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FILLED AND TRANSFORMED.

– JOHN 2:1-11. – JANUARY 22. –

"Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."

CANA of Galilee was the home city of Nathanael, one of the latest additions to the number of our Lord's disciples. He was one of six who had now given their adherence to Jesus as the Messiah. Apparently Nathanael had invited our Lord and the other disciples to be his guests at Cana, where a marriage feast was about to be held. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was present at the feast, doubtless as a very close friend of the family, as indicated by her knowledge in advance that the wine supply was running short. The customary hospitality of the Jews on such occasions would make it a serious breach of etiquette not to supply an abundance for their guests, as well as for neighbors and passers by, who, in the name of the bridegroom, would be urged to enter and partake of the hospitalities freely. Jesus and his disciples were amongst the specially invited guests.

Our Lord's mother brought to his attention the shortage of wine, and from this it has been assumed that she anticipated the miracle. We cannot agree to the reasonableness of this suggestion, because it is particularly [R3484 : page 11] stated that the miraculous creation of wine on this occasion was the beginning of Jesus' miracles. We must suppose, therefore, that Mary's long acquaintance with and dependance on her son had made her aware of his superior judgment and resourcefulness in all events and on all occasions. The matter was beyond her control, and, as was often the case with those in moderate circumstances, the bridegroom had probably spent all that he could afford to expend in preparations. Probably also, in anticipation of our Lord's presence at the marriage feast, a larger number of neighbors called on his account – to see the stranger of whom they had heard more or less through Nathanael and others.

JESUS SOCIABLE IN THE HOME.

This narrative gives us a little glimpse of the social side of our Lord's character, and convinces us that the asceticism illustrated by monks and nuns was not a part of his teaching either in word or example. His consecrated life was lived in the midst of the ordinary social conditions bearing upon any member of a moral and religious community. There is no suggestion of revelry or foolishness in our Lord's conduct, but it is reasonable to assume that he participated in the proper joys and fellowships and social amenities of such an occasion. This was in harmony with his own injunction to his followers, "Rejoice with those that do rejoice, and weep with those that weep."

What every home needs is not only a visit from Jesus, but that it should be his home, his abiding place. It would be a safe rule of life for all of the Lord's followers to desire to go to any place they would have reason to believe the Lord would go if he were again present in the flesh; it would be a safe rule for us to do or say such things as we would have reason to expect that our Lord would do or say were he present in our stead. Blessings, we may be sure, went with the dear Master wherever he went, specially to those who like Nathanael were Israelites indeed, in whose hearts there was no guile.

When we remember that the word disciple means pupil or learner, and that all of the Lord's people are his disciples (though not all apostles), it gives us a suggestion that each disciple represents the Lord – that where we go he goes, that we are his representatives or "ambassadors." With this thought before our minds how careful we each should be to properly represent our glorious Lord; – to "show forth the praise of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light." To this end how we need to pray, not only with our lips but also with our hearts, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer." Verily "as he was so are we in this

world." (1 John 4:17.) "The world knoweth us not, even as it knew him not," but our duty on all occasions is just the same: his message is that we shall let our light shine before men, that they seeing our good works may glorify our Father in heaven.

"PEACE BE TO THIS HOUSE."

A suggestion respecting the influences accompanying the Lord's disciples – which influences, we believe, surely accompanied his own presence on all such occasions – is represented by his commission to his apostles when he sent them forth. They were to say, "Peace be upon this house," before entering. We do not take it that this is a command that we should openly and formally make such a declaration before entering any building, but we do believe that this should be the heart sentiment of every one of the Lord's consecrated people – their desire, their effort, their aim – that peace and blessing may accompany them wherever they may go, resting, refreshing and uplifting the hearts of the poor groaning creation with whom they come in contact.

There are plenty of strife-breeders in the world whose entry of the portals of any home means, Strife be within these walls, whether they realize it or say it or not. Full of anger, malice, hatred and strife, their hearts speak forth of the abundance within, breeding discontent and unhappiness. With others who have passed that condition of bitterness of soul in malice and strife, and who have set their faces to walk in the Lord's footsteps, after the Spirit and not after the flesh, and who therefore are putting away those works of the flesh and the devil, some time will surely elapse before they are filled with the spirit of love: and in that interim, before they are so filled with peace and joy and the fruits of the Spirit as to overflow these in blessings wherever they go, there is apt to be a period in which evil speaking, back-biting, evil insinuations, evil surmisings, unkindnesses, ungentleness of word and conduct, impatience, etc., will be manifested.

The influence of such, even though they be pupils in Christ, is a carnal influence, highly injurious to spiritual development, calculated to stop growth in the various graces and to disturb the peace and joy of their own hearts and the hearts of others who are seeking the right ways of the Lord. The lesson for us of the Lord's followers is not only to turn from sin to righteousness and from anger and envy and malice to love, but to keep the heart fully filled with the latter, so that out of its abundance of love and joy and peace our mouth may speak and our conduct may show our relationship and likeness to our Lord, that men may take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus and have learned of him.

"HONOR THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER."

Our Lord's reply to his mother's suggestion appears rather cold and harsh, but this is largely the result of the translation. While the word "woman" is a proper translation, it does not give the elegant shading of the Greek original, which would more nearly signify lady. The word is the same, for instance, that the Emperor of Rome used in complimentary address to the Queen of Egypt, "Take courage, O woman." We may be sure that neither by word nor act did our Lord violate the commandment of the Law, "Honor thy father and thy mother." We may be sure that in all his words and conduct he was a very model of the meekness and gentleness, patience and love which his doctrines inculcated.

The expression, "What have I to do with thee?" would seem more properly to signify, "Do not attempt to dictate to me – I will know what to do when the appropriate time comes." Mary probably was intent upon hiding the fact of the shortage of the wine: Jesus on the other hand recognized that the miracle he was about to perform was less for the assistance of the bridegroom of the occasion than for a great lesson which, through the servants, probably became known to the entire company. Jesus therefore waited until the supply **[R3484 : page 12]** was not only running low but exhausted, until there was no

wine, so that the miracle would not be minimized by the admixture of the new with the old.

Mary's word to the servants, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it," was a further evidence that she was on terms of very close intimacy in that home. The servants properly enough would need such instructions, for otherwise they would not be prepared to take orders from one of the guests. Mary probably had no knowledge of what the Lord would command the servants to do, but, as before suggested, she had confidence in her son's resourcefulness and wisdom, and that as one of the guests whose entertainment had helped to exhaust the wine he would be pleased to take some steps to assist in replenishing the supply.

Here a question arises respecting the kind of wine provided by the bridegroom of which Jesus and his disciples evidently partook, and also respecting the kind of wine which the Lord subsequently produced and of which he probably partook. We know of nothing to indicate that this was merely grape juice unfermented. Everything seems to teach the reverse of this, that it was slightly alcoholic – the alcohol being produced in the wine through the processes of fermentation, resulting in what is known as "light wines." The remark of the governor of the feast that the wine which Jesus made was better than that at first supplied would, we think, support this theory, but it would not imply that the people were drunk, intoxicated, and that they had thus lost their taste or judgment.

In our view there is a great difference between present conditions and those of our Lord's time. Those people of a warmer country were accustomed to drinking light wines, in very much the same manner that we to-day drink water, tea, coffee, etc., and they had no **[R3485 : page 12]** deleterious effects, and the same may be said of the people of some parts of Europe to-day. Besides, it was in a slower age and amongst people more moderate in every way. In our day, with everything done under pressure and nervous excitement, alcoholic

stimulants of every kind seem to be poisonous to very many; it seems to be next to impossible for people to use such stimulants moderately.

It is for this reason alone that total abstinence may be recommended – because of the "present distress," because of the increased expenditure of nervous energy and consequent increased danger of inebriety, and not because the Scriptures specially enjoin total abstinence. It is our conviction that if the Lord were present in the flesh to-day under our present conditions, circumstances, etc., he would rank amongst the most abstemious, because if such abstention were not necessary for himself, we believe that his love and sympathy for the weak, fallen race would impel him to avoid being anything like a stumbling-stone in the way of any of them.

WATER-POTS FILLED FULL.

In those days they did not have hydrants, pumps, etc., but kept the water for family use in large earthen vessels called water-pots. On such an occasion as this an extra quantity would be needed, and quite probably water-pots had been borrowed from neighbors. They were of different sizes but all quite large, two firkins represented by eighteen gallons and three firkins by twenty-seven gallons, or nine gallons each firkin. It was the custom to use this water supply specially for washing the vessels of the household and the hands and feet of the guests, hence the need of so great a supply.

When the proper time came for the performance of the miracle our Lord instructed that water be fetched and that these six water-pots be filled to the brim. This use of the ordinary water-jars would prevent any suspicion of their containing any powders or mixtures that might constitute a basis for the miracle, and the filling of them to the brim would likewise hinder anyone from thinking that something was added to the water by our Lord. Besides, the water thus rising to the surface where it could be seen would show its own clearness and purity.

The change from water to wine was evidently instantaneous, for our Lord at once directed them to draw the wine and serve first the governor of the feast, who would thus have a knowledge of the fresh supply. The latter commented upon the new wine as superior to the first, and remarked to the host that usually the best was given first, when the palate would be the more keen to detect the quality. This was a testimony to the excellence of the wine which Jesus made. We cannot think that at an ordinary feast simple grape-juice would be regarded as superior wine, nor on the other hand need we suppose that the wine which Jesus made contained such a proportion of alcohol as would make it injurious to the users.

But there was another reason why the vessels were filled to the brim with the pure water: they were symbolical, they represented the Lord's people in this present time. Water is used in the Scriptures as a symbol of life, the "water of life." It particularly figures or illustrates natural or human life, as, for instance, in Revelation 22:17, where the symbol is given of the Spirit and the Bride during the Millennial age saying to the world of mankind, "Come, partake of the water of life freely." It represents the restitution work, the revival of mankind from the power of death, the infusion of the restitution life.

OUR TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS.

In these earthen vessels the water had been considerably exhausted, there was very little remaining in each vessel. So with us as members of the human family, our life forces are well exhausted through the fall. The Jews, as God's favored people under the typical Law Covenant, were justified to a certain extent, but not in the full sense of the word – not justified to life – and the filling up of the water-pots with water to the brim represented or foreshadowed the full and complete justification to life, to all human rights and privileges reckonedly granted to all who become the Lord's followers. As the Apostle expresses it, "Being justified by faith we have peace with God."

But the figure or illustration goes further and shows us the transforming of these justified lives, the impartation of a new nature by miraculous change. The thought is expressed by the Apostle when he says that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, we become New Creatures.

The change of the water to wine, therefore, represents the change of the justified being, constituting him a new creation in Christ Jesus. As the water will represent the justification, so the wine will represent the **[R3485 : page 13]** superior joys of the Spirit granted to those who through faith and a full consecration attain to the begetting of the Spirit – an adoption into the spiritual family. True, these joys at present are not as real as they will be by and by – they are joys of hope, of anticipation, which we have in earthly vessels, as the Apostle declares. By and by, however, according to the Lord's promise, a share in the Lord's resurrection will give us the new vessels, the golden vessels, the perfect conditions in which our joys and favors will be realized and appreciated to the full. There is a hint of this in our Lord's declaration at the last supper that those who would drink of his cup of suffering and self-sacrifice in the present time would by and by share with him the new wine, the divine nature and life and joys in the Kingdom.

This discernment of a spiritual signification in the wine is in full accord with the statement of our last verse of the lesson, which assures us that our Lord's miracles, etc., manifested forth – that is, beforehand – his coming glory and the blessings which he will then bestow upon his faithful.

"The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was planned."

