it might bring blowback, **GOD can't help...but help those...who need help!** He can't help but help those who need help... Friend, THAT'S God's heart! And perhaps ESPECIALLY for those of you who KNOW you need help! Cuz notice, the only people who/frankly get to experience this miracle: are Mary and the catering staff. The bride and groom don't know that they're about to be out of wine. The "master of the feast" just thinks the bride and groom have generously saved the best for last. And none of the guests are any the wiser. The ONLY people who really experience this miracle are those who know they need rescuing!... There may not be a better picture of what Jesus and Christianity is all about...than that! That unless you admit that you need rescuing from your sin/guilt/shame or just your ability to find true happiness...unless you can admit that, you're never gonna experience God's power! **The reason Jesus does this sign:** is to reveal to you that God's heart is NOT to help those who help themselves but to help those who CAN'T help themselves! Rescue those of us who know we need rescuing cuz we've gotten to the end of our "virtuous ropes"... **Is that you?** OR do you still believe/even if you wouldn't say it, that your wisdom, skill, determination, goodness HAS gotten/or CAN get you the good life? **God's heart!**

**Third,** So Then **What Does Jesus MEAN By This Sign?** We know Why it happened... Why He did it... What does He MEAN by it? Well, look in **v. 7-9**. Cuz ya see multiple references to this "*master of the feast*" **right?** Basically, this guy was in charge of keeping the party going. So think part-Wedding Planner, part DJ, and even part Best Man. The Greek phrase for him is actually "Lord of the Feast." He's a big deal... But here's the thing: He's about to be a complete dud, as this party's about to fall flat on its head. Cuz we have no indication that this guy's on top of things enough to know that the wine's almost out... And so when Jesus doesn't just bring more wine, but bring BETTER wine He not only saves this guy's tail; He makes both HE and the Groom look REAL good. **You see that?** So what Jesus **MEANS** to show is that HE HIMSELF is the true "Lord of the Feast!" HE'S the one who can not only SAVE the party but increase the joy

OF the party! In other words, Jesus' inaugural sign wasn't just to show that He's powerful or sovereign like we might expect, but to show YOU that there's no life, no joy, no true happiness APART from Him. As John said earlier in chapter 1, *"In him is life."* Earlier in **Isaiah 25** the Prophet Isaiah told Israel, *"On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples...the best of meats and finest of wines. On this mountain...he'll swallow up death forever."* Later in **John 15**, Jesus has that very famous teaching about abiding in Him and discipleship being about trust and obedience. It's an incredible picture, but at the end of it He says, *"I've told you these things"/this whole incredible teaching NOT so that you'd do the right thing, or so you become the best version of yourself or something, BUT He says, "so that my JOY may be in you, and YOUR joy may be full."* Jesus is saying, *"the first thing I mean to do/the primary thing I mean to show you is that I've come to bring festive joy."*

Now I don't mean to be judgmental here/more just observational, but ***why do you think most people in our neighborhood/our city are not worshipping anywhere this morning? Why do WE have a hard time being here every week among other things?*** Part of it at least is cuz in the back of our minds - and I hear this all the time - we believe that Christianity might be ok/might even be good, but it's really no fun and frankly there's MORE fun things we could be doing. ***Ever heard that/maybe thought it?***... Well what Jesus is doing here, is in a sense, throwing down the gauntlet and saying, *"Look I coulda done ANYTHING for my first sign, but what I want you to see is that my heart/the heart of God is not just helping those who know they need help - as if to just take you OUT of a predicament/make life a little easier, which is often how we approach God - BUT to bring you INTO real joy"/something He ultimately authenticated with His resurrection. So practically speaking, if you're gonna reject/disbelieve or just disobey Jesus you gotta at least have the intellectual honesty to admit two things: **One**, that seeking real joy outside of Jesus is gonna lack. Or as Marie Antoinette famously said, *"nothing tastes."* And then **Two**, admit that if you're rejecting Jesus cuz ya think He's all rules, regulations and self-sacrifice, then you're just not seeing Him correctly. Not that those things AREN'T a part of the Christian life/they are! But IN the Christian life THOSE things are a means to an end; namely, experiencing the festive joy of the "Lord of the Feast." That's what Jesus **means** with this sign!*

So ***Finally, What He's Teaching Us With It?*** And ya gotta look closely and ***First*** notice that in **v.6**, John makes a special point of mentioning that the jars Jesus used for this miracle - and He coulda used anything ***right?***/John didn't have to MENTION anything - But the jars Jesus intentionally uses are purification jars USED by Jews for ceremonial washing, as a part of their sacrificial system of worship. So these jars weren't just big - *"holding 20 or 30 gallons"* it says - they were a big deal! Cuz they represented being cleansed of sin and therefore able to enter into God's holy presence. But notice...***what's going on with em?***...NOTHING ***right?*** Prior to Jesus doing anything with em, they're just sittin in a corner, collecting dust, serving ZERO practical use for the need at hand! That's the first thing ya gotta notice. But ***Second***, ya gotta notice in **v.10**, after the master of the feast tastes the new wine, he turns to the bridegroom and he says in astonishment, *"Everyone (normally) serves the good wine first, and THEN the poor wine, after people've drunk freely - ya know are a little tipsy and can't tell the difference - But YOU, he says to the Groom, have kept the good wine until now."* ***What's he doing?*** He's giving the Groom all

the credit! And the Groom's TAKING it/doesn't correct him... So put these two things together: On the one hand and with the jars, you've got the epitome of religious practice - ya know the set of dos and don'ts we assume relate-us-to and make us blessed-by God - being literally empty for helping us in our time of need. And then on the other hand, you've got someone who does NOTHING getting all the credit! ***Put those together. What does that sound like? Grace right?*** It sounds like unmerited favor. Cuz see, with this sign, Jesus is trying to ***teach*** you, that as the true Lord of the Feast, the only way to interact with and ultimately be blessed BY Him is when you're, what I'll call "***desperately defiant***" or "***boldly low.***" And I mean, on the one hand/like Mary and the catering staff, ya have to admit you're out, that you don't deserve anything, can't earn anything, and that you don't just need God to "top off" your life as it were; you need Him to fill you up, because APART from Him, you're empty! And no amount of hard work, dedication, religiosity, spirituality, or morality is gonna change that. ***Desperate/Lowly!*** But then too...you have to take all the credit. You gotta be like this Groom and accept complete credit for Jesus' work. So also, ***Bold and Defiant*** in the sense of being resistant to unbelief! In other words, you have to see that you don't deserve ANYTHING BUT you've been given EVERYTHING!

So let me make this real practical: You're wondering what it looks like to interact with Jesus after you've sinned, fallen short or just don't have a relationship with Jesus in the first place. You gotta go to Him and say, "*Jesus, I've blown it. I've blown it in living for myself. And nothing I do'll make it any better cuz I'm obsessed with myself - we all are - So Jesus accept me NOT because of what I do, but entirely because of what you've DONE!*" ***You see both the lowliness AND the boldness in that? The desperation but almost defiant trusting of God?***...Or maybe you've just got something on your mind/something kinda gnawing away at ya/it keeps ya up at night/not a huge deal, but it's there right? What you have to do is go to Jesus and say, "*Lord this might be a small request - a "wine issue" if you will - but I believe you to be good and to care about me even more than the birds of the air and lilies of the field. So I'm bringing it to you anyway.*" There's a lowliness but also boldness there!...Or maybe you're feeling confused, lost-even cuz you just doing understand why things are working out the way they are. You gotta go to Jesus and say, "*Lord, I don't understand what you're doing. Cuz you said, "it's not your hour" but then "you'd stepped in," so I don't know what the heck's going on. I need you! And like that catering staff, I'll do whatever you ask.*" Desperate but also defiant in terms of not disobeying... Or maybe it's just more personal and you're thinking right now, "*Lord all this talk about weddings/marriages, it just makes me wanna BE married/have a BETER marriage/not regret the marriage I DID have but lost. Help me...to not just NOT feel low, but not put ANYTHING in place of you, knowing that the future "marriage feast of the lamb" will far surpass any marriage I COULD have or lack now.*" ***Again, you see the bold-lowliness?*** That's what ya gotta have!

Dwight Moody was a minister in Chicago in the late 1800s when his church along with a number of the homes of those IN his church was destroyed by the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. And Moody recounts how after that disaster, he fell into a period of deep depression. Got really low! (Some of you know what that's like, and perhaps all of us understand that being a Christian doesn't insulate us from brokenness.) But Moody just had this great sense of weakness and despondency about him that he couldn't lift. And one day when he was in New York City raising

money to rebuild homes back in Chicago, and he found himself just praying, *“Lord, become a reality to me. I’m in bread and water. But I need wine. Give me the wine.”* **You hear both the lowliness boldness of that prayer? Desperation but also defiant belief that God wanted to bless?** Well Moody says that at some point during his stay in the city, he was again walking around and it became like something he almost couldn’t describe/even says he’d seldom refer to after, because it was almost too sacred of an experience to name. But he began to have SUCH an experience of God’s joy that He actually prayed for God to stop because it was so overwhelming. But Moody concluded with this amazing statement. He said, *“I would not now be placed back where I was before that experience if you should give me all the world.”* **What was he saying?** He was saying, *“I was happy and thought I was doin alright. Until the wine ran out - Cuz the wine always runs out. - But NOW/now, he’s saying, no matter what “joys” I might’ve known before, I’m not going back! Cuz you Jesus are the true Lord of the Feast!”* ...Desperate-Defiance!...Bold-Lowliness!... *“Father, in a moment, as we take up the offering, and reflect together, we pray that the salvation you’ve ordained, and which Jesus - the Lord of the Feast - has accomplished, would now be applied to us - by the Spirit - and in a fresh way. Help us see the joy that we get to ENJOY if only we’ll admit our need and accept your work on our behalf. If only we’ll be both lowly and bold! We pray this in your name...!”*