

CRYING IN THE CHAPEL

AND OTHER MESSAGES

by

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CHAPTER THREE

THE TOUCH OF THE MASTER'S HAND

“And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now” (John 2:1-10).

The miracles in the Gospel of John were vehicles to introduce spiritual truth. The historical value of the miracles was not the most important thing to the writer. John never doubted their actuality, but he believed they had a higher mission than the spectacular.

- He knew that Christ fed the five thousand, but greater than that was the fact that Christ can feed the hungry hearts of men.
- He knew that Lazarus left the grave, but he was convinced that men, dead in sin, could rise to a new life.
- He knew that Christ could still the storm, but he was also convinced that Jesus could whisper, **“Peace be still”** to a heart torn by the tempests of life.

Jesus was not a cosmic kill-joy. Here we find Him at a wedding, a festive occasion. Many in our day have shied away from Christianity thinking it was a clique of cheerless characters, a society of dullards who delight in depreciating the status quo. On the contrary, the fullness of the Christian life is joy. The Christian life is not a minus, subtracting from us the cheer and the joy that make life wholesome and powerful; it is a plus, adding to us the forces of spiritual strength that makes our existence between the cradle and the grave a delightful one.

The greatest Christians that I have met have been people who were so in love with Christ that bitterness and hatred and revenge could not live within the framework of their experience.

One of the grandest characters I have ever known was an old evangelist named B. B. Crimm. He did most of his work in Texas and he was quite unique. The Lord blessed him with a brilliant humor that made him the master of every situation. I invited him to address a group of young ministers on the campus of Baylor University where I was a student. He began his sermon to us by saying, "Young men, when I was a student here many years ago, I made up my mind to be a happy Christian. As a young minister, I looked around and I saw older ministers get bitter and discouraged because the churches preferred the younger men for pastors. And I prayed, 'O Lord, when I get old, make me sweet.'" He then leaned over the pulpit and said, "You know, I am old now, and the Lord has answered my prayer. I have sugar diabetes."

Notice the use that Jesus makes of others.

The servants were there to fill the waterpots. He made them part of the team and gave significance to their drab existence by allowing them to become co-workers with Him. He told them to fill the waterpots to the brim. His mother had said to the servants, "**Do whatever He says.**"

When He raised Lazarus from the dead, He said to the helpers, "**Roll away the stone.**" In His public ministry, He chose twelve disciples to help Him with His work. In like fashion, we become partners in redeeming the world. We are co-laborers with Christ; we are ambassadors for Him. He has included us in His plan to love the world into peace and power. Let us not forget our mission; as God had sent Him, even so He sends us.

But let us not be guilty of the error that Mary committed. The answer that Jesus gave her reveals the mistake that she made. She didn't ask for the wrong thing; she asked for the wrong time. He replied, "**Mine hour is not yet come.**"

Let us remember that God's time is not our time; His clock is not our clock. God runs on Eternity Standard Time. Like Mary, many of us are trying to push Christ around. We want to fit Him into our hectic schedule. We have become a nation of epileptics. We are rushers. The patron saint of modern day Christians is St. Vitus. They that wait upon the Lord shall have their strength renewed. We are told that Enoch "**walked**" with God. He didn't run with God. God is never in a hurry. Haste is not only waste, it is sin. It reveals a lack of trust in the wisdom and work of God.

But in this message, this is the point that I want to convey to you. Wine in the New Testament represents the blood of Christ. Turning the water into wine is Christ's way of saying to the world, "***My redemption through death on the cross is the need of the world. The water of human ethics and good behavior is not enough. I must submit to man the cup of salvation.***"

When the governor of the feast tasted the wine that Jesus had made, he said, "This is the best." Jesus was saying to the guests, "***Your wine runs out, and it doesn't taste like mine. Your way of salvation is inadequate and inferior. My salvation, though miraculous, will be enough for everyone and it will be the best.***" That is the message of this miracle.

I. THE QUESTION OF THE WINE

This question is often asked concerning the wine — was it an intoxicating beverage? I have always contended, and will continue to affirm, that the wine was not fermented wine.

I do not believe that Christ would have turned water into a beverage that has caused so much heartache among the nations of men. Liquor and its satellites has ruined the mind and health of thousands. It has become the source of death on the highway. Alcohol has blighted the lives of young people, and ruined countless homes. The Saviour was interested in lifting men into a higher plane of life.

He would not turn water into a beverage that would prove fatal to the character of men made in the image of God. Jesus was always the enemy of anything that degrades and corrupts. Liquor has done that through the ages. It has inspired the wreck of nations and has buried talent and potential in the dust. Turning good water into a fermented beverage should have been inconsistent with the character of our Lord.

If the Saviour turned water into fermented wine, it would have been inconsistent with the rest of His miracles.

In all the miracles Jesus moved from bad to best; this was always the direction of His miracles.

- When men came with blind eyes, He made them well.
- When men came with deaf ears, He made them to hear.
- When men came with frozen tongues, He would restore speech.
- He restored Lazarus from corruption;
- He stilled the infuriated storm;
- He cleansed the leper.
- He spoke peace to a distraught man who was called the demoniac of Gadara.

If He turned water into a fermented beverage, His miracle was moving in the wrong direction.

From the chemical standpoint, we know that fermentation is a form of putrefaction. Fermented wine is actually rotten grape juice. The absorption of oxygen promotes the process. How could the Creator in human form reduce good water into rotten grape juice? This would be inconsistent with the pattern of His miracles. He would have been moving backwards instead of forward.

We must remember that the word “**wine**” in the New Testament has a slightly different meaning than our word. The word in the Greek is “*oinos*.”

The scholars tell us that it is generic. That means that the word as used in the Greek could mean either the simple grape juice or the fermented beverage. We are familiar with words that are generic in our language. For example, the word “pet” is generic. You may mean a dog or a cat or a bird. The word “fruit” is generic. You may mean an apple, a banana, or grapes.

The word “drink” is generic. When someone says, “I am going out for a drink,” he may mean a drink of water, a soft drink, or an alcoholic beverage. In like fashion, the word “**wine**” in the Greek is generic — it applies to either the fruit of the vine or the fermented beverage. Thus we believe that Christ could not have turned water into fermented wine; this would have been inconsistent with His purpose and His character.

We have a familiar verse in the Bible that almost everyone who wants to justify drinking knows and uses in defense of his conduct.

In the book of Timothy, Paul tells the young minister, “**Take a little wine for your stomach’s sake.**” To understand this verse, one must look at the area where Timothy lived. He was residing and working in Asia Minor. The water there was alkaline and very difficult on the stomach. Timothy was suffering from gastric disorders, so he wrote the aged and learned apostle for some advice.

We are familiar with the practice that is made of alcohol in medicine, although in recent days better substitutes have been found. At one time, alcohol served a very useful purpose in surgery. In fact, it was the only form of anesthesia. But Paul prescribed a remedy for Timothy. He urged him to mix the water with alkali in it with a wine, which is an acid, in order to neutralize the alkali. So he writes to Timothy and says, “**Drink no longer water [by itself], but add a little wine to it for thy stomach’s sake.**” Paul was not recommending moderate drinking; he was suggesting a prescription for a sick minister.

Fermented wine could never be the adequate symbol for the blood of Christ.

Remember that this is the main point in the story. Christ is showing, through a miracle, that His blood is superior to any man-made wine, or way of salvation. Rotten grape juice could never express or convey this wonderful lesson. The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin. The blood of Christ is that of a slain lamb from the foundation of the world. His blood is pure and therefore powerful.

Polluted grape juice that incites man into deeds of evil and inspires him to sin and dulls his conscience, would not be an adequate symbol of His blood. Jesus came to cleanse the soul and to empower life. His blood can make the vilest clean. His blood avails for me. “**We are not redeemed with corruptible things like silver and gold; we are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ as a lamb without blemish and without spot.**”

The centuries that have transpired since the cross have not affected the purity of the stream. Millions who are in glory now have bathed their souls in this flowing fountain; and millions more now on the way continue to find solace and courage at the foot of the cross. The dying thief found this cure adequate and the apostle Paul took the cross for the theme of his life and message. The beloved apostle John could exclaim, “**Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God . . . to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever**” (Revelation 1:5,6). The death of Jesus becomes our life. There is no salvation outside of His death. He died that we might have access to a perfect God. He died that God might have access to imperfect sinners.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if men and women everywhere would discard the wine of the world that soon expires and never satisfies, for the way of the cross that leads home? This is the purpose of the church and of preaching, to declare that God has made a way in Christ and that the worst sin that human beings can be guilty of is to reject that way and make an attempt at self-salvation.

II. THE QUANTITY OF THE WINE

Jesus requested that the servants fill the six large waterpots to the brim. Each waterpot contained about twenty gallons. This means that He made about one hundred and twenty gallons for this feast. Why so much? They did not need all of that wine. Remember that the quantity is not related to the need of the host and hostess and their guests; it is related to the person of Christ and the technique that He employs in doing His work. Jesus is never skimpy in His supply in our behalf. That is why David could say, **"My cup runneth over."**

The fulness of His redemption is an assurance of His power. Jesus is not scraping the bottom of the barrel; He is lavish in His love and grace. This is a symbol of the abundance of His salvation. John could say, **"Of his fulness have all we received and grace for grace."**

This is a revelation of what the Bible calls **"his riches in glory."**

Solomon was considered a rich man. The Queen of Sheba bragged on his wealth by stating that the half had not been told. But a greater than Solomon is here. His mercy and His abundant supply go hand in hand.

Do you recall the first miracle of Moses? He turned water into blood; a miracle of vengeance. He performed it before a king and his court. This is the first miracle of Christ. He turns water into wine, a miracle of mercy, and He doesn't do it before the dignitaries of Jerusalem.

He doesn't call the Scribes and Pharisees to be spectators of His glory. He doesn't send a report of the miracle and its abundance to a newspaper. He chooses to display the first installment of His glory in a humble home in the presence of an unknown couple. Young people who marry retain memories of the event in scrapbook form and other mementos. Can you imagine this bride and groom telling their children and grandchildren that Jesus began His miracles at their wedding?

This abundance reveals the way that God provides salvation for the world. There is enough for everyone; no one need be left out. The good can be saved, and the bad can be saved. There is salvation for the high and the low, for the educated and the illiterate. The provision of God never dims or dies; it never fades nor fails. The supply is inexhaustible. People often complain because there is not enough food, or not enough clothing, or not enough housing, but no one can complain that there is not enough salvation. If the entire world were to become Christian, yea, if every man who ever lived had sought salvation, it would not diminish the supply of redemption.

He is a payment for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the entire world.

That is why Paul could say that Christ was “**exceedingly able to do abundantly above everything that we could even ask or think.**”

When the prodigal son returned home, the father had more than enough love to cover his waywardness from the hour of his departure until the hour of his return. His overflow supply reveals His interest in us. Jesus wants to do something for us, even as He did something for these young people. He who in the wilderness would not turn stones into bread in His own behalf now turns water into wine to allay the embarrassment of the host and hostess. On the cross He would not save Himself, and they taunted Him for this, but oh, what He did for us and in what a lavish fashion He did it!

It is amazing to note that Jesus commanded the waterpots to be filled with water. The servants and the guests could have challenged this command. They could have said, “This is a wedding, not a ceremony of purification. We need wine, not water.”

But Mary warned them in advance, “**Whatever He says unto you, do it.**” In other words, do not question His commands, no matter how mysterious they may seem. This is a good thing to remember when we are dealing with Christ. He may command us to do something that seems illogical or unexplainable, but whatever He says to you — do it.

- It seemed difficult for Naaman the leper to obey the command to bathe in the Jordan. He had better water in Syria. But he obeyed the command and got the blessing.
- It may have seemed illogical for Moses to try to cure snake bite by placing a serpent of brass on a pole, but it brought healing to the people.

God may come to some of us with a strange request. Let us learn how to obey it. An unsaved man here might think, “What will faith do for me? My situation needs something else. How can believing in Christ redeem me and help me to face the problems of life?”

Do it, my friend, and the waterpots with water will become the wine of life.

When Jesus fed the five thousand He utilized a little lunch. The disciples had questioned the small snack in the light of so many people. But you recall the popular story— twelve basketfuls remained. And don't forget that these were not scraps they picked up. That was what they had left after feeding the multitude. So each disciple had a basket to take home. This should have silenced their skepticism. They that hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled.

Economists of the world fear that the power to produce food will not keep up with the population growth. Those of us who preach the Gospel need never fear that the supply of salvation will expire. One of the names in the Old Testament for God is, “*the God who is enough.*”

When you have Jesus, you have everything. Nothing is lacking in Him. Paul tells us that we are complete in Him, and that the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe is the power that raised Christ from the dead, and it is available for us. With that power we can conquer our fears and our sins. Let's use it.

The waterpots are full to the brim; there is no need to skimp. I heard of a Baptist woman who was talking to a Catholic priest. The priest was trying to tell her that she couldn't get to heaven unless she were a Catholic. He said, "Don't you know that Peter has the key?" She replied, "Let him keep the key; I have the Door." Jesus is the Door, and when we have Him, we have everything in abundance.

III. THE QUALITY OF THE WINE

The governor of the feast said, "**You have saved the best for the last.**"

Since the wine is a symbol of the blood of Christ, or His salvation, the real meaning of this statement is the superiority of the provision Christ makes for sinful man over that attempt on the part of human beings to provide for themselves. The wine of the world expires and causes embarrassment; its quality is not comparable to the wine of heaven. I wish that we could learn that. We try our manmade systems of salvation and find them inefficient. We attempt redemption on the level of ethics, or behavior, or moral achievements, or charitable demonstrations. But these are temporary, and sooner or later the wine is gone and chagrin and disappointment move in. Jesus said, "**If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.**" When the crowds were leaving the Lord, He turned to His own and said, "Will ye also go away?" But Simon spoke a great truth when he said, "**To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.**"

The Scripture plainly states that the governor did not know where this good wine had come from. But the servants knew because they had filled the waterpots. This happens in our churches. When God works the miracles of redemption, the world may not know from whence the change came. But God's people who have been filling the waterpots with water and have been assisting Christ in His spiritual work—they are conversant with what has happened. It is no mystery for them. They have seen the hand of Christ at work. They have been eyewitnesses to His majesty.

'Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer,
Thought it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin.
But he held it up with a smile.
"What am I bidden, good folks," he cried,
"And who will start bidding for me —
A dollar, and who will make it two?
Two dollars, and who'll make it three?"

"Three dollars once and three dollars twice,
And going for three." But no,
From the back of the room a gray-haired man
Stepped up, and picked up the bow;
And wiping the dust from the old violin
And tuning up all of the strings,
He played a melody, pure and sweet,
As sweet as the angels sing.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer
With a voice quiet and low,
Said, "What am I bid for the old violin?"
And he held it up with the bow.
"A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two;
Two thousand and who'll make it three?
Three thousand once, and three thousand twice,
And going and gone," said he.

The crowd cheered, but some exclaimed,
"We cannot quite understand
What changed the worth."
The man replied, "The touch of a master's hand."
And many a man with a life out of tune,
Battered and scarred with sin
Is auctioned cheap to a foolish crowd,
Much like the old violin.

A mess of pottage, a glass of wine,
A game, and he travels on.
He's going once, he's going twice,
He's going, and almost gone.
But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd
Never can quite understand
The worth of a soul, and the change that is wrought,
By the touch of the Master's hand.

The greatest miracle in the world is the salvation of one soul.

I have no trouble believing the miracles when I have seen Christ perform the miracle of transformation in the human heart. Stilling the storm, walking about upon the water, feeding the five thousand, raising the dead are minimal in comparison to changing hell into heaven and night into day and damnation into salvation.

The miracles of grace are greater than the miracles of glory.

The physical miracles revealed the sovereignty of God, but the miracles of grace reveal the sympathy of God.

When the disciples marveled at His miracles, He said, "**Greater works than these shall ye do because I go unto my Father.**" He meant that the spiritual miracles that we would produce by the proclamation of the Gospel would be greater than His physical miracles, and they are.

When the prodigal son returned home, the father instructed the servants to bring the best robe and put it on him. He didn't ask for just a robe, but he specified and insisted on the best.

When he made the supper for the returning prodigal, he didn't just kill the calf; the Scripture states that they killed the fatted calf. This is always God's technique. He insists on the best for us. The salvation that He offers in Christ is the best that He could do. This salvation is comprehensive in its coverage. It eliminates the sins of the past and makes them non-existent. It gives us power to face the problems that confront us now. It gives us a hope for tomorrow and thereby it eliminates the fear of death.

It is the best salvation because it is eternal.

I have spent a lifetime in the ministry trying to convince people that God loves them completely, and that they need not fear about not being saved if their trust is in Him, but so many continue to insist that salvation is dismissed the moment that failure seeps into our moral character. This is not so. Salvation is a unit in itself, and faith in Christ insures our position.

I tell people to worry about the caliber of their Christian living and to try to improve their spiritual condition, but not to relate to their redemption the failures and defeats of life, as if a person could rupture the relationship between God and himself by succumbing to failure.

I have been a Christian for twenty-six years, and I have never been unsaved for one moment. I haven't been completely victorious in my life, but I find no fault in Him.

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

I heard the story of a young Christian who was waiting his turn in a barber shop. He had just been converted and was happy with the victories that his new found faith had produced. However, sitting in the chair was a blatant unbeliever who was poking fun at the church and the Bible. The unbeliever said to the barber, "I don't see how any sensible person can believe the miracle where Christ turned the water into wine."

The young convert stood it as long as he could. He replied, "Friend, if you are having trouble with that miracle, come to my house, and I will show you a greater miracle than that. I can show you where Christ turned wine and whiskey into furniture, and into pictures for the wall, and into food for my table. I was a drunkard, and Christ redeemed me and gave me a new life. That is a greater miracle."

Yes, that is the greatest miracle, and Christ turned water into wine to say to the world, "*The world's wine runs out and embarrasses, but My wine is enough, and the best.*"

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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