

The Christian Hope

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 October 2022

Preacher: Archie Winnington-Ingram

[0 : 00] Thank you so much for reading, Charlie. And let me pray as we begin. Heavenly Father, we pray that this morning as we open your word together, as your Holy Spirit is at work amongst us, that you would help us to see Jesus for who he really is this morning.

For we pray in his precious name. Amen. Amen. I'd like you to begin by thinking about the last wedding that you went to.

Maybe some of the younger ones, if you've never been to a wedding, just think about the last party that you went to. And I wonder as you think about that, if there is something specific about that wedding or that party that you remember it for.

Here's a couple of examples for me. It was Pete and Hannah Campbell's wedding earlier this year. The thing I'll always remember about that wedding is the pizza van. Like we'd already had canapes and a full big meal.

And a couple of hours later, this pizza van rocks up and you can just eat as much pizza as you want. It was epic. That's what I'll remember about their wedding. But actually, the one that really sticks out for me was my sister-in-law's wedding earlier this year.

[1 : 17] The father of the bride, my father-in-law. He stands up to give his speech. And it starts in the standard sort of way, you know, all the polite thank yous. But then this beat starts to play in the background. He pulls on a backwards cap and he literally wraps the rest of his speech.

I couldn't believe it. For me, that is the one thing that I will always remember from that wedding. Maybe you've had some similar experiences. What's the thing that you remember? Well, the wedding party that we've read about this morning, the thing that all the guests would be talking about in the following weeks, the one thing that they would remember, it's obvious, isn't it?

It's the wine. The best wine they've ever drunk. But for us, as we read John's account of this wedding, we've got to see that it's just so much bigger than that.

Because what John remembers, what he wants us to remember about this wedding is the Christian hope. Because what it points to for us is the great eternal wedding feast.

And that really changes everything for us today. Because it's true in life, isn't it? That what we hope for in the future changes how we live today.

[2 : 28] If you're at school or university and you're working hard to get the grades that you need, it's because you have a hope of what your future might look like, the sort of job you'd like to have. What we hope for in the future shapes how we live today.

Maybe you're here this morning and you're not all that sure that you've got much hope for the future. You might be thinking that your best is behind you. Or maybe that you just don't have that much hope for what you know is ahead.

Well, wherever you're at this morning, this is what John wants us to know. In Christ, there is the most wonderful, eternal hope.

And in Christ, it is a hope that we are all invited to share in. And it shapes the way that we live today. This morning, as we think about Jesus, in whom our hope is found, and as we explore how that shapes our lives today, three things that I want us to see in the text.

Jesus is powerful over creation. Jesus is the substitute groom. And Jesus is a bountiful provider. We'll get there. But before we do, I just want to get our heads into the story itself.

[3 : 40] And in an attempt to take us to the scene, what I'm going to do is retell this story from the perspective of one of the servants. I remember that weekend so clearly.

The night before the wedding, I was already super tired. We'd been all week preparing for the celebration. The family that I worked for, they're kind people. And the man that they'd chosen to be the master of the banquet, he just seemed to really know his stuff.

If anything, he was just overly efficient and precise in the preparations. I even overheard an argument, actually, between him and the groom. It was the wine, you see. He was worried, the master, that there wouldn't be enough.

And this man, he really knew his wine. He actually ended up storming off from that argument. Well, if we run out of wine, you're the one who'll have to bear the shame of it. On the day of the wedding, everything seemed to be going pretty well, to be honest.

We'd been so well prepared in the run-up to the wedding that there was very little left to do. But as the day wore on and everyone seemed to be having a great time, every time I ventured back into the kitchen to get another jug of wine or a plate of food or whatever it was, I could just tell that the master of the banquet was getting increasingly anxious.

[4 : 54] Because the wine, he was right, was definitely running out. Eventually, one of the guests, Mary, I think her name was, came to the kitchen door to ask for more.

And I had to tell her that there was no more wine. And at that moment, a young man passed by. It might have been her son to look at him. And she told him that they'd run out of wine.

And his reply, well, it was strange, if I'm honest. It sticks in my mind. Woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come. It's not as though he was being rude to her or anything.

That wasn't it at all. But what could he possibly mean? My hour has not yet come. The woman seemed to understand whatever it was. And she just told us to do whatever he told us to.

And he pointed to these washing jars. You know, the sort of washing jars that guests use to clean their unholiness on their way into a feast. And he said, fill those jars with water.

[5 : 51] And there must have been at least six of these jars. I guess that's like 600 liters of water that he asked us to fill. But we did as we were told. And this is where things got really weird.

He told us to draw some out and to take it to the master of the banquet. So I got a cup and I drew some out. And you won't believe this. I hardly believed it. But I could see the water. It looked, it even smelled like wine.

Now by this point, the master of the banquet, he'd taken himself off into the corner of the kitchen. He was sat on a stool with his head in his hands. But I took him this small cup and he tried it.

And his stress just immediately, it turned into shock and then to joy. It was the best wine he'd ever tried. He didn't even want to know where it came from. He just rushed straight to the groom.

Everyone brings out the best wine first and the cheaper wine once the guests have had too much to drink. But you saved the best till now. I tell you, there's a wedding I'll never forget.

[6 : 54] That's the story. And I'm sure that the guests would have been talking about that wine for weeks and for months. But the servants, the ones who knew what had really happened, they'd be talking about Jesus, wouldn't they?

Water into wine. That's impossible. And that takes us to the first thing that I want us to see about Jesus this morning. Jesus is powerful over creation.

If you've got the text in front of you, it's in verse 9. The master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. Now, let's be clear, that's not normal.

In fact, we'd probably say that's impossible, wouldn't we? To change the chemical makeup of H₂O into whatever the formula is for wine, just like that. Katie and I were in the south of France this summer, and we had a great time visiting a couple of wineries and seeing how wine is made.

It's an incredible process. It's an incredible process, the thought and effort, and especially the time that goes into making a decent wine. And this was decent wine. See, at the end of verse 10, you saved the best till now.

[8 : 06] It's good wine. It's not as though Jesus could have just added a bit of grape juice into the 600 liters of water to make something a bit like wine. No, this is miraculous.

Water into wine. The finest wine. John is saying Jesus is powerful over creation. Now, maybe you're here, and before we even get going, this is a problem for you.

Because the world just doesn't work like that. Miracles don't happen. In other words, what we see is what there is. If we can't see it or touch it or smell it or taste it, essentially, if we can't measure it, then it doesn't exist.

And of course, if there is no God, then that is all the universe is. The material matter that the universe is made up of, the cause and effect of things acting upon that matter.

If there is no God, then what John is claiming has happened here can't have been a miracle. It must have been something else, a trick, an illusion.

[9 : 08] Jesus' attempt to wow or to manipulate, or maybe just a group of stupid, deluded disciples, too gullible to realize what was really going on.

If that's you this morning, if you're tempted to just rule out the possibility of a miracle altogether, then let me just say two things this morning before we go on. Firstly, if there is a God, then we can't disregard the possibility of a miracle.

Not just because, obviously, God is God and can do whatever he wants to do, but because if there is a God, how else would he reveal himself to us? How else would we know anything about him at all?

For what it's worth, I'd like to suggest that our existence is a miracle itself. Whatever our theories about creation and the universe or the multiverse or whatever, the fact that you and I exist, that something has come to exist out of nothing, is miraculous.

And more than that, the universe that we live in, it is an ordered universe. There's a logic to it. It is, generally speaking, like I said, bound by the laws of cause and effect. And I think that tells us something about the God who created it.

[10 : 21] But for God to make himself known to us in more specific ways, he has to do something outside of that ordered system. And that's what miracles are.

But these miracles, we'll see, they're not just random showing off. It's not a sort of attention grab. Look at me. These are signs. You see in verse 11, they're signs that point to something much bigger.

They reveal something about who God is, about who Jesus is and what he came to do. I guess fundamentally here that he is powerful over creation. The second thing I'd like to say to you, if that's you, is that it's really important that we don't make unfair assumptions about the sort of people that we read about in this story.

It's very easy for us to look back and to think that this was 2,000 years ago. These people were just stupid, gullible, nowhere near as intellectually able as us.

We've come on since then. And it is true that we live in a world today that is technologically incredible. No doubt we've made progress, haven't we, in so many ways.

[11 : 28] But that doesn't mean that we're in a position to treat people in the past as though they weren't even really human. Really, you don't have to spend long studying the ancient world to recognize how incredibly capable these people were.

Their literature, their architecture, even their technology is far more advanced than many of us might imagine. The simple truth is this, though.

These people saw Jesus do something that any human being would recognize only God could do. A child can tell the difference between water and wine.

These people aren't stupid. This is no trick. Jesus was beginning to reveal that he is powerful over creation. And John doesn't just record these things for fun, right?

We've seen that over the last couple of weeks. John had a purpose. Here's his purpose. It's in John chapter 20. Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

[12 : 31] But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. These miracles, these signs, they're recorded for us so that we, like those who were there, might read them and see Jesus for who he is.

I take it that's why John goes into so much detail in this story. He tells us exactly when this happened, exactly where this happened, the size of the water jugs even.

It's not a made-up story. John's telling us about a wedding that he would never forget. Why? So that we might believe that Jesus is who he said he was.

That we might believe that he is powerful over creation. And there are loads of implications for us today, aren't there? Lots of things about this that affect how we might live today.

But I want to just focus right now, especially on prayer. See, if we believe that Jesus is powerful over creation, and if we believe that we are not, which I trust that we do, wouldn't that affect the way that we pray?

[13 : 46] I'm not saying that we should be praying for our water to turn into wine at the next dinner party we go to. But if this is true, if this is true of Jesus, then would we trust that he is powerful in our lives?

That he does and that he can answer prayer. Perhaps not always how we would wish him to, but always for our best. If we believe that he has this power, I just think we'd be praying all the time. In all the small, quiet moments that we get throughout the day, whether it's driving to work, short walk, lunchtime, whatever it is when we're on our own, depending on his power in our weakness. And our prayer life as a church, I guess, too, it's often said that the best measure of the spiritual health of a church is its prayer life. Why?

Because we really need him. As we seek to grow together, and as we seek to reach our community, these are things that we simply can't do in our own strength.

[14:48] We desperately need the help of this powerful God as we do that. How's our prayer life? You might remember that wedding that you went to for this reason or for that, but have you ever experienced the wonder of answered prayer?

It's incredible to be able to look back at a prayer meeting, remember when we prayed for this together. Wonderful to be able to do that as a church. Jesus is powerful over creation.

But his power over creation, I guess, means nothing to us today if he isn't also, and this is the second thing I'd like us to see about Jesus this morning, the substitute groom.

As you think about the most memorable wedding that you've been to and the things that make it memorable, maybe it was a beautiful dress or a special setting or incredible food, it's almost always the food for me.

I suppose traditionally in the UK, the sort of responsibility for that has fallen on the bride's parents. Certainly in the past, traditionally, it would be the bride's parents who would foot the bill.

[15:57] I'm not sure that's actually true anymore, but 2,000 years ago in Cana in Galilee, it was always the bridegroom. See at the end of verse 9, who does the master of the banquet go to?

He goes straight to the bridegroom. Why? Because he was the one responsible for the thing. He organized it, he paid for it, it was his job to make sure that there was plenty of wine to go around. And for him to get that wrong, maybe especially in such an obvious way as the wine running out, it would have been massively shameful. I think especially in this sort of honor and shame culture of the ancient world.

And maybe for us, I don't know if you can think of, it could be a wedding or a party or even just a day that you remember, not because of something fun or joyful that happened, but because as you remember that day, you feel deep shame.

I can certainly think of times like that looking back at my life. And this is what the bridegroom faced. His shame made public.

[17:07] And so do you see what Jesus does in turning the water into wine? He deals with that shame. He steps in as a substitute for the bridegroom.

And in verse 11, we've said already, he isn't doing that just to show off. In verse 11, this is the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory.

It might be that the people at this wedding remember the wine, but it points to, just like a sign points to something much bigger. And so what did Jesus come to do?

What is this pointing to? Well, have a look at verse six, as we think about how Jesus is the substitute bridegroom. What sort of jars is the water in?

These are the jars that are used by the Jews for ceremonial washing. Again, John isn't just recording that detail because it's interesting or because it's true, though I guess it is true, but because it helps us understand the sign.

[18:09] So how does that work? Well, this was the ways of Jewish ritual, right? One of the processes that a gracious God had given the Jews of dealing with their shame. They were unclean by their sin and by contact with external unclean things.

That was a form of shame for them. And so on their way into a feast like this, they would submerge their entire arms into these ceremonial cleansing jars to clean themselves, to deal with their shame. Notice that is an entirely external process. It is other things that make me unclean. And the picture of cleansing, it's an external cleansing that removes the shame.

But Jesus came with a new message. He says you are unclean, not only by what you've touched and tasted and interacted with, but on the inside. And to deal with that internal shame and to deal with it finally, something new had to happen.

Shame was going to be dealt with in a new way. And this miracle is a sign. It is a picture of that new thing. The picture is Jesus as the substitute groom, stepping into the place of the groom and

dealing with his shame on his behalf.

[19 : 26] And that's an Old Testament picture, really, as the Old Testament prophets looked forward to the powerful creator, stepping in as the substitute groom, dealing with the shame of his people.

Here's how Isaiah puts it in Isaiah 54. Do not be afraid. You will not be put to shame. Do not fear disgrace.

You will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For your maker is your husband.

The Lord Almighty is his name. The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer. He is called the God of all the earth. See, Isaiah says, wait for this guy to come, the creator of the universe, and he is going to come to be the substitute groom.

He is going to come to take the shame that you deserve in your place. I guess in some ways, honor and shame aren't really on our radar today, are they? And yet I'm sure that we can all think of things that we are ashamed of.

[20 : 39] Certainly as I examine myself, things that I've done, ways that I've related to other people, things that I've said, even things that I've thought. I wonder if you think, maybe imagine this, if everything you had thought about this week, everything that you have desired this week, let alone all the things that you've done in secret and behind closed doors, imagine if as we left church this morning, all of those things were being projected as a video onto the building across the street.

I promise that's not going to be happening. I've not been hiding with a camera or anything like that. But if that did happen, wouldn't that bring you shame? In our heart of hearts, aren't there things that we are all ashamed of?

And so this is what Jesus came to do. And don't we desperately need him to be our substitute groom too? And he does that. He offers to do that, not because of any merit on your part or mine, but the shame that we face for the things that we have done, the shame that we face for the things that we have thought and desired, he offers to take that burden on his shoulders.

He's carried it to the cross, dying in my place, dying in your place. And then because he is powerful over creation, he rises again, proving that he is who he says he is.

And so if you're here this morning, if you're dealing with guilt, if you're dealing with shame, would you bring it to Jesus?

[22 : 14] Because only he can stand in your place as your substitute. Would you let him take your burden on his shoulders? Would you be free? Friends, you do not need to be ashamed if you are in Christ and if he stands as your substitute groom.

Jesus is powerful over creation. He is the substitute groom. And finally, Jesus is the bountiful provider. You may have heard it said in answer to this question, how can you tell a Scottish Christian?

Answer, they'll be the one doing their very best to avoid having fun. Christianity, and I guess Jesus, have earned something of a reputation and maybe especially here in Scotland, I'm not sure if that's unfair to say, for being anti-fun.

At a party, I wonder what you would expect Jesus to be like. What would you expect God to do at a party? I guess most of us instinctively, wouldn't we expect Jesus to be turning wine into water? Would expect God to be policing fun, wouldn't we? But if signs point to who Jesus is, well, would we see him for who he is this morning?

[23 : 36] Again, at the end of verse 10, you have saved the best. We've already said this is the best wine, wine of the highest quality. And more than that, in verse 6, we saw that this is loads of wine, probably around 600 litres.

It's quality, but that is an insane quantity too. Jesus is a bountiful provider. Again, I think for us, this should encourage us in our prayer life, shouldn't it?

Not only is our God powerful over creation, but he also provides for his people. So would we go to him, depend on him in prayer, trusting that he will give us all that we need.

But ultimately, we saw at the start that this miracle is really about the hope, the Christian hope. Because the hope that we have for the future shapes how we live today.

And because Jesus is powerful over creation, and because he deals with our shame as the substitute groom, he is ultimately able to provide for us bountifully into eternity.

[24 : 45] See in verse 4, that mysterious reply that Jesus gives, my hour has not yet come. That's a phrase and an idea that is repeated throughout John's gospel.

My hour has not yet come. That is until he speaks of his death and resurrection, where he says, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Why does he speak this way? How does that help us make sense of this sign? Well, what does the sign do in verse 11? It begins, just begins to reveal his glory, so eventually he is glorified.

Friends, Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection is where he was ultimately glorified. And it was where he made a way for the eternal wedding, where we will be with him in glory.

We read at the beginning of our service, didn't we, the words of Isaiah chapter 25. Don't know if they sounded familiar to you as we read John's gospel.

[25 : 50] Here's this wonderful picture of the great eternal wedding feast. On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats and the finest of wines.

On this mountain, he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations. He will swallow up death forever.

The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces. He will remove his people's disgrace or shame from all the earth.

At Cana, Jesus says his hour has not yet come, but he performs a sign that points us to that hour, to the great eternal wedding feast.

And he's made a way for us to be there in becoming our substitute too, which means that I'm invited. It means that you're invited. This is the hope for the future that changes everything today.

[27 : 00] Weddings, these parties, they often have that memorable moment, don't they? That defining feature. The wedding at Cana, it's got to have been the incredible wine. They'd have been talking about it.

I guess they'd have been drinking it, certainly for weeks to come. But here's why John remembers it. And here's why he wants us to remember it. Because it was a sign, an image of the great eternal future wedding feast to come.

For John, he remembers it because for him, it's hope for the future. Now there are again, lots of implications for this hope for us today.

I guess it's really the Christian life, isn't it? But just as we finish, I want to offer two things in particular. Firstly, I want to say to those of you who are facing deep suffering, that this is incredibly good news for you, is it not?

But it's true in life that light at the end of the tunnel makes the challenge of the moment memorable, manageable, sorry. Light at the end of the tunnel makes the challenge of the moment manageable.

[28 : 10] Just in really simple ways, you know the feeling of you're working and you're sitting at your desk, it's the middle of the afternoon, and it's just a couple of hours until you can sign off and relax for the weekend. It's light at the end of the tunnel.

We know the picture. But this is bigger than that, isn't it? Because here, it's the final enemy of death that is defeated. And not only that, but Isaiah would tell us that it's a time where every illness, every pain, every frustration, every ounce of shame, where every tear is wiped away forever.

This is real hope, and it's really good news when life sucks, isn't it? And I guess secondly, really following on from that, if this hope is true, wouldn't we want to do whatever we could to remind ourselves of it as often as possible, especially when life sucks?

And the temptation, I think, when life sucks is often to do the opposite, to stay away from church, to face it on our own and sort of stumble through. But friends, this is why we do the things that we do here on a Sunday.

As we go to the bread and the cup together, it points us to this hope. As we open God's word, it points us to this hope. As we sing together, we are pointing one another to this hope.

[29 : 34] As we depend on him in prayer, it points to this hope. As we serve one another, it points to this hope. And not only would we want to remind ourselves of it, but wouldn't we want to point other people to it too?

To share this hope with a world that doesn't know it? To invite people into spaces like this where they might encounter that hope in Jesus.

Because whoever we are, we love one another best as we encourage each other to keep holding fast to this. the hope that Jesus points us to in this miracle, the hope that Jesus invites us to in this

miracle, the hope that we have of the great eternal wedding feast.

Let's pray together as we finish. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for Jesus. we thank you so much for this incredible sign that he gives us of the hope that we have in him.

Lord, we thank you for that hope, hope of that wonderful, eternal wedding feast. Father, help us to know Jesus for who he has revealed himself to be.

[30 : 59] And by your spirit, would you help us to point one another, that even this morning, even as we sing and drink coffee together, help us to point one another to the glorious hope that we have in him.

We desperately need your help to live this life and to keep our eyes fixed on him. So be with us, we pray. Be with us by your spirit for the glory of your son.

Amen.