

The True Groom

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Happy New Year. Good to be here with you today. If you don't know me, my name is Eric. I'm one of the guys here on staff at Watermark Church, and it's great to see all of you in this year of the dog.

I want to start out today with a story. It's not an amazing story. It's actually a pretty boring story, but there's a reason I'm going to tell you this story. It was a little over a year ago. I was at a wedding banquet here in Hong Kong.

The party was going well, and the groom walks up to me, and he says, Hey, Eric, I need your help. We're running out of wine. So I called all the waiters together, and I said, Hey, we need you to fill up some buckets with water, and then we're going to do something really special.

It's not what I did. I grabbed a friend. We ran across the street to the grocery store. We picked up 24 more bottles of wine, got some boxes to carry them back, put it on my credit card, came back, and the party kept going. Very unspectacular.

But I tell you that story to introduce the story of Jesus today, because I think sometimes we can miss how unspectacular the setting of this story is. It's a wedding. The fate of the universe does not really hang in the balance in this moment, and yet Jesus steps in and does something super incredible in this moment, and I want us to catch that today.

[1 : 30] So like Kevin said, the past few weeks we've been looking at who is this man. We've been looking at Jesus. We've seen that he is the one who gives the second birth, the birth in the Spirit, and offers us life.

We've seen that he is a healer who offers us a new way to live. And today, we're going to see that he offers us more than anything and anyone else.

That he offers us satisfaction that our souls crave for. That he is the Lord who wants to give us the abundant life in all of life, from the trivial moments to the most important ones.

And to get there, we're going to see a problem, a solution, and a challenging truth. But before we jump in, let's pray. Father, we thank you for today, for this time together to look at your word, to learn about you.

We pray that as we come together today, that we would see Jesus, that we would see his beauty, and that we would fall in love with you, and recognize you as the one who truly satisfies, who truly gives us what our souls are longing for.

[2 : 37] In Jesus' name, amen. So this passage starts out with a problem. A little context. In the book of John, John has just finished introducing Jesus, telling us a little about who he is.

Jesus has called his first five disciples, and he is now back near the area where he grew up. And he goes to a wedding, and he gets to bring his disciples with him to this wedding.

He gets a plus five or so, which I think is pretty special. I've never gotten a plus five at a wedding. And a little background on the context of this wedding, because in verse three, John says something that sounds pretty everyday, when the wine ran out.

It sounds pretty trivial, pretty commonplace. To help us understand the significance of this comment, I think we need a little more background on Jewish weddings 2,000 years ago.

In a lot of ways, they were very similar to Hong Kong weddings. It was a chance to throw a huge party and invite all your friends and extended family, a massive celebration, and it was a chance for you to show off your generosity and wealth.

[3 : 49] Like in Hong Kong, the groom was expected to pay for everything. And also like in Hong Kong, there was a lot of honor and shame to be gained or lost, depending on how good or bad of a celebration it was.

But in some ways, it was a much bigger celebration than your normal Hong Kong wedding. See, these celebrations could last up to a week, which means you need a little bit more food than you do for a Hong Kong wedding, although I think the average Hong Kong wedding probably has about three days worth of food.

So you probably don't need too much more, but a little bit more. And the stakes were higher in these weddings. So it's possible that if the wedding ran out of food or wine early, the bride's family could sue the groom for bringing shame on them.

And it could become this legal dilemma for the groom if he did not plan or prepare adequately. To run out of wine in a wedding was a huge deal. You made sure that you planned enough in advance that you didn't let it happen because there was not a grocery store across the street where you could send your groomsmen with a credit card.

And so when he says, when the wine ran out, it sounds like a fairly commonplace, not a big deal thing, but it was. It was rare. It was shameful. It meant that the groom was either poor or worse, too stingy to provide adequately for his own wedding celebration.

[5 : 14] And it tells us that Mary, Jesus' mother, somehow learns about this dilemma, comes to Jesus, and tells him they have no wine. Now, John later tells us that this was Jesus' first miracle.

So my assumption is Mary is not expecting Jesus to do what he did. She is not thinking, ah, if I tell him he's going to find some water, turn it into wine, party's going to be all set. No, she's his mom. She probably knows he's a good problem solver. I mean, he's God. He's got to be a good problem solver, right? And she's just thinking, how can I avoid this awkward social situation?

I know a guy who's really good at solving problems, my son Jesus. She just wants to avoid social awkwardness. She wants some help with what she sees as a trivial situation.

But Jesus hears her comment, and he sees something way deeper going on here. See, he knows that he is the Messiah, the Savior that God has promised, who's coming to save and rescue the world and bring God's kingdom to earth.

[6 : 28] And he's read the Old Testament, and he knows that when the Old Testament talks about God's kingdom, imagery of abundant wine is everywhere. If you look at Isaiah chapter 25, verse 6, it says, On this mountain, the Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine.

If you look at the prophets Joel and Amos, they talk about how the mountains during this time will drip sweet wine. And then in the time between the Old Testament and the New Testament, this imagery just gets blown up to epic proportions.

There's this Jewish writing from between the Old Testament and the New Testament, and they say in this writing, when God's kingdom comes, on each vine, there will be a thousand branches.

And on each branch, it will produce a thousand clusters. And guess how many grapes will be on each cluster? A thousand. And each grape will produce over 35 gallons of wine.

So if you're a math person, that's 35 billion gallons of wine per vine. Probably a slight exaggeration, but you get the image. God's kingdom is a kingdom of abundant wine, an abundant celebration.

[7 : 44] And Jesus knows this. He sees this opportunity to provide wine at this party as a way of giving a glimpse into the work that he's going to do and a foretaste of what he's going to accomplish.

So Mary comes looking for a boost to the party, looking to avoid an awkward social situation, and Jesus sees an opportunity to display his glory.

He sees spiritual meaning of cosmic importance in the midst of the mundane. And I think that is why he answers the way that he does in verse 4.

Jesus said to her, Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come. Quick side note, woman is not as offensive of a way to respond to your mother in that culture as it is in ours.

It was actually a quite respectful term, but not really one you would use for your mom. It would kind of be like me calling my mom Mrs. Scott. It's not, it's respectful, but it's not really a way a son talks to his mother, right?

[8 : 46] And I think what Jesus is doing here is Mary has become comfortable around Jesus. And Mary has this expectation that Jesus is there to fulfill her desires and make her life easier.

And Jesus is saying, No, that's not how you come to me, even if you're my mother. If you're coming to me, you have to fit your life into my plans, not the other way around. And that's true for all of us

here today.

It's a challenge to us that when we come to Jesus, he's not there to make our lives easier. He's there for us to fit our lives into his plan. And that's just something to keep in mind if anyone ever tells you that we should be praying to Mary.

Now back to Jesus' comment. He says, What does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come. Now in the book of John, when Jesus mentions his hour, does anyone know what he's talking about?

It's the cross. Every time, always. Jesus' hour is referring to the cross. So Mary comes and says, Hey, the party needs more wine.

[9 : 46] And Jesus is like, It's not time for me to die. It seems like an odd response. But why is Jesus focused so quickly on the cross when he realizes that the party is out of wine?

It's because Jesus is the one who's bringing this kingdom of abundant wine. But because of our sin, that kingdom has to be purchased at a price. He knows that if he gives a glimpse into the kingdom that he's going to bring, he can't do it without thinking of the price that it's going to cost him to bring that kingdom.

And that price will be the cross. There's deep, spiritual, loaded meaning in Jesus' response. And I think this went right over Mary's head.

Because rather than recognizing all of this deep, spiritual, cosmic meaning in Jesus' words, she simply turns to the servants and says in verse 5, Do whatever he tells you.

Which is good advice. And that brings us to the solution to the problem. It tells us here, there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding 20 or 30 gallons.

[10 : 59] Now, notice what these jars are holding. It's water. And if you look through the book of John, water shows up again and again and again. So a couple weeks ago, Kevin talked about Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, where Jesus says, you have to be born of water and the Spirit.

And in John chapter 1, John comes baptizing in water. In John chapter 4, Jesus has a conversation with a woman at the well where he asks her to give him some water.

Water is all over the place. It shows up many more times as well. And if you look through, every time water shows up in the book of John, you notice a theme. Water in and of itself is never a bad thing.

But it's also never quite enough to get you what you really want or need. So when Jesus is talking to Nicodemus, being born of water isn't a bad thing, but you need something more.

You need to be born again. When John comes baptizing in water in John chapter 1, he's baptizing in water. Why? So that he can point to the one who's going to baptize in the Spirit.

[12 : 07] When Jesus comes to the woman at the well in John chapter 4 and asks her for water, he ends up rebuking her because he says there's something more that you need. There's a living water that will satisfy you and quench your thirst forever.

And you should have asked me for that. The water in and of itself isn't a bad thing, but you need something more every single time because the water itself is not enough. And it's the same at this party.

The water is not a bad thing, but what the party needs isn't the water in the jars, but wine. And why does the party not need the water anymore? Well, it has to do with why the water is there in the first place.

It says it's there for ceremonial cleaning. A little bit of background. In the Old Testament, God has the Israelites. They're his chosen people. They've got promised blessings. They're supposed to obey God.

And they fail. Again and again and again. And eventually, they get sent into exile as a punishment for their failure. After 70 years, God sends them back into their own land and they realize, hmm, when we disobey, things don't go too well.

[13 : 15] So let's obey from now on. And they realized that if you took all of the commands that God gives in the Old Testament, you could create extra commands to keep you from accidentally breaking any of God's commands.

And so one Jewish teacher realized, you know, if we just have water and wipe our hands off with it before meals, that can keep us from accidentally breaking these other laws that God has given us.

So it's not something that God explicitly commanded, but the Jews practiced it in Jesus' day to help them be more obedient to the other laws that God did give. And so they have these jars at this party to help them wash, to help them avoid accidentally breaking God's commands.

But here's the thing. The water can't do that. The water symbolizes purity, but guess what? At this party is the one who is full, who is pure.

The water symbolizes cleaning from things that defile us, but Jesus is at this party and he's the one who's going to bring the ultimate cleansing from everything that defiles us. The people at this party have the water to help them fulfill God's law, but at the party is the man who is the fulfillment of God's law.

[14:39] So the water in and of itself isn't a bad thing, but it can never achieve the cleansing that it symbolizes. It's just not enough. So where have the Old Testament religious systems gotten this party?

Out of wine? In danger of being shut down early? Basically, their reliance on tradition and their own obedience to achieve blessing can never give them what their hearts truly desire.

And I think if we look around this room today, most of us don't try to follow Old Testament religious systems as a way of achieving blessing in our lives. But we do turn to other things.

For many of us, it's our jobs. We believe that if I can work hard enough and if I can do well enough, my job will give me the meaning and the purpose and the fulfillment in my life that I truly crave and desire.

And so we pour ourselves into our jobs and we work insane hours so we can get what our hearts desire. Maybe for some of us, it's relationships.

[15:45] We believe that you're nobody until somebody loves you. And so we pursue relationship after relationship because we believe that my identity and my fulfillment in life, that the abundant life comes from having someone to love.

and we end up cutting corners and dating people we know we shouldn't date and sticking around in relationships long after it's clear that this is not a healthy place for us to be because we believe that that's the path to the abundant life.

For some of us, it's social media. If I can get enough likes on this post and it's going to prove that I'm somebody. And so we custom build this image of ourselves that has nothing to do with our real lives and put it online because we are chasing those clicks and those likes.

And the more clicks we get, the more we feel like I've made it because we believe that getting likes is more important to true abundant life than being truly known.

We're just like the Israelites. We have our own systems. We believe that these things that we can achieve are going to fulfill us but just like the Old Testament law couldn't bring what their hearts truly desired, none of the things other than Jesus that we rely on in life are ever going to truly satisfy us.

[17:08] Instead of giving us the abundant life that we long for, what do they give us? They give us stress because who am I going to be if I lose my job?

They give us anxiety. What is it about me that makes nobody want to date me? They give us fear. Why hasn't anybody clicked like on my picture yet?

Does everyone hate me? The things we long for cannot be achieved through our efforts. It's only in Jesus that we can find the security, the stability, and the freedom that our souls crave.

He is the only source of the truly abundant life. And he demonstrates this at the party. He tells the servants, fill the jars up with water. Symbolically showing that he is the one who fulfills completely the Old Testament law.

But he doesn't just fill them and leave them full. He has them fill the jars and then pull wine from them. It's almost like he's saying, by fulfilling the law, I'm inaugurating the new age of God's kingdom, the kingdom of the abundant wine right here, right now.

[18:19] The water of the law, it's not bad, but it can never get you what you're longing for. But my kingdom will bring you satisfaction. The other things you long for, you cling to, to get you that life can never satisfy you.

Only I can. So he has them draw the water, bring it to the master of the feast, and that brings us to a challenging truth.

The master of the feast, he tastes the wine, and he realizes this is delicious. So he calls the groom over and he says to him, everyone serves good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then

the poor wine.

But you have kept the good wine until now. Notice what he's saying here. Not only had the party run out of wine, not only was the party in danger of being shut down because this groom hadn't adequately prepared.

But the wine they were relying on to fuel their enjoyment up to this point was nothing compared to what Jesus offered them. How often in our lives do we try our best to squeeze every drop out of the mediocre that we can provide when Jesus is ready to offer us something so much greater, something so much better, if only we would ask.

[19 : 43] And something else, by this point, literally any wine would have made them happy. They were expecting the boxed stuff at this point. If Jesus had shown up and been like, here's some boxed wine, I got it on sale at the supermarket, they would have been ecstatic because the party can keep going.

And what does Jesus bring them instead? He gives them the good stuff. How often in our lives do we reach a point where we're so desperate for anything good to happen that we take the spiritual equivalent of boxed wine?

And Jesus is showing us and reminding us that he doesn't give us the cheap stuff. He always gives us true abundance. But here's the really challenging truth. That abundance often doesn't look like what we expect.

We believe that the true abundant life comes from fame, from money, from power, from comfort. But Jesus says, no, true abundance is about a relationship with me where you come to me, you submit to me, and you trust in me.

It's about a relationship, not stuff. If you look back in verse four, remember Jesus' comment where he said, my hour has not yet come.

[20 : 58] In this moment, his focus is on the cross. His focus is on the price that he has to pay to bring us this kingdom of the abundant wine and to make that a reality for you and for me.

And he actually uses wine to talk about the price that he was going to pay in another meal. In the Last Supper, he sits down with his disciples. He pulls out this glass of wine and he says, this cup is the new covenant of my blood.

He's saying, the price that it's going to cost me to bring this kingdom of abundant wine is the wine of my blood, but I'm willing to do it. Why? Is it so that we can be famous and rich and powerful?

No. It's because it's about a relationship and that's the price that it costs to have that relationship with us. And Jesus was willing to pay that because he cares about you and he cares about me and he loves us.

And here's the second half of the super challenging truth. the abundant life brought Jesus to the cross and he says that if we're going to have the truly abundant life, that we live that abundant life on the way of the cross as well.

[22 : 15] That the way to abundant life is not by pursuing our power and our fame and our prestige, but it's by laying down our desires every single day and pursuing him by loving the people around us.

I don't know about you, but that's scary to me because it feels way easier to just pour myself into my job and believe that if I can do really well and I can achieve success, that that's going to give me true life.

And what Jesus is saying is that best case scenario, that's the boxed wine. And even if I can get that boxed wine for a little bit, it's going to run out eventually. So here's my question for us today. What will it take for us to recognize that Jesus is so much better than the other things that we're relying on for this abundant life? I think step one is recognizing how powerless these other things are to satisfy us.

And I think, you might call me crazy, but I think Madonna expressed this really well. In an interview with Vogue, she said, my drive in life comes from a fear of being mediocre.

[23 : 22] That is always pushing me. I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being. But then I feel I'm still mediocre and uninteresting unless I do something else.

Because even though I've become somebody, I still have to prove that I am somebody. My struggle has never ended and I guess it never will. She's saying, I feel this pressure every day to wake up and prove through my efforts that I am somebody.

And on a really good day, I get the spiritual equivalent of boxed wine. But then I wake up the next morning and I realize I'm out again and I have to go produce more every single day.

I can't rest. I can't let it go. And I recognize that fame and money and success can never give me the deep desires of my soul. I'm chasing what I think is the abundant life and what I feel like is the best way to do it, but it has me trapped.

I can't stop. If I ever stop trying, I'm afraid that it's all going to disappear and be gone. And how clearly does that express what so many of us feel and experience when we try and accomplish and achieve the abundant life on our own?

[24 : 37] But Jesus comes to us and he says, stop. Stop striving. Rest. The best that you can accomplish through your efforts is mediocrity.

But I've come to bring abundance. See my beauty come to me. And how can we know that when we stop that he's going to be there and he's going to provide for us?

Well, look what happens in this story. Look at the drama that plays out here. It's actually a reenactment of the gospel story. There's a man who has this duty but it's a joyful duty to provide food and drink for his party.

It's a joyful duty because if he does it well everyone's going to have a great time and they're going to have the best party possible and he fails miserably. And for his failure he deserves shame and honor and punishment.

And in the moment of his failure Jesus steps in and does for this man what the man could not do for himself provides for him in a way that the man cannot provide for himself. And because of the work of Jesus at this party the groom who deserves shame dishonor and punishment instead is given praise and honor.

[26 : 01] That's the story of the gospel. We have a duty but it's a joyful duty to obey God. And God tells us that when we live our lives obediently to him that's going to be the most abundant fruitful joyful way to live and it's a blessing to have this responsibility and yet you and I every single one of us fail miserably.

And for our failure we deserve shame dishonor and punishment. And in the midst of our failure Jesus steps in and does for us what you and I cannot do for ourselves.

On the cross he pays the price for everything that we've ever done wrong and gives us credit for his perfection so that although we have failed through the work of Jesus you and I can be given praise and honor and glory in God's sight.

See when we stop striving that's when Jesus steps in and starts fighting our battles for us. He demonstrates that here he demonstrates that on the cross.

and on top of that think about this whose responsibility is it to provide the wine for the feast? The groom.

[27 : 20] Who does actually provide the wine for the feast? Jesus. Do you think there's significance to that? Probably. In the Old Testament over and over and over again God refers to the Israelites his special people as his bride and in the New Testament it calls the church the bride of Christ.

What's Jesus showing us by providing the wine at this feast? He's showing us that he is the greater groom. He is the one that our souls are longing for.

It's about a relationship with him and he is going to do something that's going to call a people to himself and give us unite us to him in the most intimate relationship possible for eternity.

So as we ask the question today who is this man? We see that Jesus is the Savior who rescues us through no work of our own and offers us abundance in the place of our failure and Jesus is the greater groom who is seeking a bride for his own possession.

John concludes the story by saying that Jesus displayed his glory by doing this sign. We've been discussing the glory of Christ lately. We've been saying it's sort of like a diamond.

[28 : 33] It's the fullness of who he is but when you look at it from different angles you see different things and in this story Jesus shows us another glimpse of who he is and I think what he's trying to show us here is that everything we're looking for in all our religious systems and all our self-reliant efforts is found in him.

We're not going to find it anywhere else. He is the only place where we're going to find the truly abundant life. Not our jobs, not our relationships, not social media, nothing else and because of this it's worthwhile to forsake everything else in order to pursue him because that's the path to the truly abundant life.

He did the first of his signs, he manifests his glory and his disciples believed in him. I think there are two closing things that are super significant in this last comment about the disciples believing in him.

John tells us the signs in the book of John are recorded so that we can believe and have life by believing. Jesus does the signs to lead to believe and it tells us here that the disciples believed. But what does that mean? Everyone at the party saw the sign but only the disciples believed. And that tells us it's possible to see the work of Jesus and not believe.

[30 : 01] And I think there are some of us here today who are in this place that we've been coming to Watermark for a long time. We've been hearing about Jesus, we've been seeing the difference that he makes in people's lives and we still haven't believed.

And God's calling to you today if this is you and saying Jesus is the only path to the abundant life that you desire. All your efforts cannot get you what he offers.

Stop striving, stop relying on yourself because only Jesus can give you what your soul is craving. And yes, pursuing Jesus it means a path of letting go of your self-reliance and embracing this path of the cross the way of sacrifice and trust but it will bring you the true abundance that you have always craved.

So if you're here today and you haven't trusted in Jesus I challenge you today trust in him he's the only path to the truly abundant life. But the second thing this passage shows us it says the disciples believed in him.

Now think about this they were already his disciples. To become his disciples they had to believe in him somehow and yet it tells us that after seeing this sign they believed in him.

[31 : 26] So what I see here is that it's possible to believe but not believe. Or in other words there are different levels of belief. For the disciples they probably believed that he was a good teacher maybe that he was sent by God to teach God's truth but they see this and they realize that he is powerful.

And the book of John is a journey of the disciples going deeper and deeper and coming to see more and more of who Jesus is and growing in their belief until they reach the point where they recognize this is God.

He is risen from the dead and he is the savior who is here to rescue us. And I think there are some of us here today who are sort of in this place where we believe but don't believe.

And God's calling us today to just believe. I think there are probably some of us here today who maybe we say I believe that Jesus can forgive my sins and that he's going to give me eternal life and that's going to be great but I don't really believe that he has the power and he alone has the power to give me the most abundant life possible here and now today.

And he's showing us that yes, he does. The call is to believe. Jesus is reminding us that he cares immensely about the everyday moments of our lives here and now and he wants us to have the most abundant life possible right now.

[32 : 58] Think about it. Jesus came to earth literally to save the world. The things that he did included raising the dead, giving sight to the blind, casting out demons, things that are really big deals and he gets dragged into providing food and beverage at a wedding party.

He has the same conversation that I had with a friend. If I had the conversation it can't be that significant of a conversation that like the fate of the universe hangs in the balance at it. But he still stepped in to help in this relatively trivial situation.

Why? Because he cares. Because he wants us to have the most abundant life right now. And he cares about the problems of our lives even the trivial ones.

But it's not just the trivial ones. In providing for this fairly trivial situation he gives a picture of his provision for our greatest problem as well. Just a reminder him caring and wanting an abundant life for us doesn't mean everything's going to work out the way that we want it to all the time.

But it does mean it's going to work out in a way that's ultimately best for us. So this week when we're tempted to find our identity by pouring ourselves into our jobs or relationships or social media remember only Jesus can bring the abundance that our souls crave.

[34 : 16] The truly abundant life is found in the way of the cross the way of sacrifice service and self-denial and that Jesus is trying to show you and me the inadequacy of everything else that we're going to rely on instead of him.

It might be uncomfortable but it's the path to the abundant life. Will you trust in him today? Will you believe and pursue him alone for the abundant life?

Let's pray. Jesus we thank you that you alone gives the abundant life. We thank you that you care about trivial moments and trivial situations in our lives but that you also care about the big moments and the big situations because you care about us.

We thank you that you offer us the truly abundant life not this mediocrity but true abundance. We thank you that by offering us true abundance you offer us the chance as well to rest.

You alone give us a chance to be free from our striving and our efforts to achieve what only you can give. so I pray that this week as we go throughout our weeks that we would learn to rest in you alone that we would have freedom from our striving that we would believe that we would find our abundance in you.

[35 : 43] Thank you for your love. In Jesus name Amen. Amen. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.