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Wine & Kisses
John 2:1-11
Dec 6, 2009
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According to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, about 18 million Americans have alcohol problems. More than one half of all adults have a family history of problem drinking. One fourth of all emergency room admission, one third of all suicides and more than one half of all homicides and incidents of domestic violence are alcohol related. Almost one half of all traffic fatalities are alcohol related. Alcohol and drug abuse costs the American economy \$276 billion a year.

Galatians 5:25 states that “drunkenness is the work of the flesh.” I Corinthians 6:4 is very clear that drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God. A few years ago I performed the funeral service for my brother-in-law Kurt. He drank himself to death. I loved Kurt. A few weeks ago our own Sharon Hersh preached on the story of the prodigal son, and how like him, alcohol had decimated her own life. So why do we tolerate the stuff at all?

And now I know what some of you are thinking: “The bible doesn’t forbid drinking in moderation. Well, sure, but consider the following:

1. Some people have a genetic pre-disposition to alcoholism. What if you’re one of them? Why take that risk? To drink is unsafe.
2. Your moderate drinking may influence others to major abuse. And then is it not a stumbling block?

As a Christian, you are to be an example and testimony. So you must ask yourself, especially in a situation where some are tempted and where there is already abuse... what would Jesus do?

Well fortunately for us, there are at least two places in Scripture where our Lord encounters alcoholic drink in a social situation, and responds appropriately and instructively. The first:

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 believe in Him."

Well that's just great! Jesus goes to a wedding party where it seems some folks have drunk so much wine already, that they can't discern the good from the bad. And he doesn't warn them against the hazards of drinking. Oh no! He makes 180 gallons of high quality wine... great!

And get this: the second place in Scripture where Jesus deals with wine is on the night on which He's betrayed, and what does He do with it? Does He warn against its evils? No, He institutes a sacrament, makes it a holy activity, saying, "Do this in remembrance of me, as often as you drink it." So now we get Christians worldwide drinking wine during church services, in the name of Jesus.

And get this: If you were here last time, you know that the first place, refers to the second place, and both refer to a third place, which is the "great winepress" in Rev. 14, which is in fact the cross on which Jesus takes our sins and transforms them into wine... wine that is blood and blood that is wine, that flows from the winepress... enough wine to cover the world and intoxicate all creation.

Well if you think Christianity is simply about eliminating temptation through the institution of appropriate safety procedures, that's all a bit embarrassing.

Family Guy clip

See what I mean?

He could have said, "Have some fish soup in memory of me." He could have turned the water into non-fat milk. But no, 180 gallons of wine. That's embarrassing, and so we try to correct His work. Some say that in the Bible, "wine" is like the code word for "grape juice." But if wine really means grape juice, what's the point of saying:

“Every man serves the good grape juice first, and when men have drunk freely, the poor.”

“Don’t be drunk with grape juice, but filled with the Holy Spirit.” Eph 5:18

“and Deacons must not be addicted to much grape juice.” I Tim 3:8

Paul chastises the Corinthians for getting drunk at communion... On grape juice? I don’t think so.

I read of a restaurant owner arguing for a liquor license in a dry county in Georgia. He argues that Jesus turned water into wine. The frustrated County Commissioner (who was also a Baptist deacon) fired back, “I know He did and He’s always been an embarrassment to me because of that!”

It’s embarrassing, and so for thousands of years, we’ve labored to improve Christ’s work through legislation like Prohibition, Blue Laws, age limits, bartender liability. And obviously more concerned for the public safety than Jesus, most protestant churches have eliminated communion entirely or substituted grape juice for wine, thereby improving on the sacrament itself. And yet folks can still read their Bible: Jesus turned water into wine.

A Pastor friend of mine was out to dinner and was having a glass of wine, when a woman from our church walked up and said, “Oh my goodness Pastor, I see that you’re drinking wine...” Ed replied, “I know! I keep asking for water, but every time I touch it, it turns to wine... and I can’t turn it back again!”

We laugh at that, but my brother-in-law Kurt still drank himself to death. That was his choice. You know, even if Ed’s water did turn to wine, it’s his choice to drink it. And clearly if you were at that wedding party in Cana and drank too much, that would be your choice, and that would be sin. And yet you couldn’t blame the bartender, you couldn’t blame Jesus. Because we all know He’s without sin. It’s like the only person you could blame would be yourself. If you get plastered tonight, don’t blame me and don’t blame Jesus! You chose sin. You chose to get tanked on the cheap stuff, the poor stuff, which messes with your ability to discern the good stuff. Don’t blame me! Don’t blame Jesus! You chose sin. It’s your choice.

But you see this is what’s so troubling to us: Jesus doesn’t seem all that concerned about protecting us from our own bad choices. For that matter, God the Father doesn’t seem too concerned either. God is the Creator; all wine can be traced back to Him.

Why did He make wine with the possibility that some might get drunk on it? For that matter, why did He make anything? Every bad thing is a good thing gone bad.

Why did He make possessions, with the possibility some would possess them and get greedy? The greedy don’t inherit the Kingdom of God either (I Corinthians 6:9).

Why did He make sex organs? He could have made it so we reproduced like fish or amoebas. Why did He make sex so fun with the possibility that we might lust, fornicate and rape?

Why did He make any life with the possibility we'd kill it?

Why did He make trees with the possibility that we might hang a man on one?

Why did He make iron with the possibility that we might make nails and drive them through living flesh?

Why did He put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil smack dab in the middle of the garden with two half-finished naked people and a really nasty talking snake?

Why does He not constantly protect us from making bad choice? He could. He has the power and yet every time we choose evil, it's like He lifts his hand and says, "As you wish." And we wish for hell.

So some have sought to improve His work by eliminating even the possibility of sin. Some have outlawed possessions, like Karl Marx and Josef Stalin. But when you eliminate the possibility of hoarding possessions (greed), you eliminate the possibility of giving possessions (grace). Some have outlawed all sex. You can read about it in church history. But when you eliminated the possibility of lust, you tend to eliminate the possibility of... (page is cut off – listen to transcript)

Some Christian groups have outlawed wine, which seems dreadfully close to outlawing the Lord's Supper.

Now listen: I believe that God calls some individually to choose to only drink unfermented wine (that is grape juice) for a time, due to past addictions. If that's you, your freely given abstinence is a gift to Jesus, but not a law that your self must fulfill. When we make it a law, we worship an idol and feed an addiction far worse than wine. And when we make it a law, we criminalize The Lord's Table, and Christ's command, "Take and drink." How did we get to such a place?

His agenda must be a little different than ours. His agenda must be a bit bigger than keeping my self safe or protecting me from all temptation.

And you see, the church's agenda is supposed to be the same as Jesus' agenda. But when was the last time you overheard this criticism: "You know just when we get everyone cleaned up, and everything in order and under control... those Evangelical Christians show up with a keg of beer or 180 gallons of wine." I mean if we were really following Jesus we might look a little less like policemen and legislators and more like bartenders and waiters. A little less like James Dobson and the moral majority, and a bit more like Sam and Woody on Cheers. We thought our job was to judge this messed up world, fight for better rules and laws, to keep people from

committing sin, and our lives safe from all harm. But that's not what Jesus did... He went to the party and made wine out of water in six stone jars.

John makes it clear that the six stone jars were used for the Jewish Rights of Purification: Policy and Procedure, ceremonial law that the religious leaders added to God's law, because they thought their job was to judge their world and keep people from committing sin and contracting infection.

But Jesus takes these rather empty six stone jars of Policy & Procedure used by mankind to clean himself up. He takes them and He fills them to the brim with wine. That means they can no longer be used for ritual cleaning: cleansing from the outside in.

Hey, did you know: wine cleanses from the inside out? It flows in the blood and actually kills infection. Water can't do that, and the New Testament reveals those laws cleansed nothing. In fact Paul writes that the law actually "increased the trespass." That the law can hide the real infection and even empower sin.

Recently I read an article that claimed that the culture with the highest probability rate for drinking pathologies was "protestant fundamentalist churches with no culturally defined role for alcohol." A church with no culturally defined role for alcohol. Wow. And Jesus said, "As often as you drink this cup, do it in memory of me." As far as we know, He never said, "Don't drink," but "When you drink, think of me." Drink with me. Almost like law couldn't help us, but He could.

Well, I don't know if that article (on drinking pathologies) is accurate, and I'm no expert on alcohol addiction, but my point is that God just doesn't seem to be all that concerned about protecting us from the possibility of making bad choices. You know if you eliminate the possibility of bad choices, maybe you eliminate the possibility of a good choice. If you eliminate that tree of knowledge in the middle of the garden, I think you eliminate the cross of Christ. If you eliminate the possibility of sin, perhaps you eliminate the possibility of being made in God's image and God is love. And maybe that's God's agenda: making us in His image.

Karl Barth said, "God is the one who loves in freedom." Love is like a choice, which is constantly made in freedom, unforced. "As you wish."

It's like a kiss (for weeks we've been talking about kisses). When I was a kid, I was often required to kiss my sisters, kiss my mom, kiss my relatives, sometimes even very pretty girls not in my immediate family, because it's the proprietary custom of my people... a form of greeting or saying goodbye. And it's all very nice, but 32 years ago I kissed this girl, and she kissed me. Her name was Susan, and she wasn't saying Hello or Goodbye. We kissed because we wanted to kiss. We kissed in freedom. And it was fire!

And yet, perhaps kisses should be outlawed... because with kisses, there's potential for a lot of pain and sin. And then again, there's potential for a wedding party. Twenty-seven years of marriage and four wonderful kids. Dang! With a kiss, you could betray your Lord, or win a bride. To be safe, God should have made us with no lips. No wine, and no lips.

But... He wants love. He wishes that we would wish love. And check this out: He said, "Love fulfills the entire law." Jesus fulfills the law. So if you're in love, in Jesus, with Jesus, you won't break the law. Love fulfills the law, yet Scripture says, "all who rely on works of the law are under a curse." So you can't fulfill the law with the law only love.

But we want law. Love is terrifying. We want the preacher to say, "Just give 10% of your income to the church." Then you yourself will be ok. But "Love your neighbor..." That requires an agonizing choice in freedom. "Love as I have loved you," said Jesus. That would get you crucified.

See, with the law I save myself. But love is losing myself. I don't give Susan 10% of my income, but all of my income and myself. If I'm honest, I'm not sure where she ends and I begin. I'm lost. See nothing is as unsafe to your self as love. And so we hire preachers to turn love into law – wine into water – grace into policies, procedures and regulations. It's when the couple loses faith in love that they call the lawyer.

When Susan and I fight, inevitable one of us will get frustrated and say, "Look just tell me what you want me to do... Give me a law." And I can't tell her what I want her to do, because I want her to want me in freedom. And she wants me to want her in freedom. We each want the other to walk over and surrender a kiss in freedom. Jesus (The Great Bridegroom) is at a wedding. What does He want? What's His agenda?

Later Jesus goes to another party and an unclean woman – a sinner – anoints Him with oil and tears, and won't stop kissing His feet. It's highly inappropriate, but seems to be exactly what Jesus wants. Simon, the Pharisee doesn't give Him a kiss, but she won't stop. She's lost herself; she's intoxicated with love: the burning, hot, outrageous, ecstatic, unbounded, unending and furious love of God. And we want law, for we find love to be terrifying. We're addicted to law. Hate and love it. See there's an addiction far worse than addiction to alcohol. It's addiction to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, addiction to justify ourselves, protecting ourselves with law.

Jesus is the revelation of love, the revelation of God: Love in freedom.

In this novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, through one of the characters, Dostoevsky tells the myth of the Grand Inquisitor. In the story, Jesus comes to Seville, Spain during the Inquisition, heals the crowds and loves the people, but the Grand

Inquisitor has Jesus arrested and imprisoned. Jesus will not defend himself. So the Grand Inquisitor hurls accusations at Jesus for 12 pages and sentences Him to death. He's furious over all the pain and suffering that he believes Jesus has caused.

The Inquisitor, this priest, tells Jesus that He has joined those who are "correcting his work;" those who will tell the masses whom to marry and whom not to marry, when to have children and when not to have children; those who will regulate every kiss. He cries, "You offered them something that was quite beyond them; it even looked as if you didn't love them – you who came to give them your life! Instead of ridding men of their freedom, you increased their freedom, and imposed everlasting torment on man's soul! You wanted to gain man's love so that he would follow You of his own free will, fascinated and captivated by You. In place of the clear and rigid ancient law... Why have You come to interfere with our work? And why do You look at me silently with those gentle eyes of Yours? Be angry with me. I do not want Your love, because I do not love you myself... I shall have you burned tomorrow..."

Then Dostoyevsky writes the following:

The Grand Inquisitor falls silent and waits for some time for the prisoner to answer. The prisoner's silence has weighted on him. The prisoner has watched Him; He listened to him intently, looking gently into his eyes, and apparently unwilling to speak. The old man longs for Him to say something, however painful and terrifying. But instead, He [Jesus] suddenly goes over to the old man and kisses him gently on his old, bloodless lips. And that is His only answer. The old man is startled and shudders. The corners of his lips seem to quiver slightly. He walks to the door, opens it, and says to Him, 'Go now, and do not come back...ever. You must never, never come again!' And he lets the prisoner out into the dark streets of the city. The prisoner leaves. "And what about the old man?" "The kiss glows in his heart..."

It started same time last year, when we were worshipping at Central Presbyterian, and ever since that time every now and ten, in worship, I feel these really wild little puffs of air. They come from every direction. Really strange... I know. Several weeks ago, one Sunday night, they were especially strong, comically strong, when Susan got one of her weird words. I saw her writing, what she heard Jesus saying. He said this: "Peter, I have never stopped kissing you; sometimes my kisses are sweet, sometimes they burn. But believe this: my kisses never stop."

Sometimes people will ask, "Hey Peter, how are things going down at the new church?" And I don't know how to answer. You see, a few years ago I thought I had church under control. Fifteen years of work, 2 books published, everything in place. Policies, procedures and I had cleaned up pretty well. I was proud. And then Jesus interfered with my work. Sometimes I feel pretty confused, hurt and angry with Jesus. And people will say, "How are things going with church?" And I'll say, "I really don't know, but Jesus is kissing me, and I think I'm beginning to feel it." He's always kissed me, but I haven't always felt it. Not just puffs of air, but mercy – the wine of heaven.

Well why would God make earthly wine with the possibility it might be abused? Why would God allow His children to sin? Perhaps it's so we might eventually believe His mercy. Perhaps it's so we might receive His kisses?

Why would God make wine with the possibility my friend Sharon might drink too much and lose control? Perhaps it's so she might believe and receive His kisses. He's always kissed Sharon, for He adores Sharon, just Sharon. But Sharon is so gifted, capable and put together, it might be hard for her to believe mercy. So maybe He allowed her to sin so that stripped of all her accomplishments, she might believe and receive His kisses.

In the story of the prodigal son that Sharon preached on two weeks ago only one son believed and received His Father's kisses. And only then, when he was returning from the far country. Maybe that's why his father let him go in the first place.

I performed my brother-in-law's funeral, but I got to see Kurt right before he died. We read the story of the prodigal son, and prayed together to our Father in Heaven. Even though my brother-in-law was a drunkard, I don't think he stayed a drunkard. He died as what he always was – a beloved son. But now he could feel the kisses. He came home from the far country and his father had saved the very best wine for last.

Revelation 14 – The harvest of the earth is grain and grapes – that's bread and wine – that's body and blood – that's faith in mercy. It grows in the broken soil and manure of this world and our hearts.

So why doesn't God keep us from sinning? Maybe because we're already chock full of sin, so when we commit a sin, we simply express the sin in our hearts, expose the dirt. Jesus said it's not what goes into a man that defiles him (wine included) it's what comes out, from the heart – a dead heart, incapable of love. Perhaps it's exposed through alcohol, perhaps through lust, perhaps through arrogance, perhaps through religious pride. But freedom to sin is freedom to express the sin already in our heart. And so we hate freedom, for it exposes our hearts. So we try to hide our hearts in a million laws. We hate freedom, for it exposes that we're slaves to sin, that we have no one else to blame, that we don't love love, that we're not free... not free to join the party.

The truth is none of us are truly free till God makes us free. And how does He reveal His love, that we might believe His love, that we might receive His love and love in return?

Well, He made the earth and iron in the earth for nails. And He planted a tree in the middle of a garden. And He chose not to stop us, but let us sin... against Him. But He took our sins and transformed them into His mercy. His cross is the Great Winepress. When we drink that wine, we begin to love in freedom, we are made in the image of God, and the life of the party fills our empty hearts and is pumped through our veins. That life is God's mercy.

So why doesn't God keep us from sinning? Romans 11:32 – "God consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all."

All our bad choices reveal God's good choice: Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Body broken and blood shed.

In Revelation 14, the harvest of the earth is grain and grapes – that's bread and wine. That's faith and mercy or faith in mercy. That is love in freedom. It grows in the broken soil and manure of this world, and of our hearts.

So I don't think God's agenda is keeping us from all bad choices (if it is, he's already failed). God's agenda is getting us to make one good choice in freedom... to freely choose to love Him as He loved us, that we might receive His kiss and kiss Him in return.

"As we wish."

Remember the movie *The Princess Bride*? A Grandfather comes over to read his sick Grandson a book, but the Grandson would rather play video games. He's worried that the book will be a kissing book. He doesn't want any kissing. Grandpa reassures him the book contains fencing, fighting, torture, revenge, giants, monsters, chases and escapes – lots of danger. So Grandpa reads the book *The Princess Bride*.

The Princess Bride is a maiden who likes to order a farmhand around, and the farmhand always responds, "as you wish." She begins to learn that "as you wish" really means "I love you."

They get separated, there's fencing, fighting, torture, revenge, monsters and chases and she fails Wesley. Yet through danger and sacrifice, the farmhand (Wesley) wins her love. So "As she wished" was "As he wished." And maybe that's what this world is about. God is winning the heart of the *Princess Bride*, who is you, that you might develop an appetite for His kisses. And so love Him in freedom – "As you wish."

Princess Bride clip

Remember the picture last week? Mary comes to the cross and kisses the feet of Jesus, and the blood-wine stains her lips? And remember the bride in the winepress? It's there that the heart of the groom is revealed and she kisses Him in freedom.

Well you see, you could outlaw wine, and you could outlaw kisses, and you could outlaw trees, and you could outlaw nails, but in the process you would outlaw the Gospel, and be forever stuck in Hell. You could outlaw every danger and every cause for stumbling... every rock on which men stumble (Isaiah 8:14), and in the process you would outlaw this:

Communion

You are invited to the party, the table of the Lord. Come... "As you wish." It's judgement. Come... "As you wish."