

In 1880, the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky was completing what is widely held to be the greatest novel ever written, *The Brothers Karamazov*, his final and fiercest wrestling with some of the deepest questions of faith and doubt, and the search for the meaning of life amidst suffering.

The novel, as aptly titled, follows three brothers, Dmitri, Ivan, and the primary protagonist, Alyosha. Now, each of the brothers represents a different stream of making sense of the world. Dmitri is one who's driven by passion, Ivan is one driven by intellect, and Alyosha is the man of faith. Deep in the novel, in the seventh book, Dostoevsky takes us inside a Russian monastery where Alyosha is experiencing a crisis not just of faith, but really, his whole world is seemingly coming unraveled.

His beloved spiritual father, named Elder Zosima, has just died and the whole village is grieving this loss. As his health was waning, the holiness of the Elder was perceived to mean that Jesus would move in some way and bring a miracle to Elder Zosima's life. But the community is scandalized when Zosima doesn't survive the illness, and Alyosha, who's given his life to following Jesus and the example of this Elder's faith, collapses before the coffin.

The night of Zosima's death, Alyosha is wandering, doubting all that was once certain. He's broken open after hours of grief and questioning and despair. Finally, with nowhere else to go, we find Alyosha at the coffin of his beloved Elder. As he's grieving by candlelight, another monk comes in named Father Paisiy, and he's reading aloud from the Gospel of John, which is the text we will read today—the miracle at the wedding of Cana. Alyosha kneels there in his grief, and this is a turning point in this thousand-page tome, in which Alyosha hears Father Paisiy reading about the wedding at Cana.

Dostoevsky writes, "He fell to the earth, a weak youth, and rose up a fighter, steadfast for the rest of his life." The broken, doubting, grieving Alyosha enters the room ready to give up, but hears this story of turning water into wine, and leaves transformed. This morning, all I want to do is ask, what did Alyosha hear in this story? Because this is the first miracle of Jesus that's recorded, and of all the miracles of Jesus, this one seems like a cool party trick. This would transform the life of young Alyosha. What did he hear in that moment? What is it in this story that transformed this grieving young character into a life of faith, passion, and joy?

We're going to do something a bit different today; we're going to work through the text, and along the way, we're going to pick up three different questions. Then at the end of our time, we're going to answer those questions in reverse order. So we'll pick up questions one, two, and three, and then we'll answer them in reverse order.

John is a unique writer among the gospel writers. He is the gospel of the four, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, that stands out distinct and different from all the other gospel accounts. John is the artist of the group. He organizes his gospel less chronologically and more thematically. Think of the way that a director of a movie will sometimes play with a flashback or a flash-forward using different events that are all historical, all took place, all are actual events in history, but John likes to play with them for his own purposes. So he'll, without telling us, flash forward or flash back and move things around, but the importance is to pay attention as to why this story is coming at this particular time.

John is the creative in the group, which means that everything means something, and then something else in his gospel with all sorts of symbols and allusions and things that he's using to draw and saturate our minds into the story of the scripture. Let's jump in, John 2:1. "*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*" (vv. 1-2).

If you're paying attention to the first chapter, you'll start to piece together the number of days that are happening. But what's interesting is that the third day is not a typical day on which an ancient wedding would take place. So why the note that it's the third day? There's something there on the third day, a unique name or title, but something is happening that's important. For a bit of context, weddings in the ancient world were a major event. They are big deals now, but they were far bigger deals back in the ancient world. Most weddings would last seven or more days, the entire community would be invited, and the number of people who came would bestow greater honor on the one throwing the wedding.

These weddings in the ancient world were of such significance that they became the chief celebration in the village for the whole year, which means they were laden with meaning and purpose. In an honor-shame society, this was a big deal for the one hosting the wedding. The banquet itself would be a source of great honor for the couple getting married, as well as the families involved. There is also an allusion to the biblical metaphor of a wedding. They were such a big deal in the ancient world that the predominant theme of the relationship between God and his people throughout the Bible is that of a marriage covenant.

So the wedding theme is pervasive throughout the scriptures, and already we have a couple of clues as to why the wedding takes place on the third day. If you're in the ancient world, your mind is flashing. There are all kinds of allusions, and you're recognizing all of the significance. Let's pick up in verse 3.

**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." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." vv. 3-5**

Isn't that a fascinating exchange? You have all of the emotions going on. If you're a mom, is that how you want your son to talk to you? I'm guessing no, because I know if I talked to my mom that way, both my mom and my dad would have something to say to me. What's happening here? Well, first, why is it a problem that the wine is gone? Today, we understand if you run out of food or if too many people show up and you don't have enough food or drink, but in the ancient world, the festival was over when the wine ran out.

Mary is picking up on this and watching it unfold. She recognizes the wedding is not over but is out of wine. In the first century, this would have been catastrophic. It would have been publicly humiliating, and all of the honor that this event was supposed to bring would have been turned into a lifetime of shame. There are ancient records of people filing legal proceedings against others when the wine ran out early. This would cause the family, giving away their child in marriage, to wonder if they should call the wedding off. So while it seems benign to us, this was a big deal for the host family.

What's interesting is that Jesus hears this from his mother, "They have no more wine," and Jesus provides something of a non-sequitur, the first curt response we hear from Jesus, "Woman, why do you involve me?" In the ancient world, that's not quite as offensive as we hear it now. The term woman in the original language was a formal address, so it wasn't demeaning like it is today, but it still isn't quite the way you would talk to your mother in the ancient world.

Later in the story, Jesus would use this same term, woman, in just a few chapters about speaking to the Samaritan woman. He'll speak of it to Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb, and even better, he'll say it from the cross when Jesus is hanging there. He looks out to care for his mother and calls her woman. So this isn't the harshness that we perceive, but still something's happening here. Then he follows it up with this phrase, "My hour has not yet come."

This phrase, my hour, is a technical term in the Gospel of John. Every time he uses this phrase, he is speaking of Jesus' crucifixion and ultimate glorification. You see that all over the place. You see it in chapter 7:30. You see it in chapter 8:20. But most explicitly, you see it in chapter 12:23. "Jesus replied, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.'" Then he goes on to predict his death. Chapter 13:1 It was just before the Passover Festival. "Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father." Any time John uses the phrase the hour, he is speaking of Jesus' death.

Let's go back to this exchange. Mary comes along. "Jesus, they don't have any more wine. It's all gone." To which Jesus then quite literally replies, "Mother, it's not time for me to die." What is it, in this particular moment, that is causing Jesus to give the non-sequitur to end all non-sequiturs? This has nothing to do with the wine, at least apparently it doesn't. And here's where we pick up our first question for the morning. Why does this make Jesus think of his death? What is it about this

moment in which we hear a simple request from Mary, who is aware of this Jesus.

Mary's aware, and so she actually brings a very genuine request. They're out of wine. Remember the whole immaculate conception thing? Remember when the angel appeared and said, "Your child will be the Messiah"? But Jesus' mind appears to be so consumed here that in the very forefront of his mind, in what he's experiencing, is his death. Why is it that this makes Jesus think of his death? Well, hold onto that. Let's pick up in verse 6.

**Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. vv. 6-7**

So this whole exchange is happening. Jesus is standing nearby. He looks over, sees six large jars, which hold between 20 and 30 gallons, which means there are 120 and 180 gallons of water sitting right next to Jesus. Now, John makes the point that these are not just any old jars, but these are stone jars used for ceremonial washing. That is a very important little detail, but I just want you to note the stone jars and the ceremonial washing jars.

The ceremonial washing jars were used for one explicit purpose. In the ancient world, before you went into the temple, before you participated in a meal, before you participated in a festival of any sort, you would have to go through a ceremonial washing process. This isn't about hygiene. This is something much greater. This is about the recognition of your own sinfulness before God, the process in which you become purified so you can enter the presence of God. This is important. They're huge jars that are set aside for one particular purpose.

That's also the allusion to the stone jars. John does not want any way for us to mistake that these jars are exclusively for the ceremonial washing. And that brings us to the second question: Why does Jesus, in this whole scene, use the ceremonial jars? I mean, we know where the story goes. He turns it into wine. He could have used anything. He could have used the cooking pots that were in the kitchen. He could have made 600 to 900 bottles of wine, which is what the math works out to be. He could have just had those out in the street, and they go out there and find the wine. He could have used anything to hold the wine to solve this problem, but Jesus used the ceremonial washing jars. Why does he use those jars? Well, we will circle back to that.

**Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, 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 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." vv. 8-10**

This is six hundred to nine hundred bottles of wine. This is not a polite top off to make sure the party goes on. This is an abundance of wine and not only is it an abundance of quantity of wine, but it's an abundance of the quality of wine. They take a spoonful and bring it over to the master of the banquet. He takes a sip of it and is blown away. He says, "This isn't the boxed wine that we hide in the fridge, this is the good stuff, the choice wine." He's shocked by this because he takes it to the bridegroom and says, "Listen, usually you bring out the cheap stuff later on. When everyone's had a little bit too much to drink and the palate's shot, you sneak in the cheaper stuff to fill the space."

But there's something in this that Jesus turns it into choice wine. Notice also what's happening in this exchange. This is a moment of honor or shame. The wedding for the one throwing the banquet is a moment where, if they run out of wine, they are filled with shame, a lifetime of them hearing about the time they couldn't provide enough for the wedding. But in this moment, when Jesus turns all of those jars into wine, and the headmaster tastes it for the first time, Jesus turns the potential shame of the host of the party into a moment of honor. Do you see that? I mean, it is a profound exchange. The one hosting the event, the headmaster, is blown away. And this brings a tremendous amount of honor to the one who was facing a lifetime of shame.

**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. After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days. vv. 11-12**

John rounds out the story by stating that what took place here is the first of the signs. John is broken into two distinct sections. The very first section is known as the Book of Signs, and so we will pick up seven signs in total through the first half of this Gospel of John. As you're reading through the gospel, somewhere along the line, John stops numbering them, so you have to be a little more attentive to the text, but there are seven miracles that take place.

Here, John says, "This sign revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him." Now, this belief in the Greek is speaking more to it being fixed, like their faith was fixed. The disciples had already abandoned their old way of life and followed Jesus, so there's a sense of belief in them, but something in this solidified their belief in him, their faith in him.

So this is the first sign, but we haven't actually heard what it is a sign of. John leaves that a bit to be understood from the clues he's dropped along the way, and that leads us to our third question. What is the sign pointing to? Often when we approach miracles in the modern world, we view them as naked displays of divine power. We just think of it as, he did something that apparently we can't do, and so therefore he must be God. And that's trueish. That is happening. However, all throughout the scriptures, you hear of people doing miraculous things. Like the Pharaoh way back with the plagues. He's bringing in people who seem to be doing the miraculous. And so what exactly is happening here, and what is it about this sign that solidifies the disciples' faith in him?

The three questions we've picked up along the way are: Why does this make Jesus think of his death? Why does Jesus use the ceremonial jars? And what is the sign pointing to? Let's reverse the order and answer them in three, two, one, because the answer to three gives way to two, and two to one. It also moves in a way in which the broadest, most macro scale illustration from this begins in question three, but then it gets closer and closer to you and me on a very practical level.

The first question we'll look at is what is this sign pointing to? What is meant by the word "sign"? We often think of it as a miracle, and those can be interchangeable, but they're a little bit different. John uses the Greek word *semeion*, which means sign or wonder. It is a sign like a sign we encounter on Highway 101. It's pointing to something beyond itself. So the whole point of the sign isn't just what the sign is, but what it is pointing to.

Also, note that this is the first sign, meaning this is Jesus' first chance and only chance to make a first impression. It's his first public entrance onto the scene. If you are a leader of a new movement like Jesus was, then your first public presentation is really important because, just like a politician or a famous figure, it sets the tone as to what that person is about.

I come to the question, why this sign? He'll go on later in John to raise somebody from the dead. He'll obviously go on to resurrect his own life. Those seem pretty good starting points. Why is this particular sign the first sign? There's greater symbolism in this story, and the three things we talked about before, the third day, the wedding, and the wine, all give us a symbol as to what Jesus is pointing to.

The first is that the wedding happens on the third day. Why is this, through a theological lens, important? Well, what comes to mind when you think of the third day when you're reading the Bible? The resurrection. The best explanation as to why John is explicitly stating that it's the third day is, in fact, that answer, the resurrection. This is a moment of new life, something new breaking into the old. That's what's happening at this wedding. It carries all sorts of significance.

When John writes, "On the third day, there was a wedding at Cana," he is not simply noting the calendar. He is telegraphing what day it is. It is a day like the resurrection day, which already casts it in the vein of joy, doesn't it? Because Easter is a day to celebrate. Resurrection is a day to be filled with joy, as is a wedding. The third day represents the resurrection.

The second clue is the wedding. The predominant theme throughout the scriptures is that of a wedding between God's people and himself, and the dominant metaphor throughout the prophetic tradition is of this idea of a wedding. Look at this in Isaiah 54. This is the prophet speaking to the people of God. "*For your Maker is your husband—the Lord Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth*" (Isaiah 54:5).

The fundamental posture that Isaiah in preaching to his people is that your Maker, God the Father, is your husband, drawing this metaphor that we, the people of God, are God's bride. At the end of the story in

Revelation, the Apostle John writes this about where the whole story is going. Look at Revelation 19.

**Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.) Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God." Revelation 19:6-9**

He added, "These are the true words of God." The picture in which all of this is going, that John certainly has in his mind, that Jesus has in this particular moment, is that the culmination of history is the wedding feast of the Lamb, when God's people and God himself are reunited, and they celebrate together in this joyous ceremony, and for the rest of eternity. The experience is like that of a good wedding feast, enjoying the presence of one another.

Why the wine? What is the importance of Jesus turning the water into wine? This is also one of the predominant images that the prophets use. We're asking those questions of: What is Jesus doing here? What is the sign pointing to? We have the resurrection, we have the wedding feast of the Lamb, but now the wine.

There are a few examples of the prophets speaking about the importance of wine. The prophet Joel in chapter 2:19 is speaking and prophesying about the restoration of Israel. *"The Lord replied to them: 'I am sending you grain, new wine and olive oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations.'"* Look down in verse 24 of the same chapter, *"The threshing floors will be filled with grain; the vats will overflow with new wine and oil."* This is Joel speaking about when Israel will be restored, when the new creation will come. Chapter 3 says, *"In that day, the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the Lord's house and will water the valley of Acacias" (Joel 3:18).* And then Isaiah says in chapter 25. *"On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines" (Isaiah 25:6).*

In the ancient Jewish perspective, the new age, the new creation, the hope to which the whole story is pointing, is inaugurated by the resurrection, experienced like a wedding, and symbolized by the abundance of wine, but John is making a note that on the third day there was a wedding, and there were one hundred and eighty gallons of wine present. It must just mean it was a good feast. What is the sign pointing to? The day, the wine, the wedding, all of it is Jesus' proclamation that the Kingdom of God, in which every hope of the ancient Israelite stands,

is right there in Cana. The Kingdom of God has been ushered into that particular moment.

Why is this the first sign? Well, it's the first sign because when the Kingdom of God comes, everywhere else in the scriptures, it is described as the marginalized being advocated for, the sick being healed, the dead being raised, sinners being forgiven, the mercy of God extended to the people, and the relationship between God and his people reconciled.

This is the first sign because when the Kingdom of God comes, all those other signs that blow our minds away are simply subsumed into the arrival of the Kingdom of God. The first sign is Jesus proclaiming, "The hope you have, it's here, and it's me. I am the one who brings the Kingdom of God." This is nothing short of the arrival of the age to come, in which generations of prophets had said, "It's coming. It's coming. It's coming." And when you, like the one hosting this party, experience shame and brokenness, and you come to the end of your rope and recognize you are not enough, Jesus comes in, and says, "Listen, I've got wine in which you can't even imagine, gallons and gallons of it. The Kingdom of God is here."

In the very ordinariness of a wedding, Jesus is inaugurating something so profound at a cosmic scale in which the hopes of the universe have acquiesced right in this moment at a wedding in Cana. So what does the sign point to? The arrival of the kingdom of God. But let's get a little closer to home, because what does this mean for you and me?

That leads us back to question two: Why does Jesus use ceremonial jars? Remember that detail? The six stone jars that were sitting there for the ceremonial washing. John does not want us to miss this, because here's where it moves from the cosmic to the much more personal. Those ceremonial jars were part of the Jewish purity system. It was a way in which they were made right before the presence of God, because it's one thing for the kingdom of God to arrive, but it's a whole other thing to be able to step into it.

John notes that it was brought about through the ceremonial jars because those are the old way in which you prepared yourself to enter into the presence of God. Jesus, using that, takes that whole picture of the purity system and says, "Actually, we've done away with that. I'm not going to fill it with the water that could be purer." Catch that Jesus doesn't fill it with greater water, something radically new. This is about reform and replacement.

Jesus looks at the ceremonial system, the way in which people could encounter God, and says, "We don't need that anymore because I'm here." He fills the old system in which you went to God with himself. The next story, what does Jesus do according to John? He goes into the temple, where it's being used for different purposes, and drives out the old system. He says, "If you want a temple, go ahead and destroy me and I'll raise it right back up here."

What Jesus does at Cana is the exact same thing he does at the temple. He eradicates the old way in which you come before God and fills it with himself. It is a stunning statement in which John turns on the floodlights and says, "The kingdom of God is here." The old way to encounter

God is completely done away with, because everything changes in the presence of Jesus. This is where the new creation begins. We no longer need to go to a temple or go through a ceremonial washing process to encounter the presence of God. All we have to do is come to Jesus—direct access to God himself.

Now, that should pose us the next question. Why? He filled the jars with himself. What do you mean by that? Well, that brings us all the way back to the first question. Why does this make Jesus think of his death? Why in this moment? Mary comes, they've run out of wine, and Jesus replies, "It's not time for me to die." Well, because he's filled with these images. He thinks of it. Jesus' mind is saturated. What's happening here is he knows it's the third day. He knows it's the wedding. He knows why he came.

This moment caused Jesus to think of his own wedding, the marriage supper of the Lamb, in which he thinks, "The only way we get to that is through my death." The only way the new wine fills those jars is what? "This is my body broken for you. This is my blood poured out for you." Jesus, in this moment, is thinking of the Eucharist. He's thinking of the communion table. He's thinking of the thing that we come to the tables for every single month and recite, "The body of Christ broken for you, the blood of Christ poured out for you."

Now, why does that happen? Well, that's the dominant imagery of what this covenant with God and his people is. Think of Exodus 24, way back at the Passover. It says, "Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it onto the people, and said, 'This blood is the covenant that the Lord has made for you in accordance with all these words.'" At Passover, what is representative of the blood? The wine. So the reason that Jesus is thinking of his death is that the whole thing is anchored right there.

Jesus must lay down his life, take up the cup of suffering, so that we can enjoy the feast. When Jesus fills those vats, he takes their shame, he turns it into honor. The only way to do that is through him breaking his body and pouring out his blood for you and me. This is the arrival of the kingdom of God. Paul says, in the text that we read once a month when we come to the table,

**For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper, he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.**  
1 Corinthians 11:23-26

At Cana, the water becomes wine. It's the allusion to Jesus' death. And don't forget that at the cross, Jesus is hanging there and is stabbed in his side with blood and water flowing out. This is the moment it's all been pointing to, and Jesus is so consumed with this.

However, I can't help but think of the words in Hebrews, "For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at

the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2b). Jesus is at a wedding feast, and consumed with these thoughts of his death, and what does he do with them but create joy. He goes on and celebrates. The feast continues. The wine is not out. It flows with abundance.

C.S. Lewis, in his book *Miracles*, has this half-page where he talks about Cana, and he makes the interesting point that is worth sharing here to bring it really close to home. He wrote,

**Every year, as part of the natural order, God makes wine. He does so by creating a vegetable organism that can turn water, soil, and sunlight into a juice which will, under proper conditions, become wine. Thus, in a certain sense, he constantly turns water into wine. For wine, like all drinks, is but water modified. Once and in one year only, God now incarnate, short-circuits the process and makes wine in a moment, uses earthenware jars instead of vegetable fibers to hold the water, but uses them to do what he is always doing. The miracle consists in the shortcut, but the event to which it leads is the usual one. Lewis**

Lewis' point is that God is constantly turning water into wine. The reason this one's recorded is because of the miracle of shortening the process. Lindsay and I spent about six years in Napa before moving to the Bay Area, and one of the things we learned while being there was to be in tune with the seasons. In Napa, there is a very rhythmic process to the year. You'd have what's called harvest in the fall, where they'd take the grapes off the vines and would move toward what's called crush, where they literally crush the grapes to extract the juice.

Then over that time, slowly they would begin the process of fermentation, and I kid you not, the whole valley would start to smell like wine. We were in Napa proper, but all the vineyards are up-valley, and so we're miles away from all of it, but the whole valley would begin to smell like fermented grapes. This process, in which they would plant and harvest and crush and reap over and over is exactly what Lewis is talking about.

God is always doing the miraculous of taking water and soil and a little human ingenuity and turning it into wine. What water are you not bringing to Jesus? He is constantly doing this. Whether we're aware of it or not, the miraculous is hovering right beneath the surface. Why? Because the Kingdom of God is here, my friends. The Kingdom of God is present. Jesus came to invite us into the experience of that reality. It is right here happening all the time.

It happens in the beauty of a restored relationship. It happens through the physical healing by God, doing whatever it is to shortcut the circuits and bring about that healing. It happens in the love between a husband and wife for decades, remaining faithful to one another. It happens in all the thousands of ways in which the work you do contributes to the ongoing goodness of the world. It happens in the ways people live open-handed with their time, talents, and treasures, and they bring the best of themselves to the world, with that somehow bringing more life. It happens in the turning of the seasons, in which grapes are pulled from a vine, crushed, fermented, and put in a bottle.

What water are you not bringing to him? I find it interesting that we don't know exactly when the servants knew that the water had turned into wine. I was thinking about it this morning. They bring the ladle full. Jesus says, "Draw some out and take it to the headmaster." They take it there, and the headmaster sips it, he experiences it, and says, "This is a different wine." But I wonder, did the servants know when they were carrying it that it was wine? I don't know.

What water are you carrying that you're longing for Jesus to turn to wine, and you may not know? Maybe he's doing something beneath the surface, and you have no idea, but he's doing it. Sometimes it's very slow. It's the turning of a calendar, year after year. "God, where are you?" But he's always doing it, slowly over time. Other times, it's quite quick. It happens in an instant. I don't know how or why, but do not discredit that God is constantly turning water into wine throughout every ordinary part of the day.

We started with Dostoevsky, and there's something to that story that I want to bring back because I started by asking what Alyosha heard that turned him from the doubting, grieving young man that he was into one who was steadfast for the rest of his life. Part of what I didn't share is that this story is a bit autobiographical for Dostoevsky. Just months before Dostoevsky started writing this novel, he was not a detached observer of grief. Just a few months prior, his three-year-old son had died, and later, he created this character, Alyosha. I'll give you one guess as to what his three-year-old son's name was: Alyosha.

Because Dostoevsky's trying to wrestle with his own grief, the grieving young monk is part his sons and his own story, trying to figure out this life. I find it fascinating that this is the miracle that Dostoevsky writes to turn Alyosha's life around. Read a few excerpts as we close. We picked up the scene, Alyosha's kneeling at the coffin of Elder Zosima, and this is what he says in his head as he's hearing that text we just heard read.

"Ah, that miracle, ah, that lovely miracle! Not grief, but men's joy, Christ visited when he worked his first miracle, he helped men's joy... He who loves men, loves their joy" (Alyosha). And then a little bit later, as he's in and out listening to this story, he falls into a dream or a trance, and Dostoevsky describes a vision in which Alyosha looks and sees Elder Zosima at the wedding in Cana.

**We are making merry, we are drinking new wine, the wine of a new and great joy. See how many guests there are? Here are the bridegroom and the bride, here is the wise ruler of the feast, tasting the new wine...Do not be afraid of him. Awful is his greatness before us, terrible is his loftiness, yet he is boundlessly merciful, he became like us out of love, and he is making merry with us, turning water into wine, that the joy of the guests may not end. He is waiting for new guests, he is ceaselessly calling new guests, not and unto ages of ages. See,**

**they are bringing the new wine, the vessels are being brought in. Father Zosima**

Zosima reminds him of all that God is after. He sees this vision, and the grieving Alyosha looks and sees Zosima and says, "He is after our joy." It may seem like grief. It may seem like shame. It may seem like the wine is gone, but don't we ever forget that the water jars are there, and they are filled to the brim. And then finally, Alyosha sees it, and Dostoevsky ends this beautiful chapter this way.

**Something burned in Alyosha's heart, something suddenly filled him almost painfully, tears of rapture nearly burst from his soul...Alyosha stood gazing and suddenly, as if he had been cut down, threw himself to the earth. He did not know why he was embracing it; he did not try to understand why he longed so irresistibly to kiss it, to kiss all of it, but he was kissing it, weeping, sobbing, and watering it with his tears, and he vowed ecstatically to love it, to love it unto ages of ages. "Water the earth with the tears of your joy and love those tears..." rang in his soul...He fell to the earth a weak youth and rose up a fighter, steadfast for the rest of his life. Brothers Karamazov**

What water are you holding back from taking to Jesus? What grief or shame or brokenness are you not bringing and allowing Jesus to transform into wine? My friends, the kingdom of heaven is here. It has come close purely through the sacrifice of Jesus, and he's inviting us into the party. Come celebrate the merciful love of Jesus.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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