

WATER INTO WINE

This sermon was preached in Shalom Church, Singapore in 2004.

Scripture Reading: **John 2:1-11**

This is a wedding. Weddings are happy occasions; at least, they are meant to be. Different cultures conduct and celebrate weddings differently. The Jews would normally hold their weddings in the evening. After sunset, the groom with his friends will set off from their homes and head for the house of the bride. This journey is more of a procession. Think procession, think Malay weddings today. Think procession, think Chinese weddings in the past. There is noise --- the beating of drums and blowing of trumpets; there is great excitement, as a group of men together with the groom moves excitedly to fetch the bride; and because it is held after sunset, there is the use of torches, which makes the whole procession even more spectacular.

Upon reaching the bride's house, the groom will enter to do what is necessary and fetch his bride home. Now an even bigger group of people will travel in the reverse direction this time, from the bride's home back to the groom's house. And there at the groom's house a wedding feast will be held. According to the customs of the Jews, wedding feasts could last up to 7 days! Some guests could stay throughout the 7 days, or there could be a constant flow of guests throughout those 7 days. Needless to say, food and drinks will be needed for these 7 days. Not any kind of food and drinks, but food and drinks befitting the occasion. Remember, it is a wedding feast!

This is why I said right at the beginning that weddings are happy occasions, or at least they are meant to be. To the guests, it is truly a happy time. For the groom, if he is not too rich, it can be a very stressful time! Imagine having to provide food and drinks for many people for 7 days, and food and drinks that befit a wedding feast!! Now, let's just zero in on "drinks". In those days, you either drink water or wine. There are no other kinds of beverages, unlike today --- no coffee, tea, Coke or fruit punch! Most people

will drink water at normal times. But this is a wedding! So what do you think is the appropriate drink to serve?

When people visit you during Chinese New Year, what will your parents serve the guests for drinks? Plain water? Or do we not stock up bottles after bottles of soft drinks! Here's a wedding, of course the right thing to do, the only proper thing to do, is to serve wine. Wine is not a luxury on such occasions. It is a necessity! No wine, it does just not look like a wedding feast! You just don't serve plain water on such occasions!

It is like when I was a little boy during the eve of the Chinese New Year. When I see chicken being served for dinner, I know this is a special day, this dinner is very special. Because in those days, to eat chicken is a very BIG matter! We just don't eat chicken every day, unlike today.

Now, back to the wedding feast. Wine is a necessity. If you don't serve it, or if you don't have enough to serve the guest, it is a very serious matter. You will suffer the loss of face, and you might even be sued!! According to some experts who study into Jewish weddings in those days, failure to provide ample food and drinks at the wedding feasts could land you with lawsuits! This may sound totally unbelievable to our ears, but one can imagine how the father of the bride could be so embarrassed and upset that he could really bring charges against his son-in-law!! Therefore, the situation we read of in **verse 3** is a crisis situation! "*They have no wine! They have run out of wine!*"

What is supposed to be a joyful occasion now looks as if it is going to end in disaster and tragedy. The answer, the resolution of the crisis is found in **verse 9**. Jesus performed a miracle. He turned 6 huge water pots of water into wine, and that saved the day for the groom. Now, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, I call you this morning to look at this great miracle performed by Jesus. The Lord Jesus Christ has performed many, many miracles. Among the many that were performed, the apostle John chose to record this particular miracle here. Why? What is his purpose in selecting and recording this miracle?

Look first at **verse 11**. This miracle is here called '*a sign*'. The purpose of a sign is to point to something or someone. So what is this miracle, this sign pointing to? Let me read for you **John 20:30 & 31**: *And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*

Why did John choose to put up this sign here in **John 2**? He tells us the answer. It is to point us to Jesus Christ, that we may see clearly that He is the Christ, the Son of God. Not just to see, but having seen, that we will believe Him! And if we have already believed in Him, our faith will be strengthened to continue to believe in Him! So then, my dear friends, this miracle, this sign of water turned into wine, it is tell us truths about Jesus and it is to lead us to Jesus. What does this miracle tell us about Jesus? It tells us the following five things about Jesus.

1. JESUS IS GENTLE.

We are told in **verse 11** that this is the first miracle that Jesus has performed. Where did He perform this miracle? In Cana of Galilee. Where is Cana of Galilee? The people of those days know. The people of today can't be sure. What this means is that Cana of Galilee is not a very important place. In fact, it is a rather obscure place.

It does not play a very important role in the life of the nation then. Unlike Jerusalem which is so important a place, where so many important events happened there and so many important people can be found there. Not Cana, not this Cana of Galilee. Yet Jesus chose to perform His miracle, His first miracle there.

And it was done, not in the presence of kings and nobles, but for a poor bridegroom. He is poor, else the crisis of having no wine would not have developed. And we note that his name was not mentioned,

neither that of his bride. Obscure, unknown, relatively unimportant people, living in some remote part of Palestine! Yet it is to them that Christ chose to perform His first miracle! This speaks of His gentleness. He does not despise the poor, He does not neglect the unknowns. In fact, He comes to such people and shows grace and mercy to them.

Now, this is in keeping with the general tone of His life. He was born in a manger, not in a palace. His birth was announced to shepherds, not generals. He worked as a carpenter, not a court official. He takes time to speak and help the widows, the sick, the weak and the despised.

And this character, such gentleness, is the picture that the Jews have of God in the Old Testament. God is known in the Old Testament as '*a father of the fatherless, a defender of widows*'. God is known in the Old Testament as '*the good Shepherd*', so tender and gentle with the lambs. God is known in the Old Testament to deal with unknowns like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, unknowns as far as world history is concerned. He is a gentle God. And here is Jesus, and He is exhibiting the same kind of gentleness.

Cana of Galilee, at the wedding of an unnamed couple! This gives us hope and encouragement, does it not? We are not great and famous, are we? Oh Jesus, do not pass me by, do not overlook me. Just as You did not keep away from the wedding of an unnamed couple in a obscure place, so do not stay away from me. Come to me, and show me mercy.

2. JESUS IS GENEROUS.

Look at **verse 6**. Six water pots, and each has a volume of 20 - 30 gallons. I am assuming that when Jesus turned the water into wine, He turned all the water in the 6 water pots into wine! Since we are told that the servants have filled all of them up to the brim, this

translates into 120-180 gallons of wine. This is about 500 - 750 litres of wine, if you can't understand how much is a gallon! Now, that is a lot, a lot of wine!

As I understand it, the Jews then disapprove of drunkenness. Therefore, they disapprove of strong drink. They drink wine on happy occasions like this, at a wedding feast, but it is always mixed with 2/3 of water. So this 500 - 750 litres of wine provided by Jesus was not meant to encourage the people to get drunk, because it will be diluted with water. Rather, this abundant provision points us to the fact that it will last them throughout the remaining days of the feast! No half-measures here! The "*they have no wine*" scenario will not happen again. It is a full provision. In fact, we must say that it is more than full provision, that it is more than is needed for the wedding.

So far our focus has been on the quantity. Now hear what the master of the feast said in **verse 10**. The quality is excellent, far superior to what was served thus far! So the picture is now complete:

Quantity: abundant.

Quality: excellent.

The provision is generous, very generous. The couple could actually sell the leftovers, and since the quality is excellent, it will fetch them a good price. This will surely be a great help to them as they start their marriage life. Remember, the groom is not rich, and that 7 days of feasting would have burnt a huge hole in his pocket! How generous is Jesus! He provides, not just according to our needs, but according to His riches.

Once again, this character of generosity is the picture that the Jews have of God in the Old Testament. Just take the land they possess, as an example. It is called "a land flowing with milk and honey."

Do you see the picture, the same picture? Not a land flowing with just plain water, but milk and honey. Not a land where if you squeeze hard enough, you will get milk and honey. But one that *flows* with milk and honey, it is so full, it oozes out! The land is God's gift to Israel, and therefore it points to God's great generosity! And that's God, the God the Jews knew in the Old Testament --- *He who gives to all liberally and without reproach*. Now, here is Jesus, and He is that generous. Does it not tell you something?

3. JESUS IS LOVE.

We can see this from two angles. First of all, see the *result* of this miracle. It brings joy and gladness to all present. The miracle performed is not a plague. It is a blessing. It is not to condemn, not to judge, but to bring joy and blessing. This speaks of His mission, that it is a happy one. Like what **John 3:17** says, "*For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*" He is love. He loves sinners. Of course, He will judge us one day, if we persist in rebellion against Him. But that does not negate the fact that He is love. To save, to bless is His desire.

Next, see the *timing* of this miracle. We are told that this is the first miracle Jesus performed. This implies that this miracle must have been performed very early during His 3½ years of public ministry, probably right at the beginning. From the other Gospel records, we know that before He started His public ministry, He was subjected to the devil's temptation in the wilderness for 40 days and nights. One of the temptations was to turn stones into bread, to satisfy His hunger. He refused to do that. Now, here at the wedding, not too long after, He turned water into wine!

What does this tell you? He refused to perform a miracle for Himself, but would do it for others. He would not make bread for Himself,

bread which is necessary for life! But He would make wine for others, wine which if missing, will bring great trouble to the groom, but unlikely to cost him death! Selfless! The orientation is always others, the good, the blessing of others! That's love, is it not? Of course, the ultimate expression of this was when He denied Himself, sacrificed Himself to die on the Cross for sinners. He did that, so that unworthy sinners like you and I could have life by His death! **JESUS IS LOVE.**

4. **JESUS IS POWERFUL.**

How did He turn the water into wine? He did not use any thing or any instrument. He did not even say a word to the water. He simply willed it! And it was done! What power! No need to touch the water pots, no need to say anything to the water, nothing. Just will it, and water is turned into wine!! How is it that He could have such power? Surely you cannot mistake the sign, you cannot miss it! He is God! Only God can have such power!

The God who spoke this world into existence, who said, "Let there be light" and there was light, surely we are looking at Him now! Who else can He be? That's what John wants us to see, isn't it? He says that it is in order that we may see and believe that Jesus is God the Son, that He is God! And here, surely is also a matter of great comfort and encouragement to all of us! The great transforming power of Jesus! If He can change water into wine, why do I think He cannot change me from hell-deserving sinner to be heaven-bound saint?

I remember Jesus had said, in **John 17:24**, these words: *Father, I will that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.* Christians, this is the solid assurance that we can never lose our salvation. Why? Because Jesus willed that we will be with Him in glory! What Jesus wills, that will happen!

5. JESUS IS THE ONE.

The scene is that of a wedding banquet, and a flowing supply of wine. To many of us, this may not be a scene of much significance. But to the Jews who know their Old Testament, it is very significant. Why?

Because God has given them many prophecies in the Old Testament that when His appointed Saviour comes, He will bring in a period like a wedding feast! And at that time, one of the hallmarks of the situation is this: *The mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.*

Wine in the Old Testament, besides being just wine, is also a symbol of joy and blessing. When God's appointed Saviour comes, He will usher in a time of joy and blessing. Here is the first miracle performed by Jesus. The context is a wedding banquet. The miracle is a flowing supply of wine. Is the parallel just a coincidence? No, but the message is: *He is the One!* That you may know, and believe, that Jesus is the Christ, says John. Jesus is the appointed Saviour, the One God has promised to come to save sinners from their sins. And this Saviour is none other than God Himself. That Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

What should we do? Bow your knees before Jesus, and worship Him. Confess your sins to Him, your ignorance of who He is, your neglect of Him in the past, even your despising of Him. Now believe in Him, trust Him, adore Him, worship Him, follow Him. That was what the disciples did. Look at **verse 11**. They saw His glory. From this miracle that He has performed, they saw that He is gentle, generous, love and powerful. From this sign, they saw that He is the One promised. And they believed in Him, trusted Him and followed Him.

We must note that not everyone present then has that response. The master of the feast, the guests, the servants, even the bride and the groom --- like the disciples, they have all been recipients of this great goodness from Jesus. But nothing is said about them seeing His glory and believing in Him. Perhaps some did. Most likely, most of them did not. That is why John set up the contrast here. All have experienced the gentleness, generosity, love and power of Jesus. Yet the benefit is at two levels. For most of them, it was merely physical. Only for the disciples was it spiritual. It did for them what it was meant to do.

Oh friends, it is my prayer that you will stand with the disciples this morning. You have seen this sign, not with your eyes, but with your ears this morning. Seek the Lord, my friends, seek Him. Don't be content with just physical benefits. Oh, I gain some head knowledge of Jesus and the Christian Faith this morning. No, be discontented with that. Rest not, until you see the glory of Jesus, see Him as the Saviour of sinners, as God. And come to commit yourself totally and unreservedly to Him. Indeed, I call you even now to do this. Come to Jesus. Trust Him totally and wholly, as your Lord and your Saviour. Amen.