

“I LOVE JESUS, BUT...”

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Text: John 2:1-11

A couple of years ago a friend of mine sent me a video clip from the t-v show “Ellen.” And the background to this clip is about a lady named Gladys. You see, Gladys got onto the Ellen Show because she wrote a letter to Ellen complaining about where the plants were placed on the set. Apparently, this letter rather peaked Ellen’s interest in “just who” this Gladys lady was and what she was up to. So, during one of her shows, Ellen called Gladys on the telephone.

[Watch the clip]

“I love Jesus,” she said, “but I drink a little.” So I started pondering, as most pastors do...we have some really deep thoughts about things sometimes, you know...and so I started pondering this phrase. “I love Jesus, but I drink a little.”

And as I began to think about it—it started to dawn on me, “You know there is a lot of truth to this statement for a lot of people.” Sometimes, in my own life there’s this type of thing. “I love Jesus, but...” How about you?

For some it maybe, “I love Jesus, but I talk a little too much behind other peoples’ backs.” Or “I love Jesus, but I use words that hurt people sometimes.” Maybe it’s, “I love Jesus, but I work at a job and make a little too much money—of which I don’t give back to the church.” Or, “I love Jesus, but my house is just a little bit too big.” And it could go on and on and on.

We all have weaknesses in our own lives and oftentimes we allow those weaknesses to keep us from experiencing God’s transforming love and power. So there is often this, “hanging however” in our faith. What is your “hanging however?” Is there anything getting in the way of your walk with Jesus?

I read a devotion once by a lady named Tracy Jensen who wrote about something called “Phantom pain.” This happens to people who have had a limb amputated. For instance, if it was the person’s arm that had been removed, the person’s brain still remembers the pain and sends out pain signals. Doctors have to retrain people by having them face a mirror and tell their brain that their arm is no longer there. Over time, the brain learns; the person gets better and is free of pain.

After accepting Christ as our personal Lord and Savior, our sin and its penalty was erased, or removed...amputated if you will. Yet, we don't always live as though we are free from the pain and bondage of sin. Some of us have a hard time forgiving ourselves because of our past. We may still suffer from old guilt and self-condemnation. This is a kind of "phantom pain," is it not? And this guilt, and thinking that we are not good enough for God's grace can stunt our Christian growth, cause us to want to "give up," or lead us into more sin.

Do you love Jesus, but...? It may very well be nearly impossible to follow Christ if we "love Jesus, but..."

In Luke Chapter 9 Jesus said to someone, "Follow me." But the person replied, "Lord first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead. But you go and spread the news of God's kingdom.' Someone else said to Jesus, 'I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say good-bye to those in my house.' Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts a hand on the plow and looks back is fit for God's kingdom.'

When Jesus calls us, we are to forsake our old lives. The grace of Jesus' call bursts all the bonds of sin and legalism. It breaks all the bonds of the old life, the old self. The call of Jesus is stronger than any barrier. As we face the call of Christ on our lives, we are challenged to come face to face with ourselves in the mirror of God's grace-filled Word. And as we do this, we can be healed from the "phantom pain, guilt and sin," and be set free to follow Jesus in grace and with confidence.

I think this morning, as we read the story of the wedding—the Scripture draws us to think about John Chapter 1 in which there was this rag-tag group of disciples who Jesus comes to and asks them to follow Him. And they are just a group of ordinary guys. And the only thing they know is they have chosen to follow this guy named Jesus. And I wonder if they didn't sometimes say to themselves, "we want to follow this guy, but we've got all this baggage in our lives."

So the question becomes, "How does Jesus begin to mold and shape this group of disciples to become the people that He will send out to reach the world?" And the Gospel of John tells us that on the third day...meaning after the disciples have chosen to follow Jesus...on the third day Jesus does something miraculous that shows God's glory to those around Him, and it's at a wedding in Cana of Galilee.

It's an interesting situation. They're at a wedding, and Middle Eastern weddings in the 1st Century, well, they lasted a long time. They would really party for at least a week. And at this wedding it just so happens that the host runs out of wine. And so Mary comes to Jesus and basically says to Jesus, "They're out of wine." To which Jesus responds, basically, "It's not my problem." I mean He's not the host of the wedding.

And then He says something interesting. He says, "My time has not yet come." Scholars debate all the time about what in the world Jesus is talking about here. And it's possible that what Jesus

is saying is “Look, there is going to be a day when I completely reveal My glory and My disciples will see it all, but it’s not time yet.”

But here is a fantastic thing about this passage. Even though Jesus says, “It’s not my time,” Jesus does what His mom asks Him to do. Jesus is a pretty good Son. And so, Mary turns to the servants and says, “Do whatever he tells you.” And Jesus does something very interesting. Jesus turns to these big jugs that hold water, and Jesus tells the servants to “fill them up with water.” And by the way, these jugs weren’t just ordinary water jars. They were used to contain water that would be used during a Jewish purification ceremony. They represent the old order; the old life of guilt and shame.

So Jesus takes these ancient symbols, these water jars and says, “Fill them up with water.” And then when they open them back up the water has been turned to wine. Jesus takes an ancient symbol and turns it into something brand new!!! And He does this in order to show His disciples and those around Him that God can take anything old, anything new and God can transform it into something amazingly powerful and different.

I am convinced that no matter how old or how young we are...no matter whether we are male or female...God can take us, just as we are, and God can use us to create in us something miraculous—something God can use mightily for God’s wonderful Kingdom!!!

C.S. Lewis talks about Jesus’ turning water into wine. And what C.S. Lewis basically says is that Jesus didn’t do anything in this passage that nature itself doesn’t do. In other words, water causes the vine to grow and the vine grows and grapes are produced from the vine. Grapes are then taken and crushed into juice and then later fermented and turned into wine. All Jesus did in this passage is that Jesus caused this process to happen in an instant!!!

And it reminds me of this great truth: God is the Master of taking the ordinary, everyday thing and turning it into something extraordinary!!!

God, in our lives, can take all of those weaknesses...all of those hang-ups that we have...all those stumbling blocks...all those “hanging howevers” and create something amazing out of them!!!

So our passage continues on. And we see that Jesus, in turning the water into wine does something very important for the host of the wedding. In the 1st Century, if the host or hostess ran out of wine it would have been really looked down upon by their peers. They ran the risk of being social outcasts.

So, not only does Jesus take water and turn it into wine and save their reputation. We are told that the wine was the best wine that they had at the whole party!!! And normally, people would serve the best wine first and then when the partiers couldn’t taste the wine so well, or it didn’t matter much to them anymore, the cheaper wine would be served. But Jesus saved the best for last!!! Not only does Jesus save the day, but Jesus makes the day that much more special!!!

What are you dealing with? What tragedies or circumstances are causing you grief and anxiety? As people who believe Jesus can turn water into wine, we have the marvelous hope that somehow, someday God will do a beautiful thing in our lives.

I think a key to this passage hinges on a little line that Mary said to the servants. "Do whatever he tells you." In other words, I think the key to turning water into wine and sad stories into beautiful miracles is that, as people of faith, we are to listen for the Word of God...and when we hear it, we are to go and work in the world in such a way that Jesus' power flows through us and spills out onto others. And in doing this, we might just find our "hanging however" or our "I love Jesus, but..." vanishes miraculously or is swallowed up by God's transforming love and grace!!! For it is in serving Jesus and serving others that we forget about ourselves and become the best we can be.

I heard a story about a mother who wanted so badly for her son to become a great piano player. So she took him to a piano concert where the greatest player in the world was performing--hoping that this would inspire her little boy to fulfill her dreams for him. So they were sitting in their seats waiting for the concert to begin and the mother got distracted speaking to an old friend who was sitting close by her. And when she finally turned back in her seat, her son was no longer there. She was wondering, "Where in the world did he go?"

And the show was just about to begin and she looked up at the stage, and there on the stage was her little boy. He'd somehow gotten to the front and climbed up on the stage and was now walking, with determination toward the grand piano. And the auditorium was packed. And that little boy walked up to the piano and sits down and starts to play "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" on the grand piano. And you could begin to hear a few giggles coming from the audience.

And then the great piano player suddenly walks out behind the little boy, reaches his right hand around him and begins to fill in the notes. And he takes his left hand and reaches around and begins to play with the little boy playing "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star. The next thing you know is that this beautiful sound fills the auditorium as folks rise to their feet in awe.

We don't have to be some Grand Piano Player. But we have to listen to God play the notes in order for water to turn into wine in our lives and in the lives of this community and this world around us.

May we let go of our "I love Jesus, but...or howevers..." And embrace instead, "Lord wherever You go I will follow."

Amen.