

## The Wedding of the Lamb

The gospel of John is very different to those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke and for many people it seems that they were almost a prelude for John's gospel. It was the last to be written and it is probable John knew of the other gospels. He was an older man when he wrote his account of the life and work of Jesus and so had had time to mature and he presents something more than a biography. He had time to reflect on what he wanted to emphasize.

One major difference between the synoptic gospels and that of John is that there are no parables recorded and only seven miracles or signs are contained in it. Why is this as John himself states in John 21:25 "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." So why were there no parables, which was a common teaching aid at this time. But more importantly why was there only 7 miracles recorded and why did John choose these particular ones. John calls them signs rather than miracles, as it a word that emphasizes the significance of the action rather than the marvel, but again he has related all 7 signs before he is half way through his gospel. And only 4 of the 7 miracles relate to healing.

The last sign is in John 11 and is about the raising of Lazarus who has been dead for over 3 days. This miracle is significant as it leads John directly into the second part of His gospel, which covers the final Passover, a discourse into the full meaning of the gospel message and ends in His own death and resurrection. His disciples had seen that Jesus had control over life and death and which made the importance of his own death more powerful by being raised to eternal life by God himself.

John's gospel is made up of many discourses and it seems that he carefully chose these seven miracles as a lead into them. For instance the miracle of the Feeding of the 5000 takes us into a discourse on Jesus as the bread of life. In John 6:26 he says "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." and in verse 32 he says "but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" in v 35 Jesus declares "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty". So here we see that John is urging Christians to look beyond the physical and strive to become like Christ by imbibing of Him.

The healing of the Man Born Blind discourses on spiritual blindness and how the leaders of that time couldn't accept that Jesus was the Messiah. This miracle was also performed on the Sabbath, which brought Jesus to the attention of the Pharisees and then Jesus spoke directly to them when they asked him "What? Are we blind too" Jesus said "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin: but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains." In John 9:39 Jesus said "for judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind" John then goes on to talk about the Jesus being the Shepherd of this flock, his sheep who could hear his voice and would follow Him. He said He would lay down his life for the sheep thus taking us onto what he was planning to do.

These are obvious references, but I would like to go to a miracle, which we often read over - dismiss it as a sweet story or just see the apparent surface message. To me this miracle contains the whole gospel message in it. I am talking of the wedding at Cana and the turning of water into wine.

Read the story in John 2:1-11

The turning of water into wine is apparently Jesus' first miracle and I have always wondered why John included this particular miracle or sign in His gospel. Was it only there to show the beginning of His ministry? What has it to do with our calling? What was its purpose. We see that in John 2:11 John states the purpose of the miracle was to reveal Jesus' glory. But I feel that there is much more we can learn from this story and which John's audience would immediately have picked up on which we don't.

In the ancient world the daily life of most people was a life of unremitting toil and hardship. Meals were frugal with meat only forming part of the meal during religious feasts. But family celebrations were important in a world that lacked the kind of entertainment that we are used to. So people would make the most of them. People would have a really enjoyable time feasting together. Perhaps families would make an occasion of it when meeting together especially if they lived at a distance from one another. A wedding would be just such an occasion.

Marriage was the bedrock of the society with the parents arranging a match for their children, which would then go on to form the next family unit. A marriage was binding from the time of betrothal and would need a form of divorce to end it. It was binding even though there could be some time between betrothal and the wedding itself. The wedding was not a ceremony, such as we have today, but rather a celebration that the bride and groom were now ready to become man and wife and live together.

The father of the groom would have an open house for as long as food, wine and funds held out. It could last for a week or even longer. Even the very poor would celebrate for a week and would work during the day to be able to celebrate in the evenings. Invitations were sent out and to refuse the invitation was unpardonable as was the appearance of a guest without the appropriate wedding clothes. Weddings were generally lavish affairs. There was eating and drinking to excess. There was music, songs and dances. Jokes and games were played. Oxen and fat calves were killed and cooked.

The groom, garlanded with flowers, would go with his friends to the bride's house in the evening. There they would collect the bride and her friends and process back to the groom's house with singing, music and dancing. She would be wearing a rich dress with jewels if she could afford them, and her face would be veiled. One of the groom's friends would be the master of the banquet. Finally the bride and groom were taken to the nuptial chamber, a room set aside for them, and then left alone, when the party broke up a week later!

So what does this tell us of the wedding at Cana. Cana was a village not far from Nazareth. Jesus had been invited together with some of his disciples. Was he a relative? - we don't know but it could have been a family occasion, especially as Mary is the one who approaches Jesus to say that the host is running out of wine. Did she have a part in the organization of the event? Running out of food or wine could bring dishonour upon the families, and could lead to lawsuits or even divorce before the wedding had even begun. It was a serious situation. In John 2 v 3 Jesus' mother said to him, They have no more wine. But Jesus was reluctant to do anything and replied "Dear woman... why do you involve me. My time has not yet come". But Mary was confident that His time had indeed come. She was confident enough to turn to the servants and say "do whatever he tells you." Was Jesus reluctant to begin his

ministry? Was this his last time of fun with friends before the serious business of his ministry truly began. Mary had perfect faith in Him and His love and respect for her was evident as he did indeed perform the miracle. By so doing He now began His ministry, not with an impressive miracle, but with a quiet miracle at the wedding, when very few knew what had occurred. The Jewish guests were unaware of the miracle but it was witnessed by the servants and His disciples. This is not the spectacular ministry that so many expected of the Messiah but quietly reaching the poor, sick and those who desperately needed his Good news.

The storage jars that he used were symbolic. They were used for the many washings that were required of the Jews during the course of the wedding. Jews became ceremonially defiled during the normal circumstances of daily life and were cleansed by pouring water over their hands. Although these jars were empty they would have held twenty to thirty gallons, which was between 75 to over 100 litres per jar and although this was the capacity it was perhaps not the actual content of the wine - it would have been a lot of wine. 6 jars of wine! But we know neither the number of people attending or how far they were into the Wedding Feast. But isn't this our God - a God of abundance. When the master of the banquet tasted it he immediately realized the quality of the wine and when he spoke to the bridegroom he said that the best had been saved for last. I bet it was a good drop!

The wine that Jesus transformed from the water is the symbol of His blood and together with his spirit helps to transform us. This parable is the gospel message in full. He came to call those who needed Him most. When we drink the wine it is the acceptance of this gospel message. We accept that He died and rose for us and that we allow Him to lovingly change our lives as He lives in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. The blood can be linked to the blood of his Passover. By accepting this wine every time we drink it we deepen our relationship with Him. We are betrothed to Him and daily we become more a part of Jesus for he is our bridegroom and the relationship should become very close. Like the bridegroom at the wedding he bestows gifts on us, His bride. The Holy Spirit being the major one but He also gives us other powerful gifts to help us in our walk.

The engagement was more binding at that time than what we have today. We are betrothed to Christ and He sees it as binding - in His eyes we are already saved. He already sees us as His bride. We should believe it too. The wedding at the end of the age is just something that will confirm what has already happened.

Do we realize that the gospel message for us begins and ends with a wedding!! The wedding at Cana is our calling and the wedding in the resurrection is the completion of our journey to belong totally to Christ.

Rev 19:7 "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) "then the angel said to me, Write: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!"

A man must leave his parents and be joined to his wife. Jesus left his Father and came to earth to be betrothed to His Church. When He was resurrected He went to make a home for us. On His return He becomes our husband and we start a new family - the church. He calls us to be His bride. At the culmination of the age when the Church is resurrected, the wedding takes place.

During this time before our resurrection to eternal life, we are to make ourselves ready. To make our clothes white, without spot, wrinkle or blemish. Yet Jesus says that he has given us fine linen. So this implies that this is something that we cannot do ourselves. It is only by his help that we make ourselves ready. We rely totally on Him. It is not our strength that saves us but our weakness. By acknowledging that we cannot change without help, we can allow Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit to transform our lives. It is only when we give our lives over to Jesus that he can become the master potter and shape us into His bride. We now begin a new relationship getting to know our prospective bridegroom, learning to rely on Jesus as our Lord, King and Saviour. We learn to become like Him throughout our lives. By prayer we are transformed and by trials we are tested. He has faith in us that we can do it.

Is our calling is likened to being guest called to a wedding? When we accept the invitation He cleanses us by the water of baptism. Could this be symbolized by the wedding clothes that we are expected to wear. In Matt 22:11 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. Friend, he asked, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?" The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, Tie him hand and foot and throw in outside, into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth For may are invited, but few are chosen" We cannot come to this wedding without making ourselves ready.

Is this miracle the gospel message in full? I think it is. It could be said that it the gospel message within a gospel. The linking of the wine with His blood foreshadows the death and resurrection of Jesus. So the first sign reveals not only Jesus' glory, but also points to the fullness of salvation by his shed blood, which is represented by the wine. This is also the message of Passover in the linking of his blood with the symbols of the wine and bread. By drinking this wine we are purified as linked by the wine being from the purification jars at the wedding. The picture of wedding feast is shown to us by Jesus inviting us to celebrate with Him in a great wedding feast in the resurrection. All those who have made themselves clean will sit down to a great wedding feast.

This miracle, seemingly so insignificant, just helping out at a wedding, becomes in my mind the greatest of them all.

He is betrothed to His church. We are called, chosen to prepare ourselves as a bride, while He makes a home for us. When all is ready, He like the bridegroom will then return and we participate in a great marriage in Heaven, so that we may be with Him always - How glorious.