

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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TO CHANGE
DEATH
INTO LIFE

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Living Stream Ministry
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LIFE'S PRINCIPLE— TO CHANGE DEATH INTO LIFE

The book of John presents several cases to illustrate the matter of life. Although Jesus did a great many signs in the presence of His disciples (20:30-31), John selected not more than twelve of them to illustrate the matter of life. Beginning with the case of Nicodemus in chapter 3 and ending with the resurrection of Lazarus in chapter 11, nine cases are presented. If we add the incidents of the changing of water into wine, of the cleansing of the temple, and of the washing of feet, we have a total of twelve events. All the cases recorded by John prove that Christ is life to meet our need. Based upon this principle, we must realize that the incident of changing water into wine (2:1-11) is not merely the account of a story; it has spiritual meaning with a special significance. We need to find out the spiritual significance of this event.

THE PRINCIPLE OF CHANGING DEATH INTO LIFE

When I first heard the story of Jesus' changing water into wine, I did not know the meaning behind this event. Later, I came to understand that this was not simply a story but an event accomplished by the Lord Jesus to establish the principle

of life. What is the principle of life? The principle of life is to change death into life. In each of the nine cases recorded from chapters 3 through 11, the principle is to change death into life. This is especially clear with the case of Lazarus. Lazarus was dead and had been buried for four days. He even smelled. He was full of death from top to bottom and from the inside to the outside. In every layer and corner of his being there was nothing but death. As the record of chapter 11 tells us, when the Lord Jesus learned that Lazarus was sick, He did not go to see him. He waited until he was full of death, until he was dead and buried. Then He came to raise Lazarus from the dead. If we apply the principle of life to that case, we see that Jesus changed death into life.

This principle applies not only to the last case, that of Lazarus, but also to the first case, that of Nicodemus. Do you think that Nicodemus was not a person full of death? Because he was full of death, the Lord told him that he needed to be born again so that he might have the eternal life, which is God Himself (3:3, 5-6). In a sense, Nicodemus was living, but in the eyes of God, he was a living dead person. In God's eyes, Nicodemus was dead. He also needed his death to be changed into life. Nicodemus did not even realize that he was sinful, much less that he was dead. Nevertheless, in the eyes of God, he was sinful, serpentine, and dead. As such a person, he needed the changing of death into life.

The same is true with the Samaritan woman

in chapter 4. The Samaritan woman was thirsty, and thirst is a sign of death. When you are thirsty, it means that you are going to die. The fact that you are thirsty indicates that you have death's element within you. Only the Lord Jesus can quench that thirst. To quench thirst means to change death into life. And so it is with every case recorded by John. Each incident illustrates the principle established in the event of changing water into wine—the principle of changing death into life.

JESUS COMING IN RESURRECTION

Now we need to see that Jesus came in resurrection to weak and fragile people. Some may ask, "How could Jesus come in resurrection when He had not been crucified yet? To say this is to allegorize." Yes, the whole story of changing water into wine is an allegory, and we need to allegorize every part of it.

The day upon which this sign was accomplished was "the third day" (2:1). "The third day" signifies the day of resurrection (Acts 10:40; 1 Cor. 15:4). In John 1 the words *the next day* are used three times, in verses 29, 35, and 43. Why does it say "the next day" three times in chapter 1 and then speak of "the third day" in 2:1? "The third day" in chapter 2 should not actually be called the third day, but the fifth. Perhaps you should go to John and argue with him, saying, "Brother John, you did something wrong. You have three 'next days,' and so the day mentioned

in 2:1 should be the fifth day.” John would reply, “Dear brother, that was why I did not speak of the second day, third day, and fourth day in chapter 1, but called each of them ‘the next day’ until I called the day in chapter 2 ‘the third day.’” None of the events which transpired on the “next days” in chapter 1 were in resurrection.

Let us look at the three “next days” in chapter 1. “The next day [John] saw Jesus coming to him and said, Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (v. 29). Was that in resurrection? Certainly not. How can you say that was in resurrection? “Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and looking at Jesus walking, he said, Behold, the Lamb of God!” (vv. 35-36). Although this happened on the second “next day,” it did not occur on “the third day.” The third “next day” is found in verse 43. “The next day He wanted to go forth into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, Follow Me.” This did not happen on “the third day,” because “the third day” is the day of resurrection. None of the events mentioned in chapter 1 transpired on “the third day,” that is, in resurrection. Only as we come to the changing of water into wine in chapter 2 do we find mention of “the third day.”

COMING TO WEAK AND FRAGILE PEOPLE IN A DESPISED PLACE

How do we know that in John 2 Jesus came to weak and fragile people? We know it by the fact

that He went to Cana and that *Cana* in Hebrew means “reed.” A reed in the Scriptures signifies weak and fragile people. Both Isaiah and Matthew say that we, the weak people, are the “bruised reed,” which the Lord will not break (Isa. 42:3; Matt. 12:20). In Matthew 11:7 the Lord, when referring to John the Baptist, asked the Jews if they went out into the wilderness to see a reed shaken by the wind. Of course, John the Baptist was not such a weak, fragile person who could be shaken by the wind.

The whole world is a Cana, full of weak and fragile people to whom the Lord came. The Lord’s coming to Cana signifies His coming into a world full of weak and fragile people. Although the people of this earth, like reeds, are weak and fragile, the Lord came to them in resurrection.

The wedding that Jesus attended in John 2 was in Cana of Galilee. Galilee was a place despised by people (7:52). As a despised place, Galilee signifies the low and mean condition of the world.

THE CONTINUATION AND ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN LIFE

We must allegorize the wedding and the wedding feast. Marriage is very significant and essential to human life, for without it human life is hindered. If you eliminate marriage, you terminate human life. Marriage signifies the continuation of human life. What does the wedding feast signify? It signifies the enjoyment and pleasure of

human life. Nothing on earth is a more joyful occasion than a wedding. Have you ever seen people weep mournfully at a wedding? If you were to weep in such a way at a wedding, it would mean that you are impolite or uncultured. When attending a funeral, on the contrary, you are not permitted to be joyful. When attending a wedding, however, you must be happy. According to human culture, a wedding is a joyful occasion.

The marriage feast, whether in ancient times or in the present, whether in the East or in the West, depends primarily on wine, which typifies that all human pleasure depends on life. Since wine, unlike water, derives its source from grapes, it comes from something living. Wine signifies life, for the wine of the grapes is the life of the grapes. Thus, the enjoyment of man depends upon the life of man. When life is brought to an end, all enjoyment is gone.

HUMAN LIFE RUNNING OUT

Although a wedding is a very joyful occasion, its joy is temporary. No wedding lasts very long. Recently, I attended a wedding that lasted a little longer than half an hour. We were happy there for only half an hour. This is the human wedding, the human enjoyment.

The wine, which was the center of the enjoyment of the wedding feast, ran out (2:3). This signifies that the enjoyment of human life will be terminated when human life runs out. When the

wine runs out, the pleasure of the marriage feast is gone. This signifies not only that the enjoyment of life is over but also that human life is finished. Regardless of how much pleasure you are enjoying, when your human life is ended, all your human enjoyment also is gone. Regardless of how good your wife, your husband, your parents, your children, or your job may be, if your life has come to an end, your pleasure is gone. When the wine has been exhausted, the feast is over, for the feast is dependent upon the wine. All your enjoyment depends upon your life. If your life is terminated, your enjoyment is brought to an end. Regardless of the kind of wedding you are in, when your human life runs out, your wedding is terminated and the enjoyment is over. That is what happened that day in Cana of Galilee.

Do you not believe that before the Lord Jesus went to Cana, He realized that the wine would run out? Surely He knew it ahead of time, for that was the reason that He went to Cana. The wine did not run out by accident. The Lord Jesus foreknew that the wine would be exhausted, and He went to Cana to establish the principle of life—changing death into life. By coming to the marriage feast, He came to deal with and to heal the situation. The Lord healed death in the human situation by turning it into life, in the same way that Elisha healed the bad water by making it fresh (2 Kings 2:19-22).

When the Lord came into the world, He came

into a situation where human enjoyment existed but was not lasting. He came into a situation where the death of human life terminates all human enjoyment. The changing of water into wine is a sign that must be understood figuratively. When our wine is about to run out, we know that our marriage feast will soon be over. But, praise the Lord, it is at such a time that the Lord comes into our situation. In our marriage feast we have the Lord! We need not be afraid, for He can change the water into wine.

MANKIND FILLED WITH DEATH

Before doing the miracle, the Lord told the people to fill the waterpots with water (John 2:6-7). These water containers, made of stone, were six in number. The number six represents created man, because it was on the sixth day that man was created (Gen. 1:27, 31). Therefore, the six stone waterpots signify the natural man, who was created on the sixth day. Naturally speaking, we are nothing but “waterpots,” vessels to contain something. We, the “waterpots,” were located in Cana, the land of reeds, full of weak and fragile people. We were the waterpots in Cana, weak and fragile.

The waterpots were used in the Jewish rites of purification (John 2:6), a practice of the Jewish religion. The Jewish rites of purification with water signify religion’s attempt to make people clean by certain dead practices. The ancient Jews took care of washing themselves and of keeping themselves

clean and pure in God's worship. The Lord, on the contrary, changes death into life. The ritual purification with water is outward, without life, but the Lord's changing death into life is from within and is full of life.

The Lord told the servants to fill the waterpots with water, and they filled them up to the brim (v. 7). What does this mean? As we will see, it signifies that human beings are filled with death. The waterpots, that is, mankind created on the sixth day, are filled with the waters of death.

JESUS CHANGING DEATH INTO LIFE ETERNAL

The Lord's commanding the people to fill the six vessels with water indicated that the natural man is full of death. Water in the Scriptures has two symbolic meanings. In some cases it stands for life (4:14; 7:38); in others, for death (Gen. 1:2, 6; Exo. 14:21; Matt. 3:16). The waters in Genesis 1 and the water of baptism signify death. Similarly, in the instance at Cana, water signifies death. All the stone vessels were full of water, meaning that all humanity is naturally full of death. Just as the waterpots were filled to the brim with water, so we were filled with death.

The Lord Jesus marvelously changed this death water into wine (John 2:8-9). This miracle shows not only that the Lord Jesus can call things not being as being (Rom. 4:17) but also that He can change death into life.

The Lord's miraculous changing of water into wine signifies that He changes our death into life. The water signifies death, and the wine signifies life. When the Lord changes our water into wine, that wine in our marriage feast will never end. The Lord changes our water into wine by regenerating us with the divine, eternal life (John 3:6). Since we have been regenerated, the divine life with its spiritual enjoyment will last forever. We will have an eternal marriage feast that will never end. This feast is not in our original life but in the new life that we received through regeneration. Even as the master of the feast discovered that the new wine was better than the former wine (2:9-10), so we too will find that the life we receive through regeneration is much better than our natural life. Our former life, symbolized by the poor wine, was greatly inferior. The Lord did not give us the best first but the best last. The first life, the human, created life, is an inferior life; the best life is the second life, the divine and everlasting one. This life is the best because it is the life of God Himself in Christ. So, our pleasure will last forever and ever. We have everlasting enjoyment, for Christ has translated us from death into life (5:24). He, as our everlasting, eternal life, can maintain our pleasures and enjoyment forever and ever. A new marriage feast began when we were saved, and it will never end. There is always joy within, and there is always a marriage feast within, because we have the divine wine, which is the divine life—the Lord Himself (11:25).

We all have had this kind of experience. Before we were saved, we were waterpots filled with death water. One day we said, "Lord Jesus," and He came and changed our death water into life. Regardless of the kind of death situation we might be in, if we turn our case over to the Lord Jesus, He will change that death into life. For example, even Christian husbands and wives may reach a point in their married life when the life runs out of their marriage. It seems that they are unable to go on in their married life. However, if they open to the Lord Jesus, He will change that death into life. In many marriages the Lord has changed death water into life wine.

THE BEGINNING OF SIGNS

In the Gospel of John all the miracles done by the Lord are called signs (2:23; 3:2; 4:54; 6:2, 14, 26, 30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47; 12:18, 37; 20:30). They are miracles, but they are used as signs to signify the matter of life. The word translated "miracles" in the King James Version is a word that means "signs" in Greek. A sign is that which signifies something. For instance, a red light is a sign that tells us to stop. All the miracles performed by the Lord Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of John were not only miracles but also signs.

The first mentioning of anything in the Scriptures sets forth the principle of that particular matter. Therefore, the first sign here sets forth the principle of all the following signs, that is, to change

death into life. The Lord's changing water into wine establishes the principle of life—changing death into life. Since this is the first sign, the principle of life that is set forth in it can be applied to all the other cases. For example, it can be applied to Nicodemus, a person full of death, who needed to be born again so that he might have the eternal life, which is God Himself (3:2-16).

We may also apply this principle to the case of the Samaritan woman in chapter 4. Do you think that the Samaritan woman had a life full of pleasure and enjoyment? No, but the Lord came into her life, and He changed her. That woman was simply a vessel in which the wine of human enjoyment had run out. She tried five husbands, but eventually her human enjoyment ended with no wine. She tried her best to enjoy the wine of human pleasures, but finally she felt only emptiness and death. Then the Lord turned that death into life and filled her with the divine wine of His eternal life.

Chapter 5 shows a man who was sick for thirty-eight years. His sickness indicated that the wine was gone, but the Lord came to change his death into life. In the eyes of the Lord, he was not only sick but also dead, because later in verse 25 the Lord said that the dead will hear His voice and will live. He was not only a sick man healed by the Lord but also a dead man raised by the Lord. He was even weak and dead in religion. Although religion may be quite good, it requires energy. How

could a dead man have energy? Consequently, he could do nothing with religion, for his wine had run out. But the Lord came to apply the principle of changing the death into life, as seen in the first sign.

We may also apply this principle to the other cases. The hunger of the multitude in chapter 6 reveals that their human enjoyment had come to an end, but the Lord came to them as the bread of life. The sinful woman in chapter 8 also was one whose wine of enjoyment had run out. The blind man in chapter 9 also had no enjoyment of the human life. This is especially true with the case of Lazarus in chapter 11. The main points of the case of Lazarus, in principle, are the same as those of the first case, the marriage feast at Cana. In the first case there was the enjoyment of the marriage feast. In the case of Lazarus there was the pleasure of the family love between Lazarus and his two sisters. In the wedding feast the wine ran out; in the case of Lazarus the human life ran out. Lazarus died, indicating that the wine of human life had run out. In both cases the principle of life was exactly the same: the Lord came into both situations and changed death into life. Therefore, the principle of life set forth in the incident of changing water into wine can be applied to every case throughout the Gospel of John.

In the Scriptures, figuratively speaking, the tree of life is the source of life, and the tree of knowledge is the source of death, as revealed in Genesis

2:9 and 17. In all the cases recorded in the Gospel of John, the significance always corresponds, in principle, with the tree of life resulting in life and the tree of knowledge resulting in death.

John 2:11 says that in this beginning of signs that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, He also manifested His glory, and His disciples believed into Him. The Lord's divinity was manifested in His changing death into life.

MARY SIGNIFYING THE NATURAL MAN

In the incident of the marriage feast in Cana, Mary, the mother of Jesus, signifies the natural man, which has nothing to do with life and which must be subdued by the divine life (vv. 3-5). When the wine was exhausted, the natural man came out and even prayed to the Lord. When Mary told the Lord, "They have no wine," He said to her, "Woman, what do I have in this that concerns you? My hour has not yet come" (vv. 3-4). Often we are exactly like the mother of Jesus. We are today's Mary, praying as a natural man according to our natural life. Frequently, the Lord will allow the wine in certain situations to run out in order that He may have an opportunity to change death into life. In such a case the natural man will pray, "O Lord, do something to rescue the situation." If you pray in this way, the Lord will turn to you and say, "What have I to do with you? You have nothing to do with Me in this matter." Nearly all of us would act the same way Mary did. What then

should we do? We should not do anything. Let the death come to the surface and be exposed. Then the Lord Jesus will come in.

Quite often I have received letters from individuals or from churches who are crying for help, saying, “Brother, we are so weak. Please come to help us.” Whenever I have received such a letter, I said, “You are weak, but you are not yet dead. Even if you are dead, you have not yet begun to smell.” We need to wait until the death situation comes to the surface; then the Lord Jesus will come in to change death into life. Everything that the Lord does is according to this principle of changing death into life.

This booklet is compiled from *Life-study of John*.

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