

“Invite Jesus In”

John 2:1-11

January 10, 2021

When I was a junior in high school, something wonderful happened. My parents announced that they'd be headed to a North Carolina Tarheels football game. That, in and of itself, wasn't a big deal as they were season ticket holders. What WAS a big deal was that they were playing a night game. What captivated my teenage heart in what they were telling me was that they were going to be spending the night in Chapel Hill. And they were going to trust me to be okay for the night alone.

I couldn't believe it. This was what high school dreams were made of after all. Parents gone for the weekend leaving me all alone.

My mind raced. Instantly I conjured a party of some sorts. I imagined a party where all the really cool kids would be hanging out, having fun. By the time I got to school the next day, I'd prepared a guest list. When the week of the game came alone, I deliberately invited only the really popular people in my class and the senior class to come. I didn't want things to get out of control after all.

Let me tell you. At first, I was really nervous. Would people come? My high school popularity hung in the balance as the first 45 minutes or so, no one rang my doorbell. But then, like a wonderful chorus of angels the first tones of the doorbell graced my ears. Lo and behold, it was some of those cool people I'd mentioned.

But over the next hour or so, the doorbell KEPT ringing. And these people, while nice, weren't really invited. Not by me at least. You see it turned out that those “really cool people”, well, they took it upon themselves to do a little inviting of their own.

Pretty quickly, the entire house was packed. I was worried sick. There I was, on my supposed “night of nights” terrified that someone in this growing crowd would break something or steal something or quite literally set the house on fire. I looked out of my windows and realized that my parents entire corner lot curb was saturated with cars.

Then, the doorbell rang once again breaking the monotony of my cleaning up after routine. I walked down the stairs, opened the door and lo and behold what should I see but one of Charlotte's finest staring me in the eyes.

“Are you the owner of this house” the officer inquired?

“No sir” I replied. “My parents are.”

The police officer asked me “Do you think your parents would be happy to come home and find their home seized by the law for dram shop violations?”

Let me just tell you, I didn't realize until that day that fear had degrees. I knew it did because the kind of fear I was feeling in that very moment was far greater than anything I'd ever felt before. It was what I'd like to call “real world fear.” Fears up until that point were that I'd fail a math test and things of the sort. Never did I fear that I'd be in jail and my parent's house would be taken from them for the party I threw.

After taking a big gulp, I answered the policeman. “No sir, I don't think they'd be very happy at all.”

“Well then,” he said calmly, “get everybody out of here right now.”

The next thing you know I was literally screaming at people to get out of my house. I was frantic. I remember one of the really cool kids I'd hoped to impress saying to me “this is such a disappointment” as they left.

I did get everybody out of the house. My parent's home didn't get seized by any law enforcement agency. After hours and hours and hours of intense cleaning and trash removal, I finally got it restored to a state where I thought I'd get away with everything.

Nope. Didn't happen. One of my parent's neighbors ratted me out. Needless to say, my parents weren't happy.

So, what did I end up with? Did I end up cool? No, didn't happen. Did I have fun? No, if anything, I ended up sore after all that cleaning. Did I end up grounded? Yes, until after Christmas as it would turn out. No TV, no telephone, no extracurricular activities.

I lost everything most dear to an adolescent boy in reality.

As I look back on that event now, I see the cause of the disaster. I had invited the wrong people.

Now I want to tell you about another party. A party which took place over two thousand years ago. We read about that party this morning from the Gospel of John.

John 2:1-11 – *“On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”*

Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, “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, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.”

We all know how much fun weddings can be, don't we? There's the wedding and then there's the food and the toasts and the dancing. It can all make for a wonderful time, can't it?

Now, whether they realized it or not, that bride and groom and their families had done something extremely wise when making up their guest list. *They'd invited Jesus Christ to their wedding celebration.*

Now remember, wedding celebrations in ancient Israel often lasted several days. So, you can only imagine how important it would be to only invite people you really, really wanted to be there. I mean, if someone is insufferable after 10 minutes, imagine how annoyed you'd be after two whole days with that person?

And this couple HAD invited Jesus and his disciples to come to their big event. Who knows, maybe there was some debate over the matter. Like, “I don't know, Jesus and the gang, do we really want to invite him?” “And those fishermen he hangs out with, they smell like fish all the time”

“Do we really want Jesus there? Last time I checked Jesus wasn't too terribly popular with the really cool kids of the day. You know, the Sadducees and the Pharisees. They didn't take too much to Jesus.

So maybe there was some debate on the matter, but Jesus was invited nonetheless.

And thank goodness for it. Because, you see, the rest of the crowd sure was a thirsty bunch, weren't they? I'm sure whoever arranged the soiree had tried to provide enough wine for the crowd but, ultimately, they hadn't. The wine casks ran dry.

Now look, this would've been cause for alarm. You wouldn't want to look like underprepared host after all. Running out of wine would've been a real crisis. A person could lose their honor in just such a manner to say nothing of disappointed guests as well as the jokes and barbs which would come your way from members of the family from the day of the wedding until they laid you to rest.

And so thankfully, they'd invited Jesus. Jesus says to the servants, take those big stone jars used for purification and fill them up with water.” You can just hear the servants muttering under their breath. “They want wine genius, not water.” Ultimately though, they do what Jesus' commanded.

Once those servants had filled those giant jars with water, Jesus tells them to draw out some of that water and take it to the chief steward. Again, I'm sure there was some reluctance. Can't you just hear them sighing. “Sure Jesus, we'll take some water to the man. Not a lot of good it will do him.”

But again, the servants do as they're told.

Ah and something happens. Something unexpected and wonderful happens. A Miracle. *That water that the servants had poured into those jars had become wine.*

Not only wine, the really good stuff. Not Boone's Farm. Not Ernest and Julio Gallo. I mean we're talking Chateau Laffite here. The best wine. The kind with the price tag that rolls your eyes back as you place the wine gingerly back on the store rack knowing good and well you can't afford it.

The chief steward is thoroughly impressed. You see, most people served the best wine first. Every time I read this it reminds me of our standard operating procedure at my fraternity house at Carolina. Whenever we

held a party, we bought one keg of Budweiser and 7 kegs of Shaffer Light. It makes sense, right? First impressions being what they are.

Most hosts serve the good stuff first.

But then, once the good wine ran out and people were well lubricated, well, then you could switch to something more affordable. But here, at that wedding at Cana, Jesus turns water into the best wine and the best wine is impressive to the steward and to all who tasted it.

Because of Jesus intervention; because of all that really good wine, the party continues. The merriment continues, the dancing continues. All the good stuff keeps going. Every one of the guests remains in awe of their hosts generosity. Victory from the jaws of defeat really *and it was all because the hosts had invited the right person.*

They'd invited Jesus Christ to their party. Again, maybe there were doubts, trepidations, fears over doing such a thing. But in the end, they'd made the right call.

So, here's the scorecard for the two parties. Mine – failure, humiliation, punishment. The Wedding at Cana – success, honor, accolades.

The key difference isn't the years which elapsed between these two parties. The key difference is Jesus Christ.

Whereas I'd invited the people I thought would make a difference, the wedding at Cana shows us who the real life of all parties is. It isn't the cool kids. It isn't the up-and-coming adults. It's Jesus Christ. King of King and Lord of Hosts.

Let's think about that for a moment. Could it be that the key to our lives comes in knowing to invite Jesus Christ to all the parties in our lives?

Absolutely it is.

Now look. We live in America where the separation of church and state is firmly entrenched in our minds. The country we live in ultimately has decided that there is a separation between what happens here on Sunday morning and what happens during the rest of the week. You can have Jesus Christ on Sunday but then, when that alarm clock rings on Monday morning it's time to strike Jesus' name from the guest list and return to business as usual.

However, in a way quite similar to what happened to my party years ago, the same dynamic is in effect. *When Jesus isn't invited, then things aren't going to go as well as planned.*

At a very core and essential level, we need to invite Jesus Christ into our hearts and minds and this needs to be a very deliberate thing. One of the things our Presbyterian tradition does is really stress the power and sovereignty of God. But with that emphasis, sometimes lost among us "frozen chosen" is the ongoing need to invite Jesus into our lives. And it really all does begin with a simple invitation.

If you haven't ever done something like this in your life, then my prayer today is that the Holy Spirit will move you to do just such a thing. Take some time, think it over. Then, pray. Ask Jesus to come to the party that is your life.

If you find yourself depressed, fearful, lonely. Jesus is the answer because Jesus Christ is life and He alone is the LIFE of the party.

There was an article in Christianity Today a few years back by a woman named Rosaria Champagne Butterfield. Now it helps to know that Dr. Butterfield is a college professor who, for many years, had been an outspoken critic of Christianity to anyone who would listen. All her classes, all her peers were subjected to her attacks upon the faith. Then, one day, she wrote an article condemning Christianity. It was published in her local paper.

She says in the article that pretty soon thereafter, her inbox was filled with congratulatory letters from supporters as well as condemnatory letters from people who disagreed. One letter, she says, defied those categories. It was from a pastor at a local church. He didn't attack her views, he merely invited her to come to church and then, if she was willing, to talk with him.

She did.

Over the course of several months, things changed. With new spiritual direction being provided by this pastor, Rosaria began reading the Bible. A few weeks more passed and she found herself praying. Then, she did something she would've never thought to have happened just a few years prior.

She invited Jesus into her life.

Everything changed. She writes – “Then, one ordinary day, I came to Jesus, openhanded and naked of pretension. [I asked him to come in.] Jesus triumphed. And I was a broken mess. Conversion was a train wreck. I did not want to lose everything that I loved. But the voice of God sang a sanguine love song in the rubble of my world. I weakly believed that if Jesus could conquer death, he could make right my world. I drank, tentatively at first, then passionately, of the solace of the Holy Spirit. I rested in private peace, then community, and today in the shelter of a covenant family, a church home.”

After all those years, this woman had finally gotten the guest list right.

Invite Jesus first, and all will be well, and all will be well.

But then, for goodness sakes don't just end with that. Invite Jesus into all the areas of your life. Work, school, play, your health, your wealth. You name it. Invite him along.

Think about that for a second. How often do WE think about Jesus Christ while we're at work? It's almost as if we don't want him there. Perhaps we wrongly believe that He, and the ethics he espouses, might inhibit our vocational lives. We couldn't be more wrong. If anything, Jesus can only improve our work-lives.

And what about our health?

For many of us, this is another area where we think more about the doctors and various and sundry healthcare providers and little about Jesus Christ. Almost as though they were in two different worlds. The truth couldn't be more different. Jesus Christ is the source of all health and healing. Whether the doctor gives you the all clear or whether they give you a less than perfect bill of health, invite Jesus along. He will provide you comfort amid the buzzing, binging and pain of the medical industry and he will bring healing to your body and, most importantly, to your soul as well.

Invite Jesus into your financial life. Again, this admittedly can be a scary prospect. After all, Jesus wasn't as concerned about storing earthly treasures up as we seem to be. So, we might well be a bit worried about inviting Jesus with us to the bank or into our investment portfolio. But if you truly seek treasure that will not rust or fade away, the best financial manager isn't the guy crushing the S&P 500, he's Jesus Christ who will arrange things not according to the ways of the world but rather according to the will of His Father.

And what about our relationships? Is Jesus a central part of those? Again, we may think that there's no need for Jesus in our friendships or our love relationships. Again, we couldn't be more incorrect. Inviting Jesus into all our relationships is the key to having successful ones.

I want to close by telling you about two recent weddings I've performed. Now both of these couples no doubt love one another very much and it was a joy to be a part of their special day.

But they couldn't have been more different.

The first was actually one of my closest friends from grade school. He asked me to officiate his marriage and I was honored by the request. I looked forward to it with great expectations.

When it came time to plan the service though, I was a little surprised. You see, it turned out that they really only wanted a very short wedding. I told them I was planning to read three pieces of Scripture. “That many” they asked?

I then told them I was planning to say a few words about the scriptures, do a reflection. I was gently asked to keep those remarks very brief. In fact, the couple told me they'd be happy if the entire service lasted about 10 minutes. And I was to quote “not to make it too religious.” I quickly learned that they were running on a tight timeline and wanted to get to the reception as quickly as possible. There were some real bigwigs that had been invited after all. Michael Jordan himself was on the guest list.

At the other wedding, something really neat happened. While we were standing back in the Prayer Room waiting for the bride, the groom's father pulled out a sheet of paper. He told his son with tears dotting his eyes that he had something very, very important to tell him. He'd written notes to make sure he didn't forget anything.

At that point, the groom's father talked plainly and clearly about his marriage. He said that the more he loved Jesus, the more he loved his wife. The more he loved Jesus, the better husband he was able to be. He said to his son, just moments before his nuptials, that it was all about Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ was the center of their marriage, then everything was going to be good. In sickness and in health, in plenty and in want. Then, we all said a prayer inviting Jesus to be an ongoing and active part of this soon-to-be-married couple's life.

Now look, my prayer is that both of these couples will experience love, peace and joy in and through their marriage. But if I were a gambling man, I know which couple my money would be on to experience all the blessings of married life.

The ones who got the guest list right.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen