

Miracle at Cana

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 September 2006

Preacher: Rev. Steve James

[0 : 00] Thank you very much for your welcome here. It's lovely to be back with you. Rachel and I were here for the first service. Rachel's had to catch the plane back because our youngest, Claire, some of you may remember Claire, is off to university, to Edinburgh.

So that's all very exciting. And I think she's somewhere near Spencer Bentley, so we hope that they'll meet up. But we're also in between jobs, as David announced last week. I'm going to be starting in Manchester, and it has much in common with this church in many ways. Although as somebody said to me, oh, just ten minutes before the service, it's a little rough, the area you're moving to, he said.

And I had an email that also said there'd been yet another act of violence in my area. So I'm going to stay here, and I'm sending Rachel back, and she's going to take the church on.

Now, David's in a series on Genesis, and it was a wonderful start last week, very helpful. All kinds of issues about creation were dealt with in that.

[1 : 14] But I'm going to look today, especially at another beginning. It's the beginning of Jesus' ministry. And it's the very first creative sign or miracle that he did, in which he manifested his glory.

And you'll see that on page 88 of your New Testament sections, John chapter 2, the wedding at Cana in Galilee. And the thing that's interesting about this is that it is a very strange sign.

If you were inventing a biography of Jesus Christ, you would never start with this, a miraculous solution to a social embarrassment.

It's remarkable, but it's here, because it happened. Otherwise, I can't imagine why anybody would write it in. So what does it mean? And that's what we're looking at this morning. Now, again, I understand that some of you may have brought some friends to church to begin thinking about Christianity.

And such people may be thinking to themselves, well, this had better be good, this chap from England. And I'm feeling no pressure. But actually, I'm not going to try and prove Christianity to you.

[2 : 28] I'm hoping it will commend itself to you. That as you hear this passage opened up to you, that you'll say, this is actually what I've been looking for my whole life.

Because what I'm talking about today is joy. And we're thinking about the scarcity of joy. The emptiness. They've run out. Now, Rachel and I were over in Vancouver Island, and we went to Cathedral Grove.

And we just decided to keep going on that road and ended up at Tofino, which is a long way. But while we were there, we met a couple on the beach, at Long Beach. And they said, they ran out of water at Tofino.

Now, I don't know how you ran out of water. That's quite something. I said, how did that happen? And I said, oh, it's the overdevelopment of Tofino. And I did think, actually, if you think that's overdevelopment, why don't you come to Manchester?

Because that's serious overdevelopment. But the tone of voice was one of those, there was a sigh, and she seemed to say, you know, we used to think that this place, Long Beach, was the edge of the world.

[3 : 46] But it doesn't do that for us anymore. It doesn't give us that feeling that we used to have. The joy of it is gone. And isn't that the way that it is with us?

We want something severely, desperately. We think this will give us the joy we've been looking for. And so, we fall in love, or we find success in our jobs, or we get that summer place that we think will do it for us.

And you think, this is it. But it doesn't retain its joy-giving qualities. It's as if it drifts through our fingers. It's fleeting.

And now Jesus comes to a wedding where they've run out of the wine, which is the joy-giver of the party. And he does something that indicates that he is the one who provides the joy that cannot be taken away.

So, I've got three headings. What he came to offer, how he provides it, and how to receive it. Firstly, what he came to offer. Weddings are wonderful things, and they're huge festivals back then in Jesus' day.

[5 : 00] They would be for the whole region. And so, to run out of wine, and particularly in the same culture, would be a bit of a disaster. So, Mary, the mother, turns to Jesus and says, they've run out of wine.

And there's a little bit of an altercation. And then Jesus does the extraordinary miracle. But the thing, as I said, that's strange is, why this miracle? Why this as his first sign?

If you're starting a new business, if you're going to do a recital, your first recital, if it's your first show as an artist, you want to impress, you want to say, well, this is what I'm really about.

So, let's have a healing. Let's have a wonderful healing. Let's have a resurrection from the dead. That would be fantastic. And Jesus turns 180 gallons of water into wine.

Now, why that? Well, the clue, I think, lies further down the passage. There is someone in verse 8 called, verse 9, called the steward of the feast.

[6 : 08] The steward of the feast is meant to make the party go well. He's meant to oil the wheels. He's meant to be the maitre d' move the thing on, make sure everything's there.

And he's failed. He's panicking. We're running out of wine. What are we going to do? And Jesus steps in, you see. And Jesus actually, in the party, becomes the master of the banquet, the lord of the feast, the steward of the feast.

And in doing so, he reveals who he is. He's the lord of the great feast that is to come. Let me explain.

If you get to read the Bible through, you come across passages about what it's going to be like at the end, end of everything. And at the end of everything, it's going to be a wedding banquet.

The book of Revelation talks about the wedding supper of the lamb. The book of Isaiah talks about on the mountain of the Lord Almighty, he will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best meats and the finest of wines.

[7 : 19] And he goes on to talk about how in such a place, it's going to be somewhere where joy now cannot be lost. There will be no more sorrow, there will be no more sickness, there will be no more sadness, no more tears.

He'll wipe them away himself and no more death. Now, we get glimmers of that joy, but they just don't stick.

But there are some moments, aren't there, in our lives where you suddenly think, this is a perfect day. I remember taking a wedding here and I said this in the earlier service and people said it wasn't my wedding, but it might have been yours.

So, it was a wedding where I was taking it and I was a little nervous for some strange reason and the best man handed me the ring and I dropped it.

And you can imagine the agony of that. And I was, for some reason, I was standing quite near the edge over here. And it dropped and I can see it falling in slow motion. And as it fell, it hit the concrete here absolutely square on and it bounced up perfectly.

[8 : 31] So, I caught it. And then I said, yep, it's genuine. And then carried on. Now, I hope they got that on video because I should be earning a lot of money from that.

But, it was one of those days, you see, when not even my mistake could cloud the whole thing. It was just a perfect day. And what I'm saying is that's what Jesus came to bring.

In the end, He's going to bring something that just cannot be destroyed. It cannot be messed up.

And, I... You know, when people think about being a Christian, you know, you think, well, you know, it's really boring.

You know, that's how... But it can't be, surely, if He's going to do that. Christianity, yes, it involves losing your life, but you lose it to find it.

I mean, this is people's view of what it is to be a Christian. Do you want to be a Christian? Well, you better keep your nose clean. You better keep out of trouble. You better come to church, pass out a few bulletins.

[9 : 37] It's not a very interesting life, but that's the price you pay if you want your soul to be saved from eternal damnation. You know, are Christians the sort of people that, you know, you meet and they say, I don't find that very funny.

I mean, no. I mean, if you're like that, you know, let me introduce you to Jesus. I mean, it's about joy. He's the one who takes 180 gallons of water and turns them into wine so that a party can happen and it's a sign of what He's come to do.

Now, you may think I'm lying, but I can tell you, that's what the Bible tells you and that's what Jesus is trying to get across. So that's what He comes to offer. It's really as good as that.

Now, secondly, how does He provide it? Well, there's a very strange bit in here where He has this conversation with His mother. His mother says, Son, they have no wine.

Son, fix it. You know, it's kind of nice. I have a mother like that. I hope she doesn't listen to this tape, actually. But Jesus says to her, and you see it in the text, Oh, woman, and it really is very brusque.

[10 : 52] It's a strange thing to say to your mother. Woman, my hour has not yet come. And that's a very strange thing to say. It's as if there is something that's troubling Jesus as He's sitting and looking at this wedding.

When you go to a wedding, you do, I'm sure you, there was a wonderful wedding here yesterday, I understand. But you do tend to think, don't you, about the wedding that you had or perhaps you think about the wedding you'd like to have.

Or if you are married, the one that you wish you'd had. No, no, we won't go there. But it brings up thoughts and it brings those kind of thoughts up. And it, I'm going to suggest to you that Jesus is thinking about His future wedding.

That is, that wedding supper of the Lamb, the thing that's coming at the end of time. And my reason for saying that is the clue with what He says, my hour has not yet come.

Because when He says, my hour, He means, in John's Gospel, every time it talks about the hour, it talks about His death. My hour has not yet come.

[12 : 06] Is this the time for my hour? So, Mary says to Jesus, they have no more wine. And Jesus says, woman, it's not my time to die yet.

Strange, isn't it? You see, I think He's thinking, if I'm going to have this great wedding supper with you, with people, the only way that my bride is going to fall into my arms is if I die.

What do I mean by that? Well, it may not occur to you, or it may not be that real to you, but actually, we can't come to God as, just as ourselves.

Because we're sinful. The Bible uses this word, sin, which is really just a kind of a rebellious nature against God. It's the reason that makes you hesitate in giving yourself to God.

You don't want to give control to God because you want to hold on to it yourself. Because that's what sin is. And He's saying, I need to cleanse you from that.

[13 : 15] I need to forgive you for that. I have to do that. And that is why I have to die. Because I am going to, as it were, die in your place.

I'm going to take the blame for it. I'm going to cleanse you by my death. Let me explain that further because you may be thinking, well, how does this miracle show that?

Well, Jesus says to the servants, get six stone water jars that are used for ceremonial cleansing. You can see that here. for the Jewish rites of purification.

And what they would do is they would come in from their day-to-day lives and they would wash their hands as a sign that they were unclean and they needed to be cleansed in order to come into God's presence, in order to walk with Him.

And Jesus is saying, I need to cleanse you. And the way I need to do that is by my blood, which is my wine. And I will die for you.

[14 : 18] I will take the cup of God's wrath so that you might drink the cup of God's salvation. I will do that for you. I will take the judgment so that you will never be judged.

I will take the condemnation so that you will never be condemned. That's what he was thinking about.

My hour has not yet come. Wow. Well, that's quite extraordinary actually.

How do we receive this then? How do we receive it? Well, I don't know if you noticed, but at the beginning of this service, David, David used an illustration.

He stood up and he said, a verse from Psalm 34, Taste and See That the Lord Is Good. The Bible uses sensory language to talk about how we receive Jesus Christ.

[15 : 23] You see, he comes to offer this lovely, amazing life, but in order for you to have it, he has to provide, as it were, his own death. And then you have to drink from it.

You have to take it. You have to taste and see this. And the question I'm going to ask you is, have you tasted this? Jonathan Edwards, there's a very famous 18th century preacher in New England. He used a very famous illustration. He said, there is a difference between knowing about something and having a sense of it in the heart.

You can know that honey is sweet or you can taste its sweetness. Have you tasted this? Have you received Christ?

Now, you might say, well, look, I'm not even sure I'm actually at that stage yet. I'm not even sure if I believe this. I mean, isn't this just a story in a book? And, you know, is there any evidence for God?

[16 : 29] And yes, there is evidence for God. And listen to last week and come next week. There is a creator. This is not an accident. To say that this world is an accident is like saying that there is an explosion in the paint shop and that produced the Mona Lisa.

That's, do you see what I mean? But I'm not going to use the argument from creation. David will give you that. Today, I'm going to use the argument from joy.

Why is it that you have these moments of joy and then you never get them fulfilled? Because they can't be fulfilled in this life, can they?

They just go away. C.S. Lewis talks about that and he says, creatures are not born with desires unless the possibility for the satisfaction of those desires exists.

the duckling desires water and there is water for the duckling. He says, we desire things and if we find that the desire in us cannot be met in this world, then the only explanation is that they can be met in that other world.

[17 : 38] We are given longings and tastings now that are meant to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ and he gives it. So you say, well, okay, but how do I receive it?

Mary uses a very interesting phrase. She says after the discussion to the servants, do whatever he tells you.

Do whatever he tells you. Do whatever he says. To receive this, you actually have to give up your substitute joys and commit yourself to the one great giver of joy.

You have to submit by giving that away and turning to him. Now, you may say, well, what do you mean by my substitute joys? I mean, the things that I, you see, everybody lives for something. There is something that is the most important thing. You say, well, it's a good thing. I live for my family. If you worship your family, you will ruin your family. If you worship your job, you will ruin your life and you will ruin the life of your spouse because you are there morning, noon and night.

[18 : 59] Do you see? The only person who can deserve your worship is the one who made you and the one who loves you and that is the Lord Jesus Christ who was there at the beginning of creation.

So, you have to turn away and turn to Christ. Now, the reason, in a sense, I'm in this pulpit is because, in case you hadn't picked up on this, I used to work here about 13 or so years ago and the reason that I came to this church was because 20 years ago this year, I visited Israel and there were two couples there from this church who gently suggested to me that I might like to consider coming to Canada, to Vancouver.

I hadn't a clue where Vancouver was. I started at the East Coast and looked across and found it. I'm sorry. I now know where it is. But, on that trip to Israel, we went to Cana where this miracle took place and we went to a church that they had there and we worshipped the Lord, the Lord Jesus, the giver of this life-giving joy.

It was very special. And then we got out of that and we got into the line-up, the queue, for the Cana wine and I just thought that's kind of ironic, isn't it?

You know, we've just been worshipping the great giver of life and now we're queuing up for the Cana wine, the wine that ran out. And may I tell you, I did taste some of that stuff and it's pretty bad.

[20 : 46] It's pretty rubbish, you know. And they charge a terrible price, so just watch out for that if you visit. But, and is that not ironic? You see, this is, you come here, you worship, but actually you give yourself to something else.

you have to choose which way. Who is your joy giver? There is only one person you can ultimately give your life to.

Only one. He has the words of eternal life and he offers them to you now. If you need further persuasion to consider it or even, even today in your heart to turn to God or if you've wandered away to turn back, then let me finish with this and I'm going to suggest to the men that they need to do a little, what we call, gender bending in order to get the point.

But, in the Bible, God is called the King and that means that you and I are subjects and we need to bow to him. He is called the shepherd, the good shepherd and that means that we're the sheep, the silly ones that go astray and so we need to turn back to him as sheep.

He is called the father and that means that you're the children who need to do what he says, obey him. But in this passage and actually in that hint in Jeremiah and also in the next chapter he is called the bridegroom and do you know what that makes you?

[22 : 24] I know you have to do a bit of gender bending but you know what that makes you? The bride. There's a passage in the book of Hebrews that says how the Lord Jesus left heaven and came to give himself for us and it says this, for the joy that was set before him he endured the cross and I thought to myself now what is it, what joy is it that the son of God does not have?

Surely he can have anything he wants. What does he not have? He does not have you. And so for the joy that was set before him at that marriage supper he endured the cross for you.

He gave his life in order that you might be forgiven and receive life that lasts forever. A joy that cannot be taken away from you.

So may I commend Jesus Christ to you. You may have come here today for the first time and you've wondered what do I do? There is a card here.

I would say this is so important that you cannot not consider it. There's a thing called Big Questions.

[23 : 43] They run from October the 4th to November the 1st and you can see the card here and it tells you how you sign up to that. And after you've done that you'll be invited to a further course called Simply Christianity to Discover Christ.

if he offers this to you and he does it what can I say?

That God should actually give himself and die for you. That should touch your heart and melt it in some place that says somehow I need to find out more about you.

You need my heart. Let it be melted to you. Let him woo you back so that you love him too. Let's pray together. For those who are just considering this we pray Lord that you may help them take the next step to consider Christ to explore to find out is this reality or not?

is this the great story of the universe or not? Lord give them grace as they search knowing that you search for them and have been looking for them from the beginning of eternity.

[25 : 24] Lord for those who know now this is what I need. Lord receive them as they turn to you and receive you.

as they open their hearts to you and for those of us whose love has grown cold melt it again for you are the bridegroom that looks down the aisle and sees the bride coming and wants to rush into her arms and draw her to him.

Thank you Lord that that's how you look at us hard to believe at times but the truth because the Bible says it.

We ask all these things in Jesus name Amen.