

March 7-11, 2022 Edition

Following

The Year Of ^Jesus Part 10

The Wedding At Cana: Jesus Reveals His Glory

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: This week we're looking at Jesus' first "public" miracle or sign-turning water to wine at a wedding in Cana:

On the third day there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration.
John 2:1-2 (NLT)

Ok so let's start with when the wedding occurred- on the "third day". What does that even mean? Does it have something to do with God's famous "3 day rule" that we see so often in the Bible? Turns out, no. John is talking about the third day of the week which is- Tuesday! All John's really saying here is that on Tuesday Jesus and His friends went to a wedding. Why Tuesday? Because that's the most auspicious day for a Jew to get married. There are lots of reasons for this belief but suffice it to say that's what John is saying- He went to a wedding on a Tuesday. And while He's there the family of the groom have a bit of a catering emergency- they run out of wine. GASP!

Why is that so bad? Because it was one of the things that could bring shame (or honor) on a family. Most of us know the story. They run out of wine, Mary tells Jesus, Jesus asks why she's telling Him, she ignores that and tells the servants to do whatever He says and so He tells them simply to fill several ceremonial washing jars with water and then draw some out and take it to the host who is blown away because it's the best wine he's ever tasted. What do we learn in this story? We'll start with this- we learn that Jesus cares about the small stuff.

Do you remember the little book that came out in the 2000s called, Don't Sweat The Small Stuff (and it's all small stuff) by Richard Carlson? It was a really good little book and I think Jesus would agree with him- it's all small stuff but I think Jesus would also disagree- it's all big/important stuff too. It's big and small at the same time and all of it's important. If you read several commentaries on this story you'll find just about all the commentators talking about how strange it is that this is Jesus' first public miracle. I mean it's really nothing more than a catering emergency, isn't it? Yes. And no.

For us reading all about this 2,000 years later running out of wine at a wedding seems like pretty small potatoes, doesn't it? But for the people that were in charge of making sure the party was a success it was almost like a life or death scenario. Most families lived in the same village their parents, grandparents and great grandparents (and you could keep on going for several generations probably) grew up and lived and died in. Dishonor would follow an entire family sometimes for generations. Running out of wine at a wedding feast would have been one of those things that people would still be talking about (and shaking their heads over) for generations. "Remember when Bubba's great great great grandpa's wedding ran out of wine?" And everyone would nod their heads remembering and then everyone would shake their heads imagining the shame.

So it really wasn't a small thing for them even though for the rest of us it doesn't seem like much of a big deal. The important thing to notice is, Jesus cares about the situation and the people- or maybe I should say His mom cared:

The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus' mother told him, "They have no more wine." "Dear woman, that's not our problem," Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." But his mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." John 2:3-5 (NLT)

Why does Jesus not want to help out? Well, if you scan several commentaries you'll find several ideas of what made Jesus hesitate. What does that mean? It means nobody's quite sure which means what I'm about to say you should take with a grain of salt (I know you're thinking, "I do that with everything you say anyways, Pastor Ed, I mean... I like you but

you're no Billy Graham ;o). I think Jesus is hesitant because once He does His first "public" miracle there's no turning back. Things are going to heat up pretty quickly once the cat is out of the bag that He can do stuff like that. And while He loves all of us and wants to help all of us it's also true that the miracles are not the main thing He was here for. The miracles (or signs as John calls them) are simply pointing to the fact that He's the Messiah but do you know what will happen in Israel in the next 3 1/2 years? The people of Israel will become absolutely obsessed with Jesus' miracles. Absolutely obsessed.

If you've ever read any of the gospels then you know sometimes when Jesus performs a miracle He tells the person He helped not to tell anyone. Why? Because He knows what is going to happen- mobs of people will flock to Him. Most of them will only be interested in His miraculous power but Jesus wants to teach the crowds and mentor His apostles. The mobs make that difficult. So He was hesitant to help out the disorganized party organizers who didn't order enough wine even though that is the one thing anyone will ever remember about the feast- was there enough wine and was it any good?

But in the end Jesus does help. Why? Because of His mom. Left to His own devices Jesus would have sat back and let the family stew. He probably would have felt for them but He wouldn't have helped if left up to Him. But His mom comes and because of His relationship with her Jesus changed His mind- He helped. I don't know about you but I'm thankful that this story shows us that Jesus' relationships had that kind of impact on His decisions. There are actually a few stories where Jesus doesn't intend to help but changes His mind because of the response of someone.

We'll continue looking at this story tomorrow but for today maybe spend some time asking yourself if you're like Jesus in this way- able to be swayed by what other people that God has entrusted into your own life think, want and feel.

Tuesday Reflection: This week we're looking at the story of Jesus' first public miracle- turning water into wine. At the end of the story John writes this:

This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples put their faith in him. John 2:11 (NLT)

I love the way John puts this- it was "the first time Jesus revealed his glory". What does that even mean? It means it's the first time Jesus let the cat out of the bag when it comes to His secret identity- the Son of God. And according to John (who was there that day) it caused His disciples to "put their faith in him". Why? Because what they saw was something that they had been waiting for- they had been awaiting the Bridegroom for many years. Let me explain.

In the Old Testament God uses lots of metaphors to describe His relationship with us and each metaphor tells us Who He is but it also tells us who we are. God is the King which makes us His subjects. God is my Shepherd which makes me a stupid sheep (they really are dumb- sorry). God is Creator which makes me a creation. We could go on and on. God loves using metaphors to describe Himself and us. There's another metaphor God used in the Old Testament that I imagine Jesus' disciples thought of that day at the wedding feast:

I am overwhelmed with joy in the Lord my God! For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation and draped me in a robe of righteousness. I am like a bridegroom dressed for his wedding. Isaiah 61:10 (NLT)

God refers to Himself as a bridegroom all dressed up for His own wedding. This is fascinating to me because this prophecy from Isaiah 61 will be used by Jesus in just a few days to describe Himself when He's preaching at the synagogue in His hometown- Nazareth:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Isaiah 61:1-2 (NLT)

Jesus is asked to speak at the Nazareth synagogue. So He opens the scroll of Isaiah up to this passage and reads it. When He's finished He looks up at the congregation and says, "today, in your presence, these words are fulfilled." Talk about an uproar. They try to kill Him. It doesn't work but they're so upset that's what they try to do. Why bring that story up? Because Isaiah 61 is a description of what the Messiah will do/be. And while we don't ordinarily go all the way to verse 10 where the metaphor of a bridegroom is used you can bet it's there. And you can bet the people of Israel knew it was there. Jesus' disciples put their faith in Him after this event partly because they see in Him the bridegroom who was to come. And while they didn't know what Jesus would ask of them they knew they'd do everything they could think of to be "enough".

We had a dog when I was growing up named Sidney. He was a Basenji. They're rare in the states but they are an African dog that doesn't bark. They can growl and snarl and even yodel and while that may sound awesome they are also the most headstrong animal you've ever met. We taught him to do tons of tricks- sit, lay down, roll over, dance, shake and more. He would do any of these tricks on demand for the price of a piece of bread. One time my dad was showing his friends how smart Sid was and while he held the piece of bread and Sidney was poised to perform whatever trick was asked of him my dad got distracted and turned his head to talk to his friend while still holding the bread out. Sid got frustrated and started just doing random tricks hoping one of them would land him the treat he so desperately desired. From that hilarious debacle (hilarious to us if not to Sidney) we came up with our favorite trick to require of Sid before rewarding him with the bread- we called it, "do everything". All you had to do was hold out the bread and say, "do everything, Sid" and that dog would go through all the tricks he knew trying to figure out what would earn him that treat.

I think that's what Jesus' disciples thought was coming. That Jesus would just say to them, "do everything..." and then they'd have to figure out how to please Him. And they would do anything in their power to please Him because He was the Bridegroom and they discovered that at this wedding feast. Sure there's another bridegroom at the wedding in Cana that day but at the same time THE BRIDEGROOM (sorry to shout at you but I wanted to make this point clear) was in attendance. I wonder if He sat and thought about the fact that He'd never have a typical wedding day of His own but instead would have THE WEDDING DAY (again sorry for shouting) TO END ALL WEDDING DAYS when He returns to set everything right.

The people of Israel were awaiting the Bridegroom. And not only does Jesus go to a wedding that kicks off His public ministry but He (and others) sometimes refers/refer to Himself/Him as a bridegroom. One day a couple of John The Baptist's disciples come and ask him about Jesus. He's baptizing too, what are we going to do about that? How John responds is fascinating:

You yourselves know how plainly I told you, 'I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.' It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the bridegroom's friend is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success. He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less. John 3:28-30 (NLT)

What's John's response? I'm not the bridegroom- He is. I'm just the best man (so to speak) and I'm happy to stand back now that all the work is done and let Him shine. But John's not the only one to use the bridegroom metaphor:

Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?" Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast. Mark 2:18-20 (NIV)

Jesus refers to Himself as the Bridegroom. Does He know what He's saying? You bet He does. Does He know this is going to stir up a lot of feelings among the people of God. You bet He does. So why does He use this analogy? Because that's what/who He is- He's the Bridegroom promised in the Old Testament- the One Who would bring not only stability but the feast to end all feasts. And that's exactly what Jesus is going to do. To a lesser extent while here on earth but to the ultimate extent when He returns to set everything right. He even tells a really interesting parable later in the book of Matthew about the Bridegroom and the 10 bridesmaids and how we always need to be ready for the Bridegroom to come so we won't miss the party.

So... are you ready? Do you even know what Jesus' definition of "ready" is? Calm down- I don't ask that to freak you out and make you think you need to "do everything" like my childhood dog Sidney in order to make yourself acceptable. The Bridegroom did that for you. He makes you acceptable. Now He wants you to rest in that love and provision until the day He returns for you and me to take us home to (wait for it...) the wedding feast of the Lamb. I can't even imagine what that day will be like but I'm looking forward to it.

Wednesday Reflection: Today we're going to look at how important the concept of joy is to God.

It's huge.

Ok? Enough reflection for today maybe? Maybe not, huh? Ok let's expand on that a bit as we reflect on another part of the story of Jesus turning water to wine:

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." John 2:6-8 (NLT)

What does that have to do with today's topic (joy in case you forgot ;o) you ask? Well first of all I imagine that Jesus' heart is filled with joy and maybe a bit of mischief (can there be good mischief? I certainly don't want to assign impure motives to Jesus but I think He's probably getting a kick out of watching them as they look at each other and draw out some of (what they thought was) the water they had just filled the jars up with. I wonder if Jesus was thinking, "that look of skepticism is going to go away real soon my friends..."? We'll never know but since Jesus' default setting was/is joy (I'll make that case tomorrow) I don't think it's a stretch to wonder.

But secondly I'll go out on a limb and say this story is about joy because it's about a party and wine. We live in a different culture than Jesus did. They drank so much wine because it was easy to store and it didn't go bad very often and in a world where there was no refrigeration and rot was the great enemy of the human race wine was a stable and enjoyable beverage for the people of God. But it was more than that too:

He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for people to cultivate- bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens human hearts, oil to make their faces shine, and bread that sustains their hearts. Psalm 104:14-15 (NIV)

Now I know that alcohol abuse has destroyed many lives and I'm not here to say it's not a big deal in our world. I dealt with it myself in my younger days and so I know how destructive it can be. The devil has warped just about all of the good gifts that God gave to us but it doesn't mean those gifts aren't still good for people who aren't dealing with addiction in their lives. God gave humans wine to "gladden the hearts of men" according to the Psalms. Why would He do that? Because God loves gladness. He loves joy. It's His default setting. God does get angry and sad when we hurt ourselves or each other but He always reverts back to joy. In fact one of the names He goes by in the Old Testament is El'Simchathgali which means, the God of Exceeding Joy. Modern translations of the Bible remove the title of El'Simchathgali and instead render that verse like this:

I will go to God - the Source of all my joy. Psalm 43:4 (NLT)

Literally what that verse says is, I will go to El'Simchathgali. Our God is the God of Exceeding Joy and He wants us to be like Him. Over and over the Bible invites/commands us to embrace joy and live our lives in the joy that will make us more like Him:

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Psalm 100:1 (ESV)

The command to "make a joyful noise" is a strange one until we realize how important the concept of joy is to God. I don't know about you but there are times I just don't feel like making a joyful noise. In fact if I pay attention to the noises that come out of my mouth in a given day and then tally up how many of those sounds were joyful and how many were not joyful at all I have a feeling I'd be pretty chagrined. Maybe you would be too. Maybe right now you (and I) just don't feel much like making a joyful noise. I think that's why Psalm 100:1 exists- because even when we don't feel like it it's important to choose joy and one way of doing that is to consciously decide to make joyful noises rather than those other noises we are much more used to making (and yes I know what you're thinking right now- get your mind out of junior high- I'm talking about the sounds coming out of our mouths not the ones you're thinking of and snickering about right now ;o)

We'll talk some more about joy tomorrow- what it is and what it isn't and how we "choose" it when things aren't going our way but for today maybe get out a piece of paper and a pencil and make two columns with "joyful noises" on one side and "non-joyful noises" on the other and keep a tally of how much of the sounds you make are "joyful" and how many are anything but.

Thursday Reflection: Yesterday we spent some time kicking around the command of Psalm 100:1 to "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Psalm 100:1 (ESV)". Today I want to spend some time defining joy and talking about how to "choose" it even when things aren't going well in our worlds.

So what is joy? Not sure how you'd define it? Webster's Dictionary defines joy as "the emotion of great delight or happiness caused by something exceptionally good or satisfying; keen pleasure; elation." That may be Mr. Webster's definition but it is not the Bible's definition of joy. Why is that important? Because I don't know if you've noticed this or not but we can't decide to be happy. We try to get others to "decide" to be happy and it never goes well. One year at Christmas time I saw a book on the clearance table as I was checking out called, *Stick A Geranium In Your Hat & Be Happy!* Judy has always struggled with mild depression so I thought it might be perfect for her Christmas present. She was always buying herself books about how to be happy/joyful and so I figured she'd be quite happy to receive this fine gift from me.

I was wrong.

I'll never forget- she tore off the wrapping paper and read the title and gave me a look I hope never to gaze upon again. I'm lucky we were at my parents' house so she was more restrained than she might ordinarily have been and it wasn't until later that she told me that she knew where I could stick a geranium (what can I say Judy isn't the typical preacher's wife). I learned a valuable lesson that day and that lesson has proven itself true over the years in my own life as well- you can't make yourself "be happy".

So then how can God command us to "make a joyful noise"? Because joy is not the same thing as happiness. Happiness is an emotion and we're not really in charge of our emotions, are we? I mean we can do things to make it more likely that we will be happy and we can make huge mistakes that might make it more difficult to be happy but we can't force happiness on ourselves (or anyone else for that matter). Judy and I were talking the other day and she said something I thought was pretty insightful- she said, "joy is to happiness as beauty is to prettiness". I had to think about that. She could tell I wasn't quite with her so she explained- beauty and pretty are different things, she explained. A man watching his wife give birth might decide he was watching one of the most beautiful things he'd ever seen but there's not much that's "pretty" about childbirth. And pursuing joy may bring moments of happiness but what happens when we're grieving or in pain (or both)? At that point choosing joy becomes a "sacrifice":

I will offer sacrifices of joy... to the Lord. Psalm 27:6 (NKJV)

A sacrifice of joy. Think about that for a minute. Why would joy be a sacrifice? Well let's break it down. What is a sacrifice? It's a gift we give to God in its most basic form. And sometimes the joy that this Psalm suggests we offer to God isn't easy to muster up. Sometimes we just don't feel like expressing joy or making a joyful noise. Sometimes the things that are happening in our own personal lives and in our world make expressing joy difficult- and that's when it's the most important sacrifice we can make.

Ancient Israel was an agrarian culture for the most part. Their main sources of income were crops and livestock. What would happen if those sources of income went away? Would Israel be so keen to tell the rest of us that we should make a "joyful noise" then? Turns out, yes:

Fig trees may no longer bloom, or vineyards produce grapes; olive trees may be fruitless, and harvest time a failure; sheep pens may be empty, and cattle stalls vacant- (nevertheless) I will still celebrate because the LORD God saves me. Habakkuk 3:17-18 (CEV)

The situation Habakkuk is laying out is a devastating one. He's describing Israel's economy on the brink of collapse. And what does He advise? Celebrating (which is a practice or habit of joy). But everything's falling apart- how can I celebrate when everything is falling apart? Why should I celebrate when everything's falling apart? Because choosing joyful practices even when things seem to be at their worst is the best prescription for getting through those tough times.

After Israel was conquered and the city of Jerusalem was destroyed along with the Temple everyone's life was in ruins as well. The people of God who were left behind to deal with the aftermath stopped following the commands of God. When Nehemiah came back to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and the Temple he knew before anything could be done he needed to rebuild the people of God (the Jews). So he had Ezra the scribe read the book of the Law to the Jews who were still living in and around Jerusalem. Do you know what happened? They were devastated. Why? Because they suddenly saw with blinding clarity just how far they had gotten from God's plan for them. What does Nehemiah tell them to do? Let's take a look:

All the people had been crying as they listened to the words of the Teachings. Nehemiah said, "Go and celebrate with a feast... and share gifts... with people who have nothing. This is a sacred day... Don't be sad, because the joy of the LORD will make you strong." Nehemiah 8:10 (NCV)

What is Nehemiah's advice? Celebrate. And share with those who have less than you do. Why would they do that? Because the joy of the Lord will make them stronger. That's what joy does- it makes us stronger. Growing up I knew that joy was one of the fruit of the Spirit and I knew that choosing joyful practices was a spiritual discipline or habit along with prayer, worship, cultivating community, fasting, etc.- but I figured joy was the shallow spiritual discipline. I figured God threw that one in there for people like me so we could feel good about how we were doing in at least one spiritual discipline.

But now I know- joy is not a shallow spiritual discipline. It's an incredibly deep and powerful spiritual discipline. Choosing joyful practices-especially when you don't feel particularly joyful- actually makes you strong. It also makes you more like Jesus (which we'll focus on tomorrow). So choose joy today- even (and I might say especially) if you're not feeling particularly joyful. What are some joyful practices you could choose that the Bible says builds a life of joy? Celebration is one of the things you can do to choose joy.

In ancient Israel God planned 13 festivals into the Jewish calendar. That doesn't include personal celebrations like birthdays, anniversaries and other family celebrations. That means at any given moment in time a person in ancient Israel was either gearing up for a celebration, celebrating or recovering from a celebration. Why? Because God knew that celebrating so often would make Israel strong.

It'll make you strong too. So do some celebrating this week. Even (and I think I would definitely say especially) if you don't particularly feel like celebrating right now. Keep it up and there's no telling how strong you'll become.

Friday Reflection: The last lesson I want to look at from this story this week is that the turning of water to wine at a wedding in Cana of Galilee shows us that Jesus is the true Lord Of The Party. The Lord of the Party was a real thing in ancient Israel. They were a lot like a modern DJ or party planner. The job of the Lord Of The Party was to make sure everything ran smoothly and that everyone was having a great time. After Jesus turns the water into wine we read this:

"Now dip some out, and take it to the master of the feast." So the servants followed his instructions. When the master of the feast tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. "A host always serves the best wine first," he said. "Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!" John 2:8-10 (NLT)

Yes there was already a master of the feast (Lord of the Party) but by fixing the issues that were cropping up at this particular wedding Jesus showed Himself to be the true Lord Of The Party. He was Lord of the Party at the wedding that day in Cana (even though most people had no idea) and He is to this day the Lord Of The Party in my life and in yours. Jesus saw what was happening at this wedding He was invited to and He decided to give them a wedding gift beyond anyones comprehension.

I wondered how much this wine Jesus made would have been worth in the first century. There were around 150 gallons of the stuff when He was done and it wasn't your average cup of wine- it was the best anyone had ever tasted. When you figure in how much the best wine

in the first century costs and do the math figuring 150 gallons of the stuff it turns out that Jesus' gift would have been worth somewhere in the neighborhood of \$60,000 - \$70,000 dollars. Is that nuts or what? I hope they were able to sell some of it after the wedding was over.

We've been asking why Jesus would do this and why John would show us how it was Jesus' first miracle when all He was saving them from was a catering disaster? I think we find the answer to that question as we continue looking at the story of Jesus' life. He was a bit of a party animal in first century Israel. I'm not saying He abused anything or did anything wrong but He did like going to parties. At one point the Pharisees come to Jesus and ask why He goes to so many parties with people a good Jew should never be associating with. Jesus' response? Basically Jesus says, "I can't win with you people. John The Baptist didn't eat much or drink any wine at all and you said he had a demon." And then do you know what Jesus said about Himself? It's one of my favorite verses in the entire Bible:

The Son of Man came eating and drinking and enjoying life. Matthew 11:18 (PhV)

Did you know that verse was in the Bible? You do now. This is how Jesus described Himself and His relationship to celebration- He was all in. I don't know about you but I never once heard that verse read out loud in the church I grew up in. It wasn't until I was reading through the gospels for myself that I came across that little nugget and it stopped me in my tracks. Jesus came eating and drinking and enjoying life? I mean, I've always wanted to be like Jesus but now I want to be like Him even more!

So what's the lesson for you and me? I think it's to learn to cultivate joy through celebration even when we don't much feel like celebrating. So this week find something to celebrate. Even if you don't much feel like it. Especially if you don't much feel like it. Celebrate anything- birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, waking up one more time, etc...

You get the picture. If you don't have a birthday or anniversary or holiday to celebrate then make something up. Just celebrate in a way that is meaningful to you and your family. And as you do you will be cultivating just a tiny bit more the image of Jesus within you.