**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**JOHN-013**. **THE FIRST MIRACLE IN CANA - THE WATER MADE WINE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory."*

*John 2:11*

The keynote of this Gospel was struck in the earlier verses of the first chapter in the great words, The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, full of grace and truth. To these words there is an evident reference in this language. The Evangelist regards Christ's first miracle as the first ray of that forth-flashing glory of the Incarnate Word. To this Evangelist all miracles are especially important as being signs, which is the word he generally employs to designate them. They are not mere portents, but significant revelations as well as wonders. It is not, I think, accidental that there are just seven miracles of our Lord's, before His crucifixion, recorded by John, and one of the Risen Lord.

These signs are all set forth by the Evangelist as manifestations of various aspects of that one white light, of uncreated glory which rays from Christ. They are, if I may so say, the sevenfold colours into which the one beam is analysed. Each of them might be looked at in turn as presenting some fresh thought of what the glory ... full of grace and truthis.

I begin with the first of the series. What, then, is the glory of the only Begotten Sonwhich flashes forth upon us from the miracle? My object is simply to try to answer that question for you.

**I. First, then, we see here the revelation of His creative power.**

It is very noteworthy that the miraculous fact is veiled entirely in the narrative. Not a word is said of the method of operation, it is not even said that the miracle was wrought; we are only told what preceded it, and what followed it. Itself is shrouded in deep silence. The servants fill the water-pots.--Draw out now, and they draw, and bear it to the governor of the feast. Where the miraculous act comes in we do not know; what was its nature we cannot tell. How far it extended is left obscure. Was all the large quantity of water in these six great vessels of stone transformed into wine, or was the change effected in the moment when the portion that was wanted was drawn from them and on that portion only? We cannot answer the question. Probably, I think, the latter; but at all events a veil is dropped over the fact.

Only this, we see that in this miracle, even more conspicuously than in any other of our Lord's, there are no means at all employed. Sometimes He used material vehicles, anointing a man's eyes with clay, or moistening the ear with the spittle; sometimes sending a man to bathe in the Pool of Siloam; sometimes laying His hand on the sick; sometimes healing from a distance by the mere utterance of His word. But here there is not even a word; no means of any kind employed, but the silent forth-putting of His will, which, without token, without visible audible indication of any sort, passes with sovereign power into the midst of material things and there works according to His own purpose. Is not this the signature of divinity, that without means the mere forth-putting of the will is all that is wanted to mould matter as plastic to His command? It is not even, He spake and it was done, but silently He willed, and the conscious water knew its Lord, and blushed. This is the glory of the Incarnate Word.

Now that was no interruption of the order of things established in the Creation. There was no suspension of natural laws here. What happened was only this, that the power which generally works through mediating links came into immediate connection with the effect. What does it matter whether your engine transmits its powers through half a dozen cranks, or two or three less? What does it matter whether the chain be longer or shorter? Some parenthetical links are dropped here, that is all that is unusual. For in all ordinary natural operations, as we call them, the profound prologue of this Gospel teaches us to believe that Christ, the Eternal Word, works according to His will. He was the Agent of creation. He is the Agent of that preservation which is only a continual creation. In Him is life, and all living things live because of the continual presence and operation upon them of His divine power. And again I say, what is phenomenal and unusual in this miracle is but the suppression of two or three of the connecting links between the continual cause of all creatural existences, and its effect. So let us learn that whether through a long chain of so-called causes, or whether close up against the effect, without the intervention of these parenthetical and transmitting media, the divine power works. The power is one, and the reason for the effect is one, that Christ ever works in the world, and is that Eternal Word, without whom was not anything made that was made. This beginning of miracles did Christ ... and manifested His glory.

**II. Then, again, we see here, I think, the revelation of one great purpose of our Lord's coming, to hallow all common, and especially all family, life.**

What a strange contrast there is between the simple gladness of the rustic village wedding and the tremendous scene of the Temptation in the wilderness, which preceded it only by a few days! What a strange contrast there is between the sublime heights of the first chapter and the homely incident which opens the ministry! What a contrast between the rigid asceticism of the Forerunner, who came neither eating nor drinking, and the Son of Man, who enters thus freely and cheerfully into the common joys and relationships of human nature! How unlike the scene at the marriage-feast must have been to the anticipations of the half-dozen disciples that had gathered round Him, all a-tingling with expectation as to what would be the first manifestation of His Messianic power! The last thing they would have dreamed of would have been to find Him in the humble home in Cana of Galilee. Some people say this miracle is unworthy of Him, for it was wrought upon such a trivial occasion. And was it a trivial occasion that prompted Him thus to commence His career, not by some high and strained and remote exhibition of more than human saintliness or power, but by entering like a Brother into the midst of common, homespun, earthly joys, and showing how His presence ennobled and sanctified these? Surely the world has gained from Him, among the many gifts that He has given to it, few that have been the fountain of more sacred sweetness and blessedness than is opened in that fact that the first manifestation of His glory had for its result the hallowing of the marriage tie.

And is it not in accordance with the whole meaning and spirit of His works that forasmuch as the brethren were partakers ofanything, He Himself likewise should take part of the same, and sanctify every incident of life by His sharing of it? So He protests against that faithless and wicked division of life into sacred and secular, which has wrought such harm both in the sacred and in the secular regions. So He protests against the notion that religion has to do with another world rather than with this. So He protests against the narrowing conception of His work which would remove from its influence anything that interests humanity. So He says, as it were, at the very beginning of His career, I am a Man, and nothing that is human do I reckon foreign to Myself.

Brethren! let us learn the lesson that all life is the region of His Kingdom; that the sphere of His rule is everything which a man can do or feel or think. Let us learn that where His footsteps have trod is hallowed ground. If a prince shares for a few moments in the festivities of his gathered people on some great occasion, how ennobled the feast seems! If he joins in their sports or in their occupations for a while as an act of condescension, how they return to them with renewed vigour! And so we. We have had our King in the midst of all our family life, in the midst of all our common duties; therefore are they consecrated. Let us learn that all things done with the consciousness of His presence are sacred. He has hallowed every corner of human life by His presence; and the consecration, like some pungent and perennial perfume, lingers for us yet in the else scentless air of daily life, if we follow His footsteps.

Sanctity is not singularity. There is no need to withdraw from any region of human activity and human interest in order to develop the whitest saintliness, the most Christlike purity. The saint is to be in the world, but not of it; like the Master, who went straight from the wilderness and its temptations to the homely gladness of the rustic marriage.

**III. Still further, we have here a symbol of Christ's glory as the ennobler and heightener of all earthly joys.**

That may be taken with perhaps a permissible play of fancy as one meaning, at any rate, of the transformation of water into wine; the less savoury and fragrant and powerful liquid into the more so. Wine, in the Old Testament especially, is the symbol of gladness, and though it received a deeper and a sacreder meaning in the New Testament as being the emblem of His blood shed for us, it is the Old Testament point of view that prevails here. And therefore, I say, we may read in the incident the symbol of His transforming power. He comes, the Man of Sorrows, with the gift of joy in His hand. It is not an unworthy object--not unworthy, I mean, of a divine sacrifice--to make men glad. It is worth His while to come from Heaven to agonise and to die, in order that He may sprinkle some drops of incorruptible and everlasting joy over the weary and sorrowful hearts of earth. We do not always give its true importance to gladness in the economy of our lives, because we are so accustomed to draw our joys from ignoble sources that in most of our joys there is something not altogether creditable or lofty. But Christ came to bring gladness, and to transform its earthly sources into heavenly fountains; and so to change all the less sweet, satisfying, and potent draughts which we take from earth's cisterns into the wine of the Kingdom; the new wine, strong and invigorating, making glad the heart of man.

Our commonest blessings, our commonest joys, if only they be not foul and filthy, are capable of this transformation. Link them with Christ; be glad in Him. Bring Him into your mirth, and it will change its character. Like a taper plunged into a jar of oxygen, it will blaze up more brightly. Earth, at its best and highest, without Him is like some fair landscape lying in the shadow; and when He comes to it, it is like the same scene when the sun blazes out upon it, flashes from every bend of the rippling river, brings beauty into many a shady corner, opens all the flowering petals and sets all the birds singing in the sky. The whole scene changes when a beam of light from Him falls upon earthly joys. He will transform them and ennoble them and make them perpetual. Do not meddle with mirth over which you cannot make the sign of the Cross and ask Him to bless it; and do not keep Him out of your gladness, or it will leave bitterness on your lips, howsoever sweet it tastes at first.

Ay! and not only can this Master transform the water at the marriage feast into the wine of gladness, but the cups that we all carry, into which our tears have dropped--upon these too He can lay His hand and change them into cups of blessing and of salvation.

Blessed are they ... who, passing through the valley of weeping, gather their tears into a well; the rain also covereth it with blessings. So the old Psalm put the thought that sorrow may be turned into a solemn joy, and may lie at the foundation of our most flowery fruitfulness. And the same lesson we may learn from this symbol. The Christ who transforms the water of earthly gladness into the wine of heavenly blessedness, can do the same thing for the bitter waters of sorrow, and can make them the occasions of solemn joy. When the leaves drop we see through the bare branches. Shivering and cold they may look, but we see the stars beyond, and that is better. This beginning of miracleswill Jesus repeat in every sad heart that trusts itself to Him.

**IV. And last of all, we have here a token of His glory as supplying the deficiencies of earthly sources.**

His mother saith unto Him, "They have no wine."The world's banquet runs out, Christ supplies an infinite gift. These great water-pots that stood there, if the whole contents of them were changed, as is possible, contained far more than sufficient for the modest wants of the little company. The water that flowed from each of them, in obedience to the touch of the servant's hand, if the change were effected then, as is possible, would flow on so long as any thirsted or any asked. And Christ gives to each of us, if we choose, a fountain that will spring unto life eternal. And when the world's platters are empty, and the world's cups are all drained dry, He will feed and satisfy the immortal hunger and the blessed thirst of every spirit that longs for Him.

The rude speech of the governor of the feast may lend itself to another aspect of this same thought. He said, in jesting surprise, Thou hast kept the good wine until now, whereas the world gives its best first, and when the palate is dulled and the appetite diminished, then that which is worse. How true that is; how tragically true in some of our lives! In the individual the early days of hope and vigour, when all things were fresh and wondrous, when everything was apparelled in the glory of a dream, contrast miserably with the bitter experiences of life that most of us have made. Habit comes, and takes the edge off everything. We drag remembrance, like a lengthening chain, through all our life; and with remembrance come remorse and regret. The vision splendidno more attends men, as they plod on their way through the weariness of middle life, or pass down into the deepening shadows of advancing and solitary old age. The best comes first, for the men who have no good but this world's. And some of you have got nothing in your cups but dregs that you scarcely care to drink.

But Jesus Christ keeps the best till the last. His gifts become sweeter every day. No time can cloy them. Advancing years make them more precious and more necessary. The end is better in this course than the beginning. And when life is over, and we pass into the heavens, the word will come to our lips, with surprise and with thankfulness, as we find how much better it all is than we had ever dreamed it should be: Thou hast kept the good wine until now.

Oh, my brother! do not touch that cup that is offered to you by the harlot world, spiced and fragrant and foaming; at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. But take the pure joys which the Christ, loved, trusted, obeyed, summoned to your feast and welcomed in your heart, will bring to you; and these shall grow and greaten until the perfection of the Heavens.