

Message Notes July 12th, 2020 – Beautiful Outlaw: Encountering the True Personality of Jesus

Week 5: The Extravagant Generosity of Jesus (John 2:1-12; Mark 10:45)

• Jesus at your Wedding

- Those of you who are married, do you remember your wedding day? What stands out? The ceremony, the reception, the people, the places, the quirky things that went wrong.
 - Emily and I celebrate 10 years this October. We dated 5 and ½ years through high school and college before getting married and we wanted it to be *special*. We put a lot of time into planning (well, I helped). Lots and lots of planning. (You guys have seen how Emily does VBS right? Now imagine that same woman planning her wedding! Yup, that's who I married.)
 - Some of you are in the middle of preparing for a wedding right now, or you've just finished one and can finally take a deep breath. This is a once in a life time occasion. *You have to celebrate!*
 - But it comes with its stresses, doesn't it? I remember the day before our wedding Emily and I were setting up at the reception hall with a few of our wedding party: Emily, her mom and a bridesmaid got into an argument with the staff there because the sugar bowls at the tables didn't match. Yikes. (My groomsman and I just kept quiet.)
 - But when the day came, honestly, everything was *perfect*. It was beautiful. A dream come true. All of our uncles cried. And I forget plenty of the details, but the big stuff I'll cherish in my heart forever: the sight of my future wife walking down the aisle towards me with my future father-in-law in the church where we grew up. Our pastors praying for us. Holding hands and declaring our vows. Wearing wedding rings for the first time. Feasting at the reception with all our family and friends. Embarrassing Emily when I went crazy on the dancefloor with my high school buddies. And when it was all over and we made the long drive home...everything else...
 - A day to remember for a lifetime! Even if the details are a little fuzzy after 10 years.
- Now, exercise your imagination with me for a moment: imagine if *Jesus* came to your wedding. Yes, I know he was *there* blessing your union, as God is everywhere. But I mean, what if Jesus attended your wedding, as one of your guests to celebrate. What would that be like?
 - Based on some of the ways we have shrouded his personality with what John Eldredge calls "religious fog," we might get the impression that if Jesus attended our wedding, he'd be a bit of a wall flower, too holy or too important to really engage in the festivities. Maybe he'd be off in some corner leading a prayer service, or preaching in the middle of the ceremony to start a revival, or building a makeshift pool in the kitchen at the reception to start baptizing people. Maybe he'd be policing the dancefloor or the cash bar, maybe he'd be the designated driver. Honestly, the impression Christians give the world of Jesus sometimes makes him seem like the last person you would want to have at your wedding. Basically, a divine killjoy.
 - But as we work through this *Beautiful Outlaw* series and we're trying to uncover the true personality of Jesus in the Gospels, I'm starting to think that he would be just the opposite of that. I'm thinking he might be one of the greatest people to have as a guest at your wedding. I'm thinking he was more of a "life-of-the-party" type guy than a sanctimonious bore.
 - Someone who entered the room and everything...got better. More joy, more celebration, more goodness, more laughter, more life *to the full*. (I guess, as long as you weren't doing something that would cause him to flip the tables. That would be an unfortunate reception.)

• Water into Wine

- But that was in the Temple; we're looking at the wedding in Cana today. Here, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in John's Gospel, he actually *provides miraculously* for a wedding party to continue its celebration. To keep the party *going*. And it's not just any provision—he provides the alcohol! I don't mean to offend anyone, but that's what the Bible says happened. (At my wedding, we didn't even serve alcohol—we made people buy their own!) What's going on with this miracle of Jesus turning water into wine? Let's take a look.
 - Weddings in Jesus' day, like ours, were a big deal. In Jewish culture these celebrations lasted *multiple days*—they could last *up to seven days*. Can you imagine?

- People would come and go as they were able, so it wasn't easy to plan for. If the groom ran out of food or wine while people were still coming to celebrate, that was a pretty big cultural *faux pas*. (Imagine if you took time off work, traveled for miles, got the family all dressed up, and showed up to find they could only serve half of the guests at the reception.) This family would never live it down; the village would be talking about it forever. Not a nice start to a marriage.
- So, at this point in John's Gospel, Jesus has already called a few of his first disciples, but his public ministry and miracles have not begun just yet. It says that this incident at the wedding in Cana was his *first* miraculous sign. Consider that: the first miracle of Jesus' public ministry was *turning water into wine* at a wedding reception. What a way to make an entrance. What does this story tell us about Jesus—the real Jesus of the Bible, the Jesus who lives and reigns today?
- The Scripture says, "On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, 'They have no more wine.' 'Woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. 'My hour has not yet come.'" (John 2:1-4)
 - Well then. If my mom came to me with a request and I replied, "Woman, why are you involving me in this?" I am very...curious about what her response would be...
 - To be fair, in this context, saying "woman" wasn't a derogatory thing like we hear today; it was more like he was saying, "Ma'am," or "Madam," which is still a little strange—to address his mom so impersonally. Something is going on. Mary just responds by saying to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you," (Jn. 2:5). (I wonder what the look on Jesus face was as she walked away. Was there an awkward pause as the servants stared at him, waiting for the next move?)
 - This is a humorous interaction between Jesus and his mom. Either Jesus had a playful and sarcastic tone when she asked him to help, signaling to her that he was in fact willing to do it, or Mary had so much influence in his life that he couldn't say no. I like to think it's a mixture of both. Whatever's happening, it's an endearing moment that you have permission to chuckle at.
 - Now, when Jesus "protested" to Mary, "My hour has not yet come," he's looking ahead. Every time John's Gospel talks about "the hour" of Jesus refers to *the cross*. So, he's essentially saying, *Once I start doing miracles, I'm starting my road to the cross. Do you really want me to blow my cover for some wine at a wedding? If this train starts there's no stopping it.*
- Then, he proceeds to go ahead and take care of the situation anyway. And what a way he does it! The Scriptures make a point to say how much there was: six large stone jars, "the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing," and each of these jars held between *twenty and thirty gallons of water*.
- Jesus simply tells the servants to fill the jars to the brim with water, then draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet. That's it. What do you suppose these servants were thinking? Imagine what would happen to them if the master of ceremonies asked for the next round of wine, they brought him a sample, and it was full of (the biblical equivalent of) "*tap water*."
 - I wonder if they somehow trusted Jesus, or if they were drawing from the stone jars saying, "This guy's a lunatic!" Picture them handing the cup to the maître d' and standing there, grimacing, bracing for impact—and then he says, "Unbelievable! You saved the best for last!" They might have fainted with relief. And Jesus is probably watching from the sidelines with a grin on his face, then he fades into the crowd. No one knows except the servants, his mom, and his disciples. And the story ends. The first sign of Jesus to reveal his glory.
- Here are a few things to think about:
 - **Number one:** *that's a lot of wine!* Six stone jars of water, filled to the brim, up to thirty gallons each. That's *180 gallons of wine*. That comes to a little over *900 bottles of wine*. 900 bottles! Have you ever been to a wedding reception with *900 bottles* of wine? This seems a little ridiculous, this seems extravagant! *Jesus did that.*
 - **Number two:** *it's good wine, the finest wine.* Not the cheap stuff. After sampling it, the master of the banquet says, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." (Jn. 2:10) Hmm.

- **Number three:** Jesus used stone jars that were meant to be filled with water for the ceremonial washing of hands. He filled religious instruments intended for ritual purification with *wine* for a party. These jars were consecrated a for special purpose and weren't meant for anything else.
- That's kind of a bold, provocative move from Jesus, don't you think? Maybe a very loose analogy would be if a youth leader turned a baptismal pool into a hot tub for a lock-in (I actually heard that happened once). Or if you converted the sanctuary into a dance party for a weekend. I know some people who would get a little upset with that. (Don't get any ideas, Trinity Youth!)
- Maybe, just maybe, it's a statement about what Jesus does to lifeless, manmade religion. Maybe, just maybe, he intends to turn the stagnant water of our false piety into the finest wine of Heaven—*gallons and gallons of it!* Maybe, the difference between who we try to limit God to be and who he really is, is as great as the difference between those empty stone jars and those gallons of finest wine.
- **He Gave Himself**
 - Jesus reveals a God whose goodness is abundant and whose generosity is extravagant. We tend to underestimate God. We tend to underestimate his generosity, his greatness, his holiness, his love. We also limit our own love and generosity. We're afraid we might run out.
 - *Jesus never runs out.* He brings life out of death, he brings water from the rocks, he brings mana in the desert, he feeds 5,000 with a packed lunch, he turns water into wine so the party can keep going all week—so you have more than you know what to do with.
 - Jesus, throughout the Gospels, demonstrates the same extravagant generosity with his time, with his energy, with his presence, with his attention, with his power, with his healing, with his life. And he demonstrates extravagant generosity throughout creation.
 - Jesus pours out his very life for us at Calvary, where divine blood and water flow out, becoming the finest wine and the feast at the table of communion where we gather still to this day.
 - Do you limit this God? Do you think of him as stingy and shrewd? Do you comprehend his heart for us? The problem is, we've been hurt by life in this broken world, where things are not yet as they should be. We doubt God could be this good, because we've seen so much bad.
 - But he is this good. And this first sign of Jesus' glory where water is turned into wine reminds us that he is—the sheer extravagance and abundance of this miracle is a sign of his goodness. And we will one day see it without any doubt. It's not a chore for him to love you—it's who he is. He doesn't roll his eyes and sigh, "If I have to." He is fiercely committed to your highest good—to your redemption, your transformation, your complete sanctification (which means to be made *holy* like him).
 - But you have to let go of the false things you hold onto if you want to receive the true things he offers. The Old Testament Prophet Isaiah says, "*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 you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you...*" (Isa. 55)
 - His wine is *better* than ours. His wine makes ours seem like stone jars of stagnant water. Many still refuse.
 - But his generous love is so great that he gave his own life to make our wrongs right so we could receive all that he intends to give. And the question is, will you accept? He is extravagantly generous and glorious. You just have to accept it. If you want to accept it, then pause, and pray.