

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church / August 1, 2021 / Pastor Jeff Harrison
Un-Bottled: Jesus and Your Emotional Life Series
Biblical Joy (John 2:1-11)

A Video Introduces Biblical Joy and Its Relevance

Good morning. Wasn't it great seeing Embersyn/Clementine dedicated? And fitting for the emotion we're covering today: joy. In this season, I sure could use some more joy in my life, and maybe you could too. So let's ask God for joy...

Now I don't know about you, but in this season, I'm not crushing it when it comes to joy. I could use some more joy, and more of the resilience that comes from being joyful, and more blessings flowing to everyone around me as I increase in joy.

To get our bearings with biblical joy, including how biblical joy differs from circumstantial happiness, and how it relates to sorrow, let's check out this video from *The Bible Project*... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qvOhQTuD2e0>

The video shows us that biblical joy "is an attitude God's people adopt not because of happy circumstances but because of their hope in God's love and promise... that when you believe Jesus' love has overcome death itself, joy becomes reasonable in the darkest of circumstances... but that doesn't mean you ignore or suppress your sorrow... or give trite advice to 'turn that frown upside down.' Christian joy is a profound decision of faith and hope in the power of Jesus' own life and love."

Orienting to God's Word

So now that we've got this sense of what biblical joy is from the video, let's explore joy in John chapter 2. If you've got a Bible or Bible app, open to the Gospel of John, chapter 2. If not, not worries, we'll have the verses on the screen. If you're new to reading the Bible, the big numbers are chapter numbers and the little numbers are verse numbers.

The Gospel of John is a biography about Jesus written by John, one of Jesus' closest friends and followers. In John chapter 2, Jesus has just started His public ministry. And there, Jesus and His mother and disciples are invited to a celebration of joy.

Teaching: Cana's lessons on joy

Enjoy daily blessings – Let's pick up the story in verse 1 of John chapter 2. **(1-2)**

2 On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there,² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

We see in this passage Jesus and His followers taking the time to enjoy a wedding celebration. Some today can lose sight of enjoying God's blessings, focusing only on serving God's kingdom. Mistakenly living as if really following Jesus involves the absence of celebration, laughter, and enjoyment of God's good gifts.

But God initially placed humanity in a garden of abundance set up for us to enjoy God, each other, and our world. So God wants us to enjoy Him and His blessings. But because of our sin, and everyone else's, we've lost that garden ideal. In its place, life is often difficult, filled with thorns.

But sometimes, amid this hardship, by God's grace, we get to enjoy a party, like Jesus and His disciples did. Here in John 2, Jesus models for us the value of taking some time to celebrate, to enjoy life and its blessings.

This past week was a full one for me. I was on vacation the week before, so this week I had to catch up on emails and tasks and prepare this sermon and prepare for and lead my care group and prepare for and lead an Elders meeting, and participate in other meetings and do other tasks, and there were also all the normal things to do at home, as well as a few unique commitments this week. All good and normal kinds of things, just a full week.

Well, on Wednesday I went to a café for some cold brew coffee and focused time prepping this sermon. After a few hours there, I get a sandwich. Normally, given my busyness, I'd rush through the sandwich while continuing to work. But then I think, "You know, rather than just write words about how you all could apply this passage to your lives, maybe I should start applying it to mine as well." ☺

So I pause my work and over lunch actually enjoy God's blessings, paying attention to the beauty around me. I thank God for providing my car to drive there, and getting to sit in a beautiful, air-conditioned café, and having the money to afford a sandwich, and for the friendly workers who take my order, make my sandwich, and bring it to me, and for the textures and delicious flavors of the sandwich itself and how each bite satisfies my hunger pangs, and also for the beautiful vegetation outside the café window waving back and forth in the breeze. To be a little astonished by what before felt very ordinary and was being taken for granted. And then, before I leave, the café even gives me some free monkey bread. God providing another blessing.

And then I thought to myself, “What if I really enjoyed every single sandwich in this way? Why do I let busyness and minor problems keep me from enjoying daily blessings? And what if we all really enjoyed every sandwich and every other daily blessing God provides?”

I bet we’d be a more grateful, joyful, worshipful people, better able to resist temptations to sin and to serve God’s kingdom more joyfully, spreading our joy to others.

Sometimes the wine runs out – Now someone might think, “Of course you can enjoy the blessings of the sandwich. You’re healthy and your family loves you and you’ve got a job and all these other blessings. I’ve got cancer, or no one wants to marry me, or I’m out of work and in debt. How am I supposed to enjoy daily blessings?”

Struggles and sorrows do make it much, much harder to enjoy each day’s blessings from God. In the language of verse 3, in life, sometimes the wine runs out. Verse 3:

³ When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.”

In their culture, weddings were a big deal, the celebrations typically spanning a whole week. And wine was central to the celebration. So if the wine runs out, the celebration is over. The joy is gone as these small-town, ancient people must go back to the many hardships of daily life. In that culture, running out of wine and prematurely ending the wedding celebration was also a shameful embarrassment for the family. A debacle that’d be remembered for years to come in that small town. So both sorrow and shame are coming once everyone hears that the wine has run out.

As in Cana, perhaps the wine has run out in your life. Maybe you really messed up and are experiencing hard consequences, or maybe you’ve got a chronic health problem, or maybe your big five-year plan has not at all come to fruition. The wine has run out, and you feel like there’s nothing to enjoy.

Jesus replaces shame and sorrow with righteousness and joy – As Mary tells Jesus about the wine running out in verse 3, she seems to be asking Jesus to do something about it, to fix the impending sorrow and shame. Let’s see Jesus’ response in verse 4. **(4)**

⁴ “Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.”

Now I wouldn’t recommend, under the pretense of trying to be like Jesus, calling your mother “woman.” ☺ But in first century Jewish culture, “woman” was a polite way to speak.

Here in verse 4, Jesus' speech appears to disengage Himself from the wedding's needs, saying His hour has not yet come.

If you read the whole Gospel of John, you see that "My hour" always refers to the end of Jesus' life on earth: to His suffering, death, resurrection, and returning to the Father. So here in verse 4, very early in Jesus' public ministry, before He's even performed a miracle, perhaps Jesus' statement means, "Mother, it's not yet time for me to reveal Myself to everyone as Messiah, so why are you asking Me to do a miracle?"

We don't know exactly how Mary interpreted Jesus' somewhat cryptic "My hour has not yet come" response. But we do know that Mary thinks there is at least a chance that Jesus will act, so she instructs the servants starting in verse 5. **(5-10)**

⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. ⁸ Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." ⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ and said, "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."

In these verses Jesus replaces the shame and sorrow of prematurely ending the celebration with honor and joy. Notice how Jesus does it. Verse 6 tells us that Jesus works using the purification jars, which were part of the rituals the Jewish people practiced to have right standing before God. So Jesus replacing ceremonial ritual with an abundance of wine, a symbol of joy.

Notice also in these verses the servants' role, which is to do whatever Jesus tells them to do, even when it doesn't make sense, and trust Jesus to work through their obedience.

And imagine being the bridegroom. Though your family messed things up by not having enough wine, now in these verses you're getting all the credit for Jesus' work.

Is all this starting to sound like something else? Perhaps these details are pointing to something much more than just what's happening at the wedding. Verse 11 goes on to say:

¹¹ What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

In the next chapter, John 3, Jesus is described as a bridegroom, and later in the New Testament, all who believe in Jesus are called the bride of Christ; it's wedding imagery.

So here, at a wedding, Jesus's mom asks Him to do something about the lack of wine. And Jesus responds that His hour, which in John's gospel always refers to His suffering and death, has not yet come.

It's like Jesus may be thinking, "Mom, you want me to do something about their shame and bring joy to them? I have come to deal with their shame and sorrow and bring them forgiveness, righteousness, and joy, but My hour for that has not yet come."

I once heard Pastor Tim Keller artfully describe how this sign at Cana revealed Jesus' glory, as verse 11 says. Jesus is looking forward to His own death as He says that, "His hour has not yet come." So Jesus may have been thinking at this Cana wedding about His wedding to us, His bride. And how the only way Jesus would sip the cup of joy at His wedding feast was to first die and rise for His bride.

So Jesus, after turning the water to wine, sat amongst all the joy of the Cana celebration, sipping His coming sorrow, so that today we can sit amid our world's sorrow, sipping our coming joy.

John, the author of this gospel, describes our coming joy in the last few chapters of the book of Revelation.¹ There John describes the celebration as the ultimate wedding feast, a feast for Jesus and us, His bride. I wonder, what will the pulsating joy of that feast feel like?

And John also describes in Revelation a great spiritual battle that ends with Jesus defeating and judging all evil for all time. Jesus ending all death, mourning, and pain forever. I wonder, as all evil, death, and pain are removed from inside of us and from all around us just how tremendous our joy will be.

¹ Revelation 19-22

Then John describes heaven coming down to earth as a city with no need for the sun or moon. Because the glory of God gives light, with the city having a brilliance like a very precious jewel. I wonder what wonderful joy we'll feel as we look on that glory and brilliance.

There in the city is a river of the water of life, clear as a crystal, and on each side of the river is the tree of life, yielding fruit every month, its leaves healing the nations. As we partake in that water and that tree, I wonder how indescribably refreshing, delicious, and healing it will be.

And when we arrive to that great city, God promises to wipe every tear from our eyes. I wonder, just what does that tender touch of God feel like? Inexpressibly comforting, nurturing, secure, warm, renewing?

There God will dwell with us. I wonder what the unfathomable joy of seeing the face of God and reigning forever with Him is like.

A pastor with cancer illustrates biblical joy – Now it's not enough to only know these glorious things in our heads, and then just file them away. We must take them to our hearts.

Because like Pastor Tim Keller, the wine may run out in our lives. In Keller's case, he's been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He wrote about it in an article for *The Atlantic* earlier this year.

He wrote about how he and his wife Kathy spent much time after his diagnosis in tears and disbelief. Of course they knew they would die someday, but they both felt great and thought they had many years together ahead of them. And before the diagnosis, death was an abstraction to them, true but not yet a personal reality. As death was just an abstraction, so their faith in their resurrection in Jesus was also somewhat abstract.

Keller says, "But as death, the last enemy, became real to my heart, I realized that my beliefs would have to become just as real to my heart, or I wouldn't be able to get through the day... I had to look hard at my deepest trusts, my strongest loves and fears, and bring them into contact with God... Jesus's costly love, death, and resurrection had become not just something I believed and filed away, but a hope that sustained me all day. I pray this prayer daily..."

And as I lay down in sleep and rose this morning only by your grace, keep me in the joyful, lively remembrance that whatever happens, I will someday know my final rising, because Jesus Christ lay down in death for me, and rose for my justification."

Then Keller goes on to say, “As this spiritual reality grows, what are the effects on how I live? One of the most difficult results to explain is what happened to my joys and fears. Since my diagnosis, Kathy and I have come to see that the more we tried to make a heaven out of this world—the more we grounded our comfort and security in it—the less we were able to enjoy it... To our surprise and encouragement, Kathy and I have discovered that the less we attempt to make this world into a heaven, the more we are able to enjoy it.

No longer are we burdening it with demands impossible for it to fulfill. We have found that the simplest things—from sun on the water and flowers in the vase to our own embraces, sex, and conversation—bring more joy than ever. This has taken us by surprise.

This change was not an overnight revolution. As God’s reality dawns more on my heart, slowly and painfully and through many tears, the simplest pleasures of this world have become sources of daily happiness. It is only as I have become, for lack of a better term, more *heavenly minded* that I can see the material world for the astonishingly good divine gift that it is.

I can sincerely say, without any sentimentality or exaggeration, that I’ve never been happier in my life, that I’ve never had more days filled with comfort. But it is equally true that I’ve never had so many days of grief. One of our dearest friends lost her husband to cancer six years ago. Even now, she says, she might seem fine, and then out of nowhere some reminder or thought will sideswipe her and cripple her with sorrow.

Yes. But I have come to be grateful for those sideswipes, because they remind me to reorient myself to the convictions of my head and the processes of my heart. When I take time to remember how to deal with my fears and savor my joys, the consolations are stronger and sweeter than ever.”²

Next Step

Like Tim Keller, eventually our lives will run out. Until then, we’re invited to enjoy our daily blessings, every single sandwich. And when the wine runs out in our lives, may we remember our coming eternal joy.

That’s our next step, our application this morning: to enjoy our daily blessings and our coming eternal joy.

² <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/03/tim-keller-growing-my-faith-face-death/618219/> Accessed 7/27/21.

In Cana, Jesus didn't provide just enough low-quality wine to keep the celebration kinda going for just a bit longer. No, Jesus provided over 100 gallons of the choicest wine, a great abundance far beyond the needs of the party, showing us that when Jesus gives eternal life, He gives it in great abundance. Ultimate wedding feast united with Jesus, end of all evil, death and pain, water of life, tree of life, touch from God, beholding His face and reigning with Him kind of joyful abundance!

That coming joy is ours because Jesus, after turning water to wine, sat amongst all the joy of the celebration, sipping His coming sorrow, so that today we can sit amid our world's sorrow, sipping the coming joy.

We remember this now with another feast, the Lord's Supper, which points us not only backwards to the cross, but also forwards, to the indescribable joy of the marriage supper of the Lamb.