**John 2:1-11 “Full to the Brim”**
“I Am” – Sermon 4

Prop: Lift your eyes from the poverty of the world to the abundance of Christ.

Intro: Who has ever heard this passage before? Who has ever heard this passage used at a wedding or in reference to marriage? Who has ever heard it used in the discussion about whether Christians should drink alcohol? Alright, let’s start out by covering all the tangential issues that, yes, this passage does speak to, but that’s not really what it’s about. First of all, yes, Jesus does create alcohol. It was a common drink at the time, especially for celebrations, as it has been throughout history, and the Bible never questions it. No, Jesus does not thereby endorse getting plastered at a wedding reception or any other time. Yes, Jesus does attend this wedding, and it is good indication that Jesus approves of marriage. No, Jesus was not married himself and he does not restrict either happiness or whole as a person only to those who are married. Yes, Jesus called his mother, “Woman.” No, I would not recommend calling your mother, “Woman.”

This passage gets thrown around a lot, but so often we focus on the incidental points instead of looking at it for what it wants to say about itself. [v 11]. Whatever other points we might want to observe here, the reason it is here is because it is the first of Jesus’ signs. Now you know what a sign is for—it’s to tell you about something other than itself. If we saw a bunch of people standing outside gathered around our church sign because they wanted to come to our church, we’d tell them they missed. Don’t get hung up on the sign but what the sign leads you to: you have to read a sign to understand it. So what does this first sign of Jesus show us? “His glory.” “He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.” It’s not really about a wedding in Cana and it’s not about wine; it’s about who Jesus is:

1. Jesus is the overflowing fountain of the abundance of the kingdom of God.
	1. That’s not all that Jesus is. I don’t mean to limit him to this definition. He is the Lord, he is our Judge, but during his ministry on earth, Jesus also demonstrated repeatedly and abundantly the life and joy and restoration of the kingdom of God.
	2. This is important to remember when we sometimes re-center scripture around ourselves.
		1. If you compare this miracle to some others that Jesus does, for example raising someone from the dead, you might think, “Great. He made some wine.” And I’ve heard preachers try to validate this miracle by talking about what a serious social disgrace it was to run out of wine at a wedding feast. And yes, I don’t doubt that it would have been embarrassing. We went to a wedding for some friends once when they miscalculated how much food they would need, so there wasn’t enough food for everyone to have dinner. We felt really bad for them; they’re really great people and it was embarrassing for them. When Jesus’ mother goes to him and says, “Hey, they’re running out of wine,” this is probably what Mary has in mind. After all, Jesus did bring in five extra guests with him. Mary felt bad for these friends who didn’t have enough wine for their guests. Okay, fair enough. But that’s not what gives the miracle validity. For millennia people have tried to convince God to do miracles for them by demonstrating how worthy their cause is, how serious their situation, how deserving the recipients. When we’re talking about some social embarrassment because we ran out of alcohol, it’s kind of hard to argue that case.
		2. But Jesus does it anyway. Because it’s not about how serious our need is. We don’t have to pry favors out of Jesus’ clenched fists. Jesus gives and gives generously because the greatness of the miracle is not about how great our need but about how great the glory of Christ that is revealed through it. And Jesus shows here that he is the overflowing fountain of the abundance of the kingdom of God.
	3. For three years, Jesus walks the length and breadth of the old territory of Israel, from Galilee to Judea and back again, and everywhere he goes, people are healed, the hungry are filled, the dead are raised. It’s completely unlike anything you encounter on earth. It is the kingdom of heaven breaking through and bringing life and healing to the brokenness of this world. It’s like wherever Jesus goes, death and hunger and sickness are pushed back and the power of the resurrection is visible among us. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of abundance and life and restoration, and as Jesus travels around, that abundance overflows through him.
		1. That’s why it doesn’t matter how great the need is. Jesus gives abundantly more than what is needed. Do you realize how much wine Jesus created? Six stone jars, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. That’s 120 to 180 gallons of wine. This was not exactly a royal banquet with thousands of guests; suppose they had 200 wedding guests. Does each one really need to consume half a gallon to a gallon of wine at this wedding feast? Not at all; it would actually be a really bad idea. But this little wedding feast is graced with royal abundance because the King is in attendance as a guest. What Jesus gives is not proportionate to the need but proportionate to his glory. His abundance overflows far greater than our need.
		2. The point, then, is not our need but his abundance. Who Jesus is and what he has come to do are on a completely different level than the way we usually think of our lives. The point of this miracle is to shift our attention off the things we so often worry about onto Christ and what he offers. We spend all our time praying for Jesus to fix our problems, to heal our illnesses. Jesus is telling us here, Yes, I can fix your problems. Yes, I can heal your illnesses. There is not a cancer, not an injury, not an infection Jesus cannot take away. He can give abundantly more than all that. But what he wants is to raise our eyes from the level of the things we fret about and complain about and pray about, to his level, where we know him and his glory and his goodness. Whether he can provide is not even a question; but the greater question is, do we see him for who he is?
2. The Year of the Lord’s Favor
	1. I suspect there is a reason that John takes the time to explain to us that these stone jars were used by the Jews for ceremonial cleansing. Jesus is showing us that a new age in world history has just dawned.
		1. These stone jars are there because for centuries, the Jewish people have been following the rituals of the Law to try to compensate for their sinfulness. And the Law was a good gift, because we do have this sinful nature and if we want to know the God who made us, we need to deal with that. But these washing ceremonies had to be done over and over, because they could never really take away our sin, any more than offering sheep and goats and bulls on the altar could make a human being holy. Instead they served as constant reminders of our sinfulness and our distance from God. That’s the old age.
		2. Now Jesus appears, and he knows exactly what those stone jars are for. I doubt a pious Jewish person would dream of putting wine in a vessel set apart for the sacred cleansing rites demanded by the Law of God. But Jesus has the servants fill these stone jars with ordinary water, and fill them to the brim. These servants know they put ordinary water in there; there’s nothing they could have done to make that water anything other than what it was, any more than they could have made the Law more than what it was. But when Jesus tells them to draw water out of those same jars, just because it was Jesus who told them to do it, what came out was the best wine anyone had ever had.
		3. When Jesus came to Israel, he was coming to stone jars of water, a nation that for centuries had been guided by the Law, but in Jesus, something altogether new had arrived, and it was better than the Law. Jesus calls it the Year of the Lord’s Favor. It’s a new covenant, a new age in world history, where the grace of God was being poured out in staggering new ways. The rituals of the Law would no longer be needed for our cleansing; now Jesus is our cleansing, not repeatedly and ritualistically but once and for all, abundantly and freely. Instead of the ritual of the law, you had the celebration of the gospel, that through Jesus grace and truth were setting us free from sin once and for all.
		4. This is what John was talking about back in chapter 1 when he says in his prologue, “From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” This is not the first time that water was been miraculously transformed in the Bible, and in fact the last time it happened was through Moses. Remember? When Moses was called to lead Israel out of Egypt and the Egyptians said no, God used Moses to change the water of the Nile into what? Blood. It was the judgment of God against the rebellion of Egypt. But when Jesus comes as a second and better Moses, he changes the water in wine. Not judgment for sin but grace, poured out abundantly. A whole new age in God’s plan of redemption.
	2. Does that mean we’ve entered an age where sin doesn’t matter or we can get away with whatever we want? As Paul puts it, “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!” Just because Jesus created 120+ gallons of wine doesn’t mean he wanted anybody to try to drink all that at once. Similarly, just because his grace is unstinting and more than sufficient to wash away our sins doesn’t mean he invites us to try his grace by sinning as much as we can. Again, the abundance of his grace helps us to look beyond our immediate problem to see the glory and goodness of the one who provides. When we receive forgiveness for our sins, we don’t say, Oh, great. That solves the problem of how to enjoy life without going to hell; thanks, God. I’ll be going now. We see that the provision is so much greater than our need so that we realize how good Christ is, how glorious, and how much above the ordinary level we have been living at so that we seek him instead of ourselves.
3. Becoming empty on the way to becoming full
	1. Unfortunately, the route most of us take to get to that point is a pretty bumpy one. Just how bad does our situation have to get before we are willing to cry out to Jesus for his grace?
		1. Suppose at this wedding Jesus went to that they made sure to get enough wine in their own resources. Would they ever have known the Son of God was among them? The master of the banquet explains how the situation usually goes: “Everyone bring out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink.” Why would this be the usual pattern? Because after they’ve been drinking for a while, they can’t tell if it’s good wine or bad wine. They keep drinking it, but their appreciation for it slowly erodes until they can’t even tell what they’re drinking. And even though they can’t appreciate it, they keep drinking it.
		2. We do this with all kinds of pleasures: we try it once and say, that was good, I think I’ll have some more. So we try it again, and it’s good but not quite as good, so to make up for it, we have more and more and more, until we hardly enjoy it anymore but we can get more so we do. Why do we sometimes eat and eat until we make ourselves uncomfortable? Why does sex so often lead to conflict in a relationship instead of unity? Why are our houses so full of stuff that we hardly ever use? You’d think at some point we would just stop; you’d think we would realize that these things don’t actually satisfy us, that we’d better look somewhere else for our satisfaction. But as long as there is more stuff to get and enjoy, and it is within our power to get it, we’ll keep on trying it. As long as the wine holds up, we’ll keep on drinking, even when we can’t enjoy it anymore.
	2. But if we’re lucky, at some point the wine runs out. A crisis hits, we’re confronted with just how empty the things the world offers are. How serious a crisis it needs to be depends on how stubborn we are. There is church along SR 3 that has a sign that says, “When everything else fails, try Jesus.” And I’ve always wanted to change that to, “BEFORE everything else fails, try Jesus.” Why do we have to try EVERYTHING ELSE first before we’re finally willing to turn to Jesus? But unfortunately, that is often human nature. If our hearts are tender, hopefully it is not such a painful experience before we realize we need something greater. But if our hearts are hard, we might just keep on going from one disaster to another until there is absolutely nothing left. But when we hit this point, when the wine runs out, and we absolutely have nothing else to try, if we then turn to Christ, we finally get to taste the good stuff.
		1. We try delighting our souls in material things: our house, our car(s), eating out, going on vacation, whatever. But a crisis hits: we’re in the hospital, our house burns down, something nearly kills us. Our comfort is stripped away, but then we cry out to Jesus. And he comes near to us and shows us his love and his power and we find joy so much deeper and more satisfying than anything we had before the crisis hit. You take Chuck Colson: brilliant and ruthless man in Washington, right in the halls of power, on top of the world, until one day it lands him in prison. It was the best thing that could have happened to him. Because that’s when he finds Jesus and spends the rest of his life sharing with other prisoners the joy that Jesus gave to him.
		2. And it’s not only material things we use to distract ourselves from finding the abundant grace of Jesus. Sometimes we try sustaining our soul on spiritual things of our own making. We think following Jesus is about rituals like under the Law. We think we’re doing just fine going to church once a week and giving our offering and going home. And some crazy, passionate Christian asks us, Isn’t the grace of Jesus amazing? And we say, Mm, sure is, but we’re not amazed; we have no savor for his goodness. We think, What’s so amazing, I’m the one doing all the work? And as long as our superficial sins are kept at bay, we can ignore the deeper sins of pride and selfishness. But maybe something happens that destroys our façade. We get caught in some outward sin or a family member does: alcohol or divorce or lies or pornography, and superficial religion can’t help us. The wine has run out. So we cry out to Jesus from our sin and he comes into the deep places of our hearts and pours his grace on our wounds, not only forgiving us but changing us with his love, and maybe for the first time we realize, his grace really is amazing. There is absolutely nothing I could do that he cannot forgive. This is the Lord I want my life to belong to.
		3. We hate it when our comforts fail us. Nobody wants to get to that point. It must have been very uncomfortable for this couple to run out of wine in the middle of their wedding feast; but the master of the feast says it himself, “You have saved the best until now.” It’s when our comforts run out that we’re reminded to call on Jesus and say, I need something better than this. Not just for today, not just to get me through this crisis so I can go on my way again; I don’t want to be in this situation again. I’m done living for my pleasures, on my strength. What you have is infinitely better, and that’s what I want.
		4. “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.” (Isa 55:1-2) It is worth running out of whatever the world has to offer just to find what Jesus pours out abundantly.
4. The Master of the Feast
	1. The master of the banquet is kind of a comical character in this story; he has no idea what is going on. He’s not the one in charge. He just pronounces his excitement about the wine that has mysteriously appeared. That title, master of the banquet, more appropriately falls on the one who provided the wine. Jesus is the master of the feast. His provision for us is more than enough for all our needs. That’s true, in this life.
		1. Once in a while we get a revelation of his glory. This event in Cana is one of those revelations, when for a miraculous moment we see past the bounds of earth and experience Christ as the King of a coming kingdom. We get glimpses of that glory once in a while ourselves, when he miraculously heals us, when he miraculously provides for our needs, in worship when we experience his presence and his glory. And inasmuch as we draw near to him and see his glory and taste his abundance, we also can share that revelation with others. Inasmuch as we have seen his grace overtake our sin and wash us clean, we have been rescued into that kingdom. And we can reflect his kingdom on earth, by sharing the abundance, the compassion, the grace, and the joy Christ has given us.
		2. But all of these are just a prelude of the kingdom that is coming. The wine that Jesus provided at that wedding in Cana was the first taste of the wedding feast we read about in Revelation. Then Christ will be the bridegroom and we will be his bride, and we will never be separated from him. And if you think Jesus provided abundantly for this wedding, just wait until it’s HIS wedding. Then we will experience the abundance of his kingdom not just in a taste or a glimpse but in its fullness.
		3. So when Jesus showers on you the overflow of his abundance, you might be tempted to think, Now this is the good life. Jesus’ goal must be to make me happy with all the good gifts I have. Well actually, this is not the good life; that will be the good life. Jesus’ purpose at this wedding was not for people to drink a bunch of wine and be satisfied but to show them that he is the fount of every blessing, that he is the master of the feast. When you receive his abundance, lift your eyes from this world with its problems and temporary solutions to him who is greater than all of it.
		4. Likewise, when the wine runs out, when it seems like the blessings have stopped, lift your eyes from this world to him who is greater. This is the not the wedding feast. The wedding feast is still coming. I’ve been told that getting old is no fun. I believe it. Something for me to look forward to. But no matter how old you get, if you belong to Christ, you still have something to look forward to. Your greatest joy is not behind you; it’s ahead of you, and the nearer you approach the end of this life, the closer that joy is. When you stand in his presence, you won’t look back and regret the things you’ve behind. As you drink in his presence, his joy and his glory, you will be able to tell him with confidence, “You have saved the best until now.”