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Simply Jesus: Extravagant Generosity

Simply Jesus Series

John 2:1-2, 21:1-11

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Well, when I got married to Donna, I thought I knew her. We dated for a year, we had known each other for 18 months, we spent time together almost every single day. I mean, we spent hours together. I thought I knew her well. I knew her well enough to know I loved her, to know I appreciated lots of things about her. I knew I loved her enough to marry her and spend the rest of my life with her, but there were a lot of things I didn't know. I remember not long after we had got settled into our apartment, kind of back to life after the honeymoon, and we were both working fulltime. I remember coming home on a Friday night from work and both of us expressing how absolutely exhausted we were from the week. We're both so tired, we're just worn out, and in the back of my mind, I'm thinking, "You know, let's just turn the lights down, pop some popcorn, watch a movie and just veg" and that's what I'm thinking. That's going to recharge my batteries and just sort of help me get back on my feet and Donna, after expressing how tired she was, said, "Hey, let's have a bunch of people over and have a party!" and I said, "Oh my goodness. We are very very different." 29 years later, I'm still learning lots of things about my wife that continue to intrigue me and we continue to learn things.

Don't you think that's a little bit how it is with our relationship with Jesus? I mean, he courted us, he pursued us. At one point, we knew enough to say, "I do. I will." And we were married, and we began to walk that journey together, but oh my goodness, there is so much more to Jesus than what we could ever have imagined on that first day when we first said, "I will." That's really why we're doing what we're doing this summer in our series called Simply Jesus. We're just going back and through the gospels trying to examine, through the writing of these eyewitnesses, more about Jesus, more about who He is. So I hope that you're reading along with us. If you're following the reading plan, we've read through Mark, we're about halfway through Matthew, if you haven't started, that's okay. Stop at the Information Center, pick up a reading plan, you'll get the rest of Matthew, Luke and John, and just live in the story of Jesus.

We offered some books so that you can maybe read something fresh and get a fresh perspective on Jesus, and the weekend messages, we're talking about sort of the myths or the false ideas we have about Jesus vs. what He really was as revealed in the pages of Scripture. We looked at the fact that Jesus came to reveal—to bring out into the light—who God really is, to show us God, and He showed us that God is Father, that God relates to us, that everything Jesus did reminds us that God is a Father and He wants to relate to us that way. We saw that Jesus went to the outcasts, He didn't just hang with the righteous, with the pretty people, but to the lowly, to the least. He made a home among them and He was as comfortable with them as He was with anyone. Last week, Jeff reminded us that Jesus is not aloof, Jesus is not somehow distant from our pain, our emotion, and what we feel that even though He's all-powerful and He has the ability to fix any problem that we have, including raising Lazarus from the dead, knowing he was going to do that, still He felt the agony and sorrow of Mary and Martha, to the point that He wept. That's our Jesus. Sometimes, what we learn about Him surprises. Sometimes it challenges our view of Him. It challenges the status-quo of our view of who Jesus is and I think that may be the case for us this morning. We're going to look in the gospel of John and look at the very first miracle that Jesus did and the very last miracle that Jesus did and see what we can learn about Jesus from the first and the last thing He did.

Now, typically, if you're going to write about somebody, the first thing you're going to write that they did would be very important and the last thing would be very important. So what were the first sign—the first miracle—and the last miracle that Jesus did? Well, turn to John chapter 2 this morning and we'll take a close look at these two brief stories about the first and last sign that Jesus performed. Now, here's what we're going to do. We're going to read each of these stories one at a time and we're going to make a few observations and come to a couple of conclusions and then we're going to put it all together and say "What do we do with this?" when we get to the end. So we're going to start reading in John chapter 2, verses 1-11.

> **On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, " Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each. Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." So they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it to him. When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom, and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now." This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.** (John 2:1-11, NASB)

Just a couple of observations on this story. First of all, you'll notice that it takes place in Cana of Galilee. Now we're going to put a map on the screen for you this morning, because both the first and last miracles, as well as many others, occur in Galilee. If you can see at the very top of the map is the region of Galilee, around the Sea of Galilee has several names, that Sea or large lake, and this happens in Cana, just about nine miles north of Nazareth where Jesus grew up. A lot of the miracles took place there, and then you'll see down in Jerusalem, towards the bottom, is sort of the rest of the gospels take place in and around Judea, and there's quite a distance—75 miles or so. Jesus begins and ends in Galilee. Now, Galilee would have been thought of a little bit as the sticks. That's kind of the rural area. The sophisticated urbanites were in Jerusalem and surrounds. People didn't have high view of the Galileans, but Jesus chooses—He's not only from there and chooses many of His disciples from there, but that's where He begins and ends His ministry, among common folks. So that's where this takes place.

You'll notice that it is a wedding. Now, when we think of a wedding, we think of sort of a one-day event, you know maybe 3-4 hours, half an hour to an hour ceremony, and then a reception and you know by the end of the night, it's over and we move on, but that was not a Jewish wedding. A Jewish wedding would have gone on for a number of days, and so there was many banquets and many different pieces to this celebration, and you'd start at the bride's house and you'd move on, and it would culminate—sometimes it would go maybe up to a week. This was quite an extensive party that would go on for a long period of time. Weddings were a very, very big deal, and here Jesus, his mother, his disciples were invited to this wedding. Probably lots and lots of people at this wedding. This is a major celebration. They have a problem, as you can see, they've run out of wine. Now wine was just a standard part of these celebrations. Wine was a symbol of bounty, of

prosperity, of blessing. It symbolized wealth, and you wanted to make sure, if you're the bridegroom and the bridegroom's family, that you're putting on the very best party you possibly can. And so the wine was a significant part of that party and they're out of wine. So Jesus' mother comes to Jesus and points this out to Him and Jesus says, and this is an important note here, when he says to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us?" that sounds a little harsh to us, but that word for woman is actually one of real, deep respect. He's saying very respectfully, to his mother, what business of that is ours, my time has not yet come. In other words, Jesus acted in complete harmony with the Father, and the Father hadn't given Him the go-ahead to perform miracles. At least, he hadn't to that point. But I think Mary, in her heart, knew *it's coming, one of these days people are going to know who Jesus really is*, so she says in faith to the servants, "Whatever he tells you to do, you just do it."

And what does He do? Well, He eventually says to the servants to take those six stone jars containing 20-30 gallons each. Now, there's a major emphasis here on quantity. This is 150 gallons combined of stone jars that they fill with water. 150 gallons, and He says fill it up, and they fill it up with water, and they take it to the headwaiter as Jesus instructed, and the waiter tastes it and it's become wine. It's not become just any wine, it's become the finest wine. This is absolutely outstanding top-of-the-line wine. Jesus has become a winemaker for His very first miracle.

Now, there's a few observations I want to make. We don't want to get sidetracked on this, at this particular point. First of all, it really truly was wine. This wasn't grape juice. I know that maybe you've been to a contortionist show sometime and you've seen people that can twist their body in all sorts of strange ways. Well, I have seen some incredible contortionism related to how this wine wasn't really wine. I'm telling you it was wine. You could get drunk on it. It had alcohol in it. It was the finest wine. That's why you would use the best wine first and save the least wine till last, after people had had their fill of it. Jesus turned the water into wine. Now, in the church that I grew up in, we had two things we wish would have happened: either the story would just go away—take it out of the Bible, it didn't need to be there—or the miracle really should have been Jesus turning wine into water. Now, that, my friends, would really be a great miracle, but no, He turned water into wine.

Now, here's a second observation. We're not encouraging and Jesus isn't encouraging drinking in this story, but He's not forbidding it, either. It was just a part of what people did. It was a beverage. And that's the right way to view these things. What is clearly forbidden is to think that by not drinking, or by drinking—either one—you are more righteous or more Christian than if you don't do the other. And clearly we're forbidden to judge someone else as to whether or not they drink. This is a part of culture, and Jesus did not forbid it. In fact, in this case, he lavished 150 gallons of the finest wine onto this party, as it was nearing its end. That would equate to over 900 bottles of wine. Now, I don't know how many people were there, but that would be a lot of wine for those folks. And Jesus added to this celebration. Now, some of you might say, "Well, isn't alcohol a significant, major problem in our culture?" And I would say, "Yes, and no. Yes, there are people who are addicted to alcohol, as there are people who are addicted to lots of other things. But this answer is no in the sense that the problem is not this thing. It's not the drink, it's what's inside."

Turn over to Mark 7 real quick because Jesus just couldn't make this any clearer, again and again in the gospels, none more clear than in Mark 7 and we're just going to read a couple of verses here, beginning in verse 14.

[Jesus] **called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. [If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."]**

When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." (Mark 7:14-23)

Anyone who is recovering from an addiction is not fighting the external thing, they're fighting the demon within. They're facing down the sinfulness of their own heart, and where they turn to find life, to find escape from their pain and their suffering, and they go to the wrong place, so the thing itself is not the problem. It's what's within us. So to drink or not to drink shouldn't really be the question. In this case, Jesus blesses this party with wine in abundance, the finest of wine, both quantity and quality of unbelievable proportions. And what does it tell us about Jesus? How did this manifest His glory, as it says here in the last verse of the section? I think, first of all it tells us that wherever Jesus is, there is joyful celebration. Jesus has come to bring joy and celebration. Jesus is not a somber, overly serious, austere Jesus. Jesus enters into the celebration of life. He's right there beside us, and wherever Jesus is present, it invites celebration. Here we have the very first picture in this sign, a sign pointed to some greater spiritual truth. What Jesus is telling us is giving us a picture of the Kingdom of God. That's what He came to proclaim. This is a picture of the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of God is about celebration and about joy and about abundance and about God's lavish, lavish grace that He pours out on His people in practical little ways, from what is there to drink and to eat, to the greater truth of who He is and how we get to relate to Him. This is the Kingdom of God, full of joy and celebration, and wherever Jesus is present, there ought to be celebration, not austerity, not overly-seriousness, not rigidity, not frugality, but joy and celebration. That's how Jesus manifested His glory as He began His ministry.

Now, go to John chapter 21, let's look at the last miracle that He did here on earth. This is after the resurrection. This is after all the events of the cross, and the resurrection and even appearing to His disciples down by Jerusalem, and now chapter 21 verse 1.

After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias [another word for or name for the Sea of Galilee]**, and He manifested Himself in this way. Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.**

But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish.

So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.

Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead. (John 21:1-14)

Once again, we find ourselves back in Galilee, now at the Sea of Galilee and it's one of those stories where you can imagine, after all the events of the resurrection, all of the events of that last week, from the triumphal entry to the Jesus casting out the moneychangers in the Temple, to the teaching every single day, and the sense, this tension and all of the activity going on, and then the cross and then resurrection, that these guys were just exhausted, worn out, tired, sitting around, they've seen Jesus now, they know He's alive, but they're kind of just sitting around, waiting for something to happen, and what do they know? What do they know best? Fishing. And Peter just says, "I'm going fishing." And six of the other disciples say, "I'm going with you" and so they make the trek, 75 miles, all the way up to Galilee, back to what they're familiar with, get on a boat and go out all night with their nets trying to fish, but probably just enjoying being out, out on the sea, out away from all of the stress that had been going on. But all night long as they fish, they catch nothing. And then early in the morning you have this incredible scene here on the beach.

On the screen, you're going to see a picture, a recent picture, of the Sea of Galilee at sunrise. Just have those guys leave it up there. It's better to see that on the screen than my ugly face. So just leave it up there as we talk this through, because this is what you would have seen if you were sitting on the shore, looking out across the Sea of Galilee, and there is Jesus on the beach, and He's come to seek. And He calls out to them, "Hey, you have any fish?" "No, not a one." And then Jesus says what I think is just extremely playful; I mean this is just Jesus' joy and playfulness and delight. "Hey, cast the net on the other side of the boat and you'll catch fish." Now, this is rather silly. Think about it. There's probably about a distance of 4 or 5 feet from one side of the boat to the other.

This reminds me of what happens when I go fishing with my boys. We were just in Minnesota and doing this: Sam will stand on this side of the boat and he'll cast the net and he'll get a fish and Lee's on the other side of the boat. Lee thinks the fish are over here, so

he comes over here and he casts, of course the fish are now gone because fish don't sit, looking up, waiting for somebody to drop a hook in front of them. Fish move.

I think it's kind of funny. I think Jesus is just having fun with these guys. He's saying, "Hey, put the net on the other side of the boat, 4 feet away." Sure enough, there's a net-full of fish. And that so—they knew immediately who it was that was standing on shore. It was Jesus. And I love Peter. Peter just takes his jacket, puts it on, wraps it around himself and jumps in the water. I mean, he runs to Jesus—he swims to Jesus. I'm sure the other six guys are, "there he is again, leaving us to do all the work." They have to drag the net full of this fish, all the way to shore while Peter's just over there talking to Jesus, enjoying Jesus. When they dragged those nets full of fish to the shore, what do you see? What do you see? You see Jesus has made a charcoal fire, and already cooking on that fire is fish. See, Jesus didn't need the catch. He produced the fish already; they were already cooking for them along with bread. But Jesus, in a way that only Jesus can do, says, "Hey, come bring some of the fish you caught and add it to what I have." And there you have, for men, this is a man thing. This is how men connect with Jesus. Here you have some men around a campfire having a shore breakfast of fish and bread, and you know—it's men, there's no paper plates, nobody brought napkins, nobody brought utensils. This is men grabbing fish out of the frying pan or whatever they were cooking it on, or over the open fire and eating it with their hands. This is guys connecting with God in an intimate way, and a friendship that's so deep, so real, so profound, I don't know what was said, it doesn't seem to matter. Nothing's told about the conversation, but there was intimacy and fellowship and friendship.

You see, the Kingdom of God, as Jesus revealed and manifests Himself, is about relationship, it's about community, it's about friendship, it's about Jesus coming to us, wherever we are. And when everything we've tried has failed, that Jesus shows up and provides abundantly beyond what we could ever imagine. That's who Jesus is. But He doesn't just give us abundance. Again, both the quantity and the quality are emphasized in the story: 153 large fish. This is a fantastic catch. Jesus, in abundance, blesses these guys, but there's friendship here beyond provision. There's intimacy with God. There's a comfortableness and a realness to the God of the Universe when Jesus comes and just wants to have breakfast and spend some time together. In both of these cases, the bookends of John, the first sign and the last, give us a picture of the Kingdom of God. There's a Kingdom of God pictured here that's profound and real and this is our Jesus. Jesus came to announce the arrival of the Kingdom of God and to announce Himself as the King. He came to say I am the King. Over 100 times in the gospels, He'll be talking about the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of God and this first sign and this last sign we have a beautiful picture of the Kingdom of God and of our King. You see the Kingdom of God is feasting and friendship. The Kingdom of God is celebration and community with the King and with the other people in the Kingdom and it is a beautiful, wonderful thing God has lavished. God is good, God is abundant, God wants to pour it out, and what's even more important for us to know is that the Kingdom of God is both now and not yet. You see, the Kingdom of God has come. When Jesus rose from the dead and the Spirit came, the Kingdom of God was here, the Kingdom of God is here, the Kingdom of God is wherever Christ rules, and where does Christ rule? He rules in the hearts of His people. So the Kingdom of God is here and so your life as a Kingdom child should reflect this joy and celebration, feasting and friendship. That's what we ought to be reflecting to the world. This is what the Kingdom is all about and this is what Kingdom people should be all about.

Too many times, we think that discipleship, following Jesus, means we have to be serious, austere all the time, that we can't really smile, that we can't really have fun, that if we have too much fun, that's can't be too good, because Jesus, after all, was very serious, and you ask the question, "Didn't Jesus come to suffer and to die? Didn't He have to endure horrible things?" and the answer is absolutely yes, but why was He willing to suffer? Why was He willing to die? It was so that this Kingdom vision could become a reality for you and for me and for the whole world. He said for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross. For the joy set before Him—what was that joy? That was joy was to bring us into the Kingdom of celebration and community, of feasting and friendship. That's why He went to the cross. That's so appealing, that's so attractive, that's so unlike the Jesus that I grew up thinking about, who I just wanted to not make angry and stay away from. Oh, to know that Jesus invites us to come and be a part of this Kingdom.

I remember when our daughter was just a small child; Donna and I took her together to the pediatrician's office. We were part of a large church in Minnesota. I was on staff there, and working with college students. And this was a pediatrician who had been around for a long time in that community, knew it well, knew everyone, and just a great guy and a great doctor. And I remember sitting there and having this great conversation and then he ask that dreaded question that all of us, as pastors, absolutely hate: What do you do for a living? And as soon as you say you're a pastor, they're gone. It happens over and over again. I don't know what it is about us that's so scary, but people don't know what to do with us. Then I told him where I worked and that I work with college students, and he said—this is the exact words, "Isn't that the church where you can't drink and you can't dance?" and you know, I had to say "No, nobody ever teaches that." There's not a single document in that church that would ever have said those things you can't do, but somehow the culture of the church was not about Jesus and the Kingdom and celebration and feasting and friendship and community. What we conveyed to the community was, "We're all about what we're against." We were known for what we wouldn't do, for austerity, for frugality, for seriousness. Nobody was attracted to that message. Now, if we say we're all about Jesus, we're all about this Kingdom life, it still may repel people, but at least we're presenting the real picture of who Jesus is, and the real picture of the Kingdom of God.

What do we do with this? The first thing I have to do is to repent, to change my mind, to change my view of Jesus. You see, I struggle with this. I struggle to be relaxed and joyful and just enjoy life and enter into it. I feel somehow constrained, I think, from how I was taught, that, you know, you can't have too much fun, and so I can tend to be a little bit uptight, a little bit overly rigid, overly serious. You can ask my kids. Sometimes I'm like, *let's be careful we don't have too much fun*. What do I need to do? I have to repent. I need to relax. I need to say this is the Kingdom of God, it's feasting and friendship, celebration and community. And I think if we really understood that, if we really grabbed ahold of that, if we really experienced this Jesus, the Jesus Who's presented to us in the gospels, I think what would happen would be, it would become so natural, or we'd become so celebratory and so engaged that we'd be giving people all around us a taste of the Kingdom of God. I think we'd be giving them images and ideas that the Kingdom and this incredible thing that Jesus invited us all into. This everlasting party, where after we've done our very best to make it all we could ever want it to be and it falls short, Jesus brings all the extra abundance to it. When we work so hard and ended up short, with nothing in the net, Jesus supplies everything that's needed. We give people a taste of that abundant, joyful celebrating God.

Now, in just a minute we're going to sing a celebrating song. We're going to rejoice in this Kingdom and this is what God has invited us into. But here's what I'm going to ask you to do: don't get up and leave during the song. Don't do it. Some of you are in a habit, you slip out, and I'm really, really serious. Don't do it because we are going to leave you, after that song, with a challenge on how to take this joyful expression of the Kingdom and we're going to challenge you to do something really practical to give the people around you a taste, just a taste, of the Kingdom of God that is now and not yet.

Our Father, we thank You that You have revealed these stories to us. They seem odd, in a way. No one's healed, no disease cured, no demons cast out, yet the first and the last miracle give us this beautiful picture of Who You are as our King and the Kingdom that You are bringing. Lord, may we embrace this joyful, playful Jesus as our own, and get to know You even better. In Your Name we pray, amen.

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