

## ***Mary's Testimony About Christ***

John 2:1-11

The Gospel of John Sermon Series

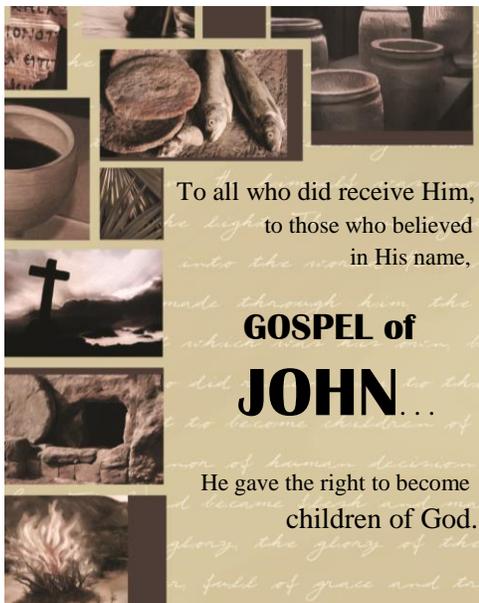
Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

February 23, 2014

**TEXT:** John 2:1-11

This morning we continue in our series on the Gospel of John. We been emphasizing that John's Gospel is arranged around a set of testimonies, each one containing a full presentation of the



Person of Christ and His glory. Each scene of the Gospel of John is meant to give us a picture of Christ and to steer us towards faith in His person, and so it is today. We began with John's own testimony in the prologue of his Gospel; last Sunday we looked at John the Baptist's testimony: "*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*" This morning we want to consider Mary's testimony about Christ from John 2. Mary's testimony about Christ comes in the context of a wedding celebration in Cana of Galilee. Mary is described as the mother of Jesus four times in these first few verses of John 2. She does not appear again in the Gospel until we see her at the foot of the cross in John 19. Mary appears in this text as present at this wedding, a witness to Christ's activity there, and pointing us with a very profound

and crucial charge to do whatever Christ tells us. We want to walk through the scene this morning, hearing it as though from her point of view.

We read that on the third day, there was a wedding that took place in Cana of Galilee. In Hebrew and Greek, the days of the week are counted by numbers, so it is probably Tuesday that is mentioned here. This is one of those interesting details that makes us sure that John is reflecting an eyewitness account. Eyewitnesses include random, to us, details like: There were 153 fish in the catch; this is the day of the week that that happened; or this was the time it happened. As you go along, don't ignore those little details that remind us that this is coming to us firsthand. There was a wedding in Cana; the mother of Jesus was there; and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to this wedding. Cana is a village about eight miles from Nazareth, and the celebration of the wedding brings the village together. We are not told

whose wedding this was, although there is one third century Latin manuscript that indicates as a marginal note that the wedding was John the son of Zebedee's, which is fascinating. I'm not ready to commit to that, but I think it's interesting that an ancient reader recognized that it may have been John's. Wedding festivities bring the village together. Everyone is invited to a first century wedding. You don't have the social pressure that we often have in our day of whom are we going to invite, who's going to be mad that we didn't invite them, or how in the world will we pay for this if we invite everyone that we think we should invite? Those questions are off the table; everyone comes. It's a community wedding and everyone comes. These wedding celebrations would often last a week. That's a great wedding celebration, isn't it? Space it out over a week and celebrate a significant event in the life of the community. This wedding celebration is going on in Cana, and a hospitality crisis emerges at this wedding celebration. In John 2:3 we read:

*"When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to Him, 'They have no more wine.'"*

All of a sudden, there is a lack of this celebratory substance to make the wedding party go on and on and on. When the wine is gone, the mother of Jesus says to Him, *"They have no more wine."* The party is in jeopardy; they have no more wine. In John 2, we are invited into a sacred conversation, a sacred dialogue. Without John's Gospel, we would have no knowledge of this incident or this conversation. This moment in the life of our Lord is told to us only by John, and he welcomes us inside this private exchange between Jesus and His mother, a testimony rendered by Mary about her Son. We are welcomed inside this conversation, and Mary says to Jesus, *"They have no more wine."* We listen in, and Jesus replies in John 2:4:

*"'Dear woman, why do you involve Me?' Jesus replied. 'My hour has not yet come.'"*

I like this translation in the NIV. It says, *"Dear woman . . ."* Some translations translate this very literally, just as in the Greek text where this just says: *"Woman."* It comes off a little abrasive in English. You may be tempted, as a reader in English, to think that Jesus is rebuking or scolding Mary, and yet, that is not the case, and that is why I think the NIV translates very well: *"Dear woman."* It is not a disrespectful or demeaning term, for it is, in fact, the same way that Jesus addresses His mother from the cross. In John 19:26, Jesus sees His mother and the disciple whom He loved, which we now know is John, and He speaks to His mother from the cross and says:

*"Woman, behold, your son!"*

Surely, this is not a rebuke or correction. *"Dear woman,"* He says, *"Why do you involve Me?"* or literally, *"Why is this a concern of ours?"* Jesus says, *"My hour has not yet come."* The *hour* is a very crucial concept unique to John's Gospel. It's the time table of redemption in John. I lead a retreat once for university students, and the theme of the retreat was the Gospel of John. One

of the things I asked the students to do, in the context of the retreat, was to go, find some a place of quiet solitude, be alone, read through the Gospel of John in one sitting, and mark every time you see the expression “the hour.” This gives you a clue to the meaning of John's Gospel. Jesus says in John 4:23:

*“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.”*

In John 5:25, He says:

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”*

Jesus says in John 12:23, when the Greeks finally come to request an audience with Him:

*“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”*

In Jesus's prayer to the Father in John 17:1, He lifts His eyes and says:

*“Father, the hour has come.”*

The *hour* for Jesus is the beginning time of His saving activity in the world that culminates with His death and resurrection. His public ministry has not begun at this moment. He is there at this wedding as a guest, and yet His mother asks Him to intervene. There's a shared understanding, it seems, between Mary and Jesus. We read in Luke 2:19, after the angel spoke to Mary:

*“But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.”*

Mary treasured the words of the angel. She knows that she has no ordinary Son, and this hospitality crisis at this wedding prompts her to request her Son to act. We don't know, we're not told, if she has something specific in mind. Jesus' reply to her leaves us wondering, but we see that Mary is full of faith and a great example for us in John 2:5. Mary turns to the servants, those working the festivities, and says to them this tremendous line:

*“Do whatever He tells you.”*

With this statement, Mary instructs the servants, and all of us this morning. There is a tremendous amount of truth in this short phrase, and this is our memory verse for the week. On the one hand, it's an easy one to memorize, but it's devastating for all of us who possess a fallen, sin-diseased heart. In the original text, since Greek syntax is more flexible, it's the *“whatever He tells you”* that is first, so she says: *“Whatever He says to you, do.”* English syntax is less flexible so we have a preference to frontload that verb: *“Do whatever He tells you.”* Think of this for a minute: Whatever Jesus tells you, do it. Could we become a community that lives like that? Could I as a person become a person who lives like that, that whatever Jesus told me to do I would do? It's not difficult to understand that, and yet it is a gateway of life.

Jesus says in John 15:14:

*“You are My friends if you do what I command you.”*

Jesus Himself provides the ultimate example in John 17:4. When speaking to the Father, He says:

*“I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work that You gave Me to do.”*

Isn't it amazing how we like to counsel other people on what they should be doing? It's easy for us to see the discrepancy in the lives around us: “Dear brother, I can really see here clearly how you are not doing what Jesus is clearly commanding you.” It's so easy to see and so difficult to work the pattern of our own heart to respond. Yet, I'm telling you from the Scripture, this is where life is. Life is lived in greater and greater measure out of obeying Christ. You see, the reward of obeying Christ and doing what He tells you is that He will speak to you again, and you can obey Him again. The reward for not obeying Christ is a hardening of the heart, and it becomes harder and harder to obey Christ when you reject His Word. So, this simple, profound truth, *“Do whatever He tells you,”* these are Mary's instructions to the servants, and they reverberate out for us. Will you, together with me, strive to be a people who do what Christ tells us, whatever He says? For some of us, it will be very specific actions; for others, it will be a very specific refraining from actions; for all of us, this implies an intensive dedication to His Word. That's where we learn of His commands most clearly. Well, Mary tells the servants to do whatever He tells them to do.

The way that John tells the story about what happens next is an unfolding of the consequences of this pattern of obedience. He tells us, within this wedding scene, that there were six stone



water jars. Again he gives another detail that you would include only if you had been there. Does it really matter that there were six? Some people have done allegorical interpretation likening this to six days of creation, or the six orders of the Mishnah. You can go wild with that, but I think there were simply six jars, and he said were six, because he saw that there were six. These water jars are there, and they are there for the purposes of ritual purification. They are made of stone. These water jars look like this; these are examples found from the first

century. Some of these were on display when the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit came to Cincinnati. These are first century Jerusalem stone water jars for purification. These are impressive. They have to be made of stone. They are turned on a lathe, just one block of stone. They are made of stone because stone vessels do not absorb impurity. An earthen vessel is porous and absorbs

impurity, so it cannot be used to purify. In Leviticus 11:33, we read concerning anyone who touches something dead, and is thus unclean:

*"And if any of them falls into any earthenware vessel, all that is in it shall be unclean, and you shall break it."*

So, these vessels are made of stone. Jesus tells the servants in John 2:7a:

*"Fill the jars with water."*

John tells in John 2:7b:

*"So they filled them to the brim."*

Here's the pattern:

- Do whatever He tells you;
- Jesus says fill them to the brim;
- and they filled them.

Jesus speaks again in John 2:8a:

*"Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."*

John tells us in John 2:8b:

*"They did so."*

Jesus speaks; Jesus is obeyed. The servants take this water to the master of the banquet, and in John 2:9, something extraordinary happens. The master of the banquet tastes the water, and the water has become wine. The master of the banquet does not know where this has come from. He's well aware of the hospitality crisis at this banquet; he is in charge of the banquet; he doesn't know where this new source of wine has come from, though, John tells us, the servants who had drawn the water knew. The master of the feast calls for the bridegroom, and the expression that used here is that he the calls out to him. It is not a private exchange. It seems that the master of the feast just speaks to the bridegroom in front of everyone, and in John 2:10 he says:

*"Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now."*

Notice that the master of the feast assumes that the bridegroom has acted. He thinks the bridegroom has done something, but John tells us he didn't know what really happened. He says, "You have brought the best out now." One drink of the wine that Christ provides: it's a superior quality; it exceeded expectations; it's sobering in its quality, and the master of the feast says, "Where has this come from?"

The narrative ends right there, and you and I are left to wonder what just happened here. All kinds of questions come to our mind: Why did He do that? How did He do that? Is it okay that He did that? We would be left hanging if John hadn't told us what this meant. In John 2:11, he tells us what this meant in three clauses, each of them very important.

The first clause of John 2:11 says:

*"This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee,"*

This was the first *sign*. This wording is unique to John: a *sign*. When you call this a *sign*, as John does, then the question you ask is: "What does the sign mean; what is being signified by this activity?" The word *sign* is used seven times in the first part of John's Gospel, and John tells the public ministry of Christ around these actions that are significant and pregnant with meaning:

The turning of water into wine is the first; a healing at Cana is the second; a healing at the pool of Bethesda is the third; the multiplication of loaves of bread is the fourth; the walking on the water is the fifth; the curing of a man born blind is the sixth; and the seventh is the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

These signs beg the question: "What in the world does this mean?" That's the question that must be answered. These signs signify something; they mean something; they are a characteristic mode of action of the prophets. Remember that the first sign in the Old Testament is another transformation of water. The signs of the Exodus are a mode of revealing God's person to His own people, and so, too, in the Gospel of John. God says in Exodus 7:3:

*"I [will] multiply my signs and wonders."*

For what purpose? So that we would know Him. This is the origin of this whole concept of signs; to reveal God, to draw people to Him. So it is the case with our Lord.

John tells us in the second clause of John 2:11, that Jesus:

*". . . manifested His glory."*

In this action, manifesting the glory of Christ, that incarnate Word, who has taken on flesh and dwelt among us, revealed His glory. So, it is right for us to ask, "How so?" How does the turning of the water into wine reveal the glory of Christ? I saw four ways:

- The first meaning of Jesus' revealing His glory is the power of Christ as Creator and Redeemer.

Christ appears in this act as the Creator in His power. We were not told how He does this other than through His spoken word. His word creates, just like in Genesis. When Jesus says, "Your sins are forgiven," that same powerful voice will forgive your sin. Jesus appears, also within this, as our Redeemer, doing the signs to recall the Exodus.

- The second meaning of Jesus' revealing His glory in this passage is the setting that He chooses of a wedding.

Jesus characteristically did things at weddings. Weddings are occasions of great joy, so it is fitting that Jesus' first sign takes place within this setting of joy. We saw in many of Jesus' parables, such as The Great Banquet, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Jesus talked about it, framed His ministry within it, and so it is fitting that He would act and reveal His glory at this occasion of joy.

- The third meaning of Jesus' revealing His glory is that of His great abundance and provision.

Jesus had instructed them to fill the water pots up to the brim. There is a lavish supply, overflowing provision, 120 gallons of wine, probably more than is needed. Yet this image of overflowing abundance of wine is a deep prophetic note of the era of salvation in the Scriptures. In Genesis 49:10-11, we read of the ruler from Jacob who would come to rule all the nations. It says of Him:

*"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between His feet, until tribute comes to Him; and to Him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Binding His foal to the vine and His donkey's colt to the choice vine, He has washed His garments in wine and His vesture in the blood of grapes."*

Amos 9:13 says:

*"Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it."*

In Hosea 14:4-7, God says:

*"I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for My anger has turned from them. . . They shall return and dwell beneath My shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon."*

In Jeremiah 31:10-14, a great New Testament, New Covenant passage, the Lord says:

*"Hear the word of the LORD. . . 'They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall languish no more. Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. I will feast the soul of the priests with abundance, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness,' declares the LORD."*

This is an image of overflowing, super abundance. Why? For some of us, it's troubling that Jesus made an abundance of alcohol. I think we have to remember that this is a first century setting. Jesus is not inviting people to drunkenness and abuse of alcohol; He is providing a wedding feast celebration. Jesus' provision is not for shame, but for joy, and ultimately for purification.

- The fourth meaning that I see in Jesus' revealing His glory is to notice that there has been a great exchange by this miracle.

The jars filled with water for purification are used no more. The water for purification and washing away of sin is replaced by the provision of the wine of Christ. Later in John 2, Jesus will also speak of His body to be given. All of the narratives of John's Gospel are a full picture of the work of Christ in miniature, and we are left at the end of John 2 with the overwhelming impression that it is the cup and the bread that Jesus provided that purifies us from sin. The choice wine from God's Son leads not to intoxication and abuse and shame. The choice wine from Christ purifies us from all unrighteousness and cleanses us from sin. 1 John 1:7 says:

*"The blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin."*

Irenaeus, Clement, Cyril of Jerusalem, Cyprian of North Africa, all of these early Christians reading John 2 commented that they saw this miracle pointing to communion. It is not a "Get drunk on my dime," kind of miracle. It's a provision at the wedding banquet from Christ, the beloved Son, who, in His power, transforms by His spoken word, who manifests His glory to us and to the disciples.

John tells us in the third clause of John 2:11, that upon seeing His glory:

*"His disciples believed in Him."*

John tells us what inevitably happened when the disciples see Jesus' glory, and I pray this happens here. If you see Christ, all you need to do is see Him just once. If you see Him clearly, as the disciples do here, you will believe, even as they believed. The wine that Christ provides ultimately leads them to faith. This first of Christ's signs in John has the grand ending of conversion and belief. Remember, John's purpose in writing this. He said in John 20:30-31:

*"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name."*

The revelation of the signs is to lead us to faith. The goal of these signs is unchanged, and John records them for us today. This is the programmatic statement of the first of these signs. We will have many more along the way, and all of them have this same purpose: to manifest the glory of Christ and that you, upon seeing Him, would say, "I see His glory, and I believe."

I wish this were a communion Sunday. It would be so right to break the bread and drink the cup of Christ today, but in light of this Word, let's follow this narrative to the end and believe in His name, and going forth from this place, inscribe Mary's testimony on our hearts, to do whatever He tells you and have life in His name.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we thank You for the sacred mystery of this Your first sign. We thank You for the way that this sign shows us Your glory and points us again to the work of the cross. Lord Jesus, we ask this day that You would make us Yours. We desire, Lord, to surrender all to You, to give to You all that we are, all that we have. Father, we desire to see the glory of Your Son and to trust Him forever. I pray, Lord, that You would help us to heed the consequence of this testimony, that we might be a people that do whatever You tell us to do. Father, make us courageous people in our obedience, to follow You in faith. Lord, we surrender all to You, and we worship You together. We desire, Lord, to have life.

In Your name, Amen.