**Saving the Best for Last**

Based on [John 2:1-11](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn2.1-11)

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Second Sunday after the Epiphany

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Jesus was invited to a wedding in Cana in Galilee. He went with his disciples and his mother was also there. The wine ran out. Mary goes to Jesus and asks for help. Jesus helps. He turns more than a hundred gallons of water into wine. The master of the feast did not know of the miracle, but when he tasted the wine he said to the bridegroom, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” This was the first of Jesus’ signs.

There's something to be said about the wine. Evidently, Jesus knows how to make really good wine. So good that it bested the wine that came before it. Obviously, it wouldn’t comport with the nature of the miraculous, nor with perfection of Jesus himself had he made substandard or even less than perfect wine. But there’s two other levels on which to consider this. The first wine was made by man, the last wine by God; and,the first wine was older the last wine new wine.

Elsewhere Jesus says, “ No one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins--and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins” (Mark 2:22). The general consensus is that Jesus is here talking about the New Covenant and the Gospel, versus the Old Covenant and the Law. Now that’s not to say that the Old Covenant or the Law given to Moses wasn’t from God, but it was given to a people who weren’t promised the Holy Spirit for personal sanctification. Now, I don’t mean that there was no faith, but the ceremonial laws requiring Sabbath observances and forbidding certain foods as unclean...these were for a people who had not reached the maturity we have been given in Christ.

Christians can get troubled by reading the old testament because certain godly men like Abraham, Jacob, King David and others practiced polygamy. Abraham denied that Sarah was his wife so that Pharaoh would feel free to seduce her rather than kill Abraham to do so. When men from sodom came in order to rape who they thought were other men and guests of Lot, lot says “No, take my daughters, only don’t take these men”. King David and Solomon made some very violent and severe political maneuvers that we would have a hard time justifying as christians today. And that is a good question. Why are we as God’s children told that if we make a practice of sinning we will not inherit the kingdom of God, and yet David and Solomon had numerous wives and concubines, apparently without God’s expressing disapproval?

(Pause to let congregation think)

It’s often thought that God was harder on the Israelites because of the Law observing sabbaths, offering sacrifices, and easier on Christians because of the Gospel. But if god overlooked certain sins for them that he doesn’t overlook for us...didn’t Moses have it easier?

(Pause)

Acts says, “The times of ignorance, God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent” (17:30). Romans says that Jesus’ death, “was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins (3:25). Galatians says to the Jews, “So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by Grace” (3:24). The Pharisees asked Jesus what he thought about divorce since Moses allowed it. He replies that God allowed Moses to divorce because of the people’s hardness of heart, but now Jesus says to christians “what God has joined, let no man separate.”

There is also the fact that what Jesus changed was **water intended for a jewish purification rite** in order to make the wine. That water was used, not for a ritual that God commanded, but for a ritual the jews made up. You may remember at one point that the Pharisees criticized Jesus’ disciples for not washing before they eat. That was not a sin, it was just a man-made custom they didn’t observe. The point is that Jesus took the water intended for a man made custom and changed it into wine from God to make merry the hearts of men. “He saved the better wine for Last”, that means that the Gospel of Jesus is better than the traditions of men, as much as wine is better than bath water.

The old wineskin is the Israelites who were tasked to keep the ceremonies and laws of God in all cleanness and purity, but who were unable to do it. They even made up new traditions like washings in attempts to make themselves holy, and ended up trusting them more than God’s word. In that time God showed forbearance in many things...because they were not given the Holy Spirit as we are. They were like children, in need of guardians. They kept the old wine, of the Old Covenant. But Jesus came and preached a gospel of free forgiveness of sins and the gift of the holy spirit to all who believe. And rather than elaborate ceremonial sacrifices of bulls and goats on the altar, and required feast days, fasts and prohibitions of certain foods, he gave his simple body and blood under bread and wine, and gave water for baptism to forgive our sins and give us his spirit, who bears within us the fruit of righteousness that allows us to lead holy lives as god intended. This is new wine, fit for new wineskins, new children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. And he pours in us his new testament as new wine in us to cleans us from within so that our hearts will seek the holiness that the Israelites with their law were not able to attain.

To tie this all back into our text...Jesus saved the good wine until now. The pharisees rejected his coming. At his death, the temple curtain tore like old wineskins. But that’s why we have been called to become new people, born from above, ready and grateful to receive the New Covenant of Bread and wine that are his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Ready to go forth from this altar driven by the Spirit into the desert of this world equipped for every Good Work to accomplish in love and joy. We are new wineskins, who have received new wine from Jesus, who has saved the good wine until now. Let us receive the fruit of the vine today, that we may bear the fruit of the spirit in our hearts.