

The Miracle of the Wedding at Cana in Galilee

I wonder what you make of miracles? I have to say, when I was at school there were two approaches to miracles.

On the one side there were those who took them literally. So for example, when discussing the story of Jonah and the Whale. If you were to say it was a picture of the forthcoming death and resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 12:38-42). You may receive a rebuttal. 'Oh no Julian, you are now putting man's spin on it'. 'This is your own human pride.'

And then at the other end of the spectrum there were those who were simply too intelligent to believe in the miracles. 'It is all superstitious rubbish', they would say. We have science now. Anything that remotely sounded supernatural was dismissed as primitive, from primitive people. And, any healings that occurred were psychosomatic. 'Most of what was wrong with these people was in their heads.' they would say.

Now the point I am trying to make this is this. Both these approaches, the literal and the reductionist approach, miss the point. And they miss the point because the real meaning and purpose of the miracle has passed them by. They have simply engaged in an exercise of trying to prove whether the miracle happened or not. And hence they miss **the real meaning** of the miracle.

Instead, we should ask the question that St Augustine asked.

'What does the miracle tell us?

'What does the miracle tell us about **Christ**?

'The miracle on the outside has something on the inside which must be understood.' continues Augustine.

So let us this morning try to *understand* the meaning of the miracle at the wedding at Cana in Galilee. And as we begin to do so we will begin to see the **symbolism** attached to the events that happened that day.

In the Old Testament many passages symbolise the Messianic era as a wedding feast. (Isa. 54:4–8; 62:4–5). In the New Testament in the climax of the Book of Revelation, (when there is Armageddon), heaven is described as a union between Christ and his church.

And the account of the wedding at Cana in Galilee and the miracle of water into wine, needs to be understood in the same symbolic tradition.

John the Apostle, an eyewitness to the events that day, and the writer of our Gospel reading this morning, declares the real meaning of the miracle that day at the end of our Gospel reading. John says,

‘Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed him.’ (Verse 11)

Now we are getting to the *real* meaning of this miracle, the purpose of the miracle.

So it is no surprise that the first of the Seven Signs in the Gospel of John happens at a wedding. This is the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies of what was prophesied centuries before. Our own hymn writers say the same. ‘From Heaven, He came and sought her, to be His holy Bride, with His own blood He brought her, And for her life He died.’ And so the miracle happening at a wedding has huge significance in itself.

And not only would the arrival of the Messiah be marked by a wedding banquet, it would also be plentiful, it would be overflowing! The image of the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven is always one of abundance. It would be a **sumptuous** occasion. The Prophet Amos foretold of the coming Messiah:

New wine will drip from the mountains and I will bring my people back from exile. (Amos 9:13-14) (see also Jer. 31:12; Hos. 14:7; Amos 9:13–14)

New wine stands for New life. The inferior wine is gone, it says in our reading this morning.

The Lord will redeem them, and they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord, the grain, the new wine, and the olive oil. They will be like a well-watered garden that will sorrow no more. (Jer. 31:12)

And so the miracle of the water into wine at the Wedding at Cana in Galilee marks the dawning of a new era. The Kingdom of Heaven is near. The Messiah is in their midst. And there is joy and happiness. Everyone's cup is overflowing.

The presence of the Messiah produces an extra 150 gallons of wine – a staggering amount of wine. Far more than was needed. The arrival of the Messiah, the bridegroom of the church, is a time of joy and celebration, and there is enough for everyone - and more! There was far more wine than was needed that day. As King David said nine centuries before:

'My cup runneth over, and I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever ((Psalm 23:5).

Not only does the wedding banquet and the abundance of wine mark the beginning of the Messianic era, but the six stone water jars for the rites of purification are symbolic of the Messianic era. These were no ordinary jars. These jars *had* to be made of stone. Stone being more impervious than earthenware, and less likely to contract uncleanness. Jewish law required that hands be ceremonially washed before meals and the vessels to be used also be cleansed (Mark 7:3–4). All done in a very meticulous way.

Now the number Six in rabbinic numerology always meant imperfection, or incompleteness, falling short. And so these six stone jars for the rites of purification highlight the shortcomings of the Old Covenant. The Old Law.

They held water for external washings, but they could not provide internal cleansing, the real joy that comes from sins forgiven. But here in their midst was someone who could forgive their sins, and of the world.

So, in this the first miracle or **sign** in the Gospel of John, our Lord brought fullness where there was emptiness, joy where there was disappointment, and something internal for that which was only external (water for ceremonial washings).

Jesus transformed the content of those stone jars that day and he will change our hearts too. He will, as I said in a recent sermon, replace our hearts of stone with a heart of flesh (Ez. 36:26).

The significance of the stone jars and the new wine replacing the old wine, and the new wine being superior to the old, is symbolic of the New Covenant replacing the old priestly covenant. What the Jewish High Priest could not do on the Day of Atonement, that is atone for the nation's sins when he entered the Holy of Holies, Jesus the Great High Priest, has done. He has atoned for the sins not only for Israel, but for the world. That is a lot of sin indeed!

The new covenant was markedly different to the old priestly covenant. Whereas the Old Covenant was written on stone, the new covenant would be written on people's hearts. Whereas the old Law was a legal relationship with God, as cold as the stone it was written on, the new covenant is a personal relationship with God through his Son, by the Holy Spirit.

The Messiah that day was not coming to patch up an old religious system with its rules and traditions. His purpose was to fulfil the Law and deliver that which was yet to be done, something that had been prophesied centuries before, the forgiveness of sins, the redemption of the world, and life everlasting for those who believe. And at the Wedding at Cana in Galilee we see the beginnings of this new exciting and plenteous Messianic era. **AMEN.**