

A promise of transformation

The miracle of Jesus turning water into wine

A close-up photograph of a person's hand, wearing a white shirt cuff and a grey suit jacket, resting on the cover of a dark brown leather-bound Bible. The Bible is placed on a wooden surface. The lighting is warm, highlighting the texture of the leather and the skin of the hand.

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Please read **John 2:9-10**, first of all.

9And when the ruler of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and knew not whence it was (but the servants that had drawn the water knew), the ruler of the feast calleth the bridegroom, **10**and saith unto him, Every man setteth on first the good wine; and when men have drunk freely, then that which is worse: thou hast kept the good wine until now.



Assumptions can be unreliable

It is likely to be true of all of us how it is that we are continuously making assumptions about people or about situations which turn out to be far from accurate. For example we meet someone for the first time and straightaway make an assumption about them. Or a neighbour or a work colleague buys a new car and straightaway we make an assumption about them; maybe that they have come into unexpected riches. How wrong, though, assumptions can be.



On first reading the miracle of Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana of Galilee it has for long been wondered about, people assuming that it was not an especially important thing to do. As has been said of it, “Honestly, it seems like an odd way to kick off a public ministry. No blind eyes opened. No lepers healed. No demons cast out. **Just a quiet rescue of a wedding celebration that was about to take an awkward turn.**”

(See

<https://www.markcole.ca/why-jesus-turned-water-into-wine-and-what-it-means-for-you>)

Yes, this is the assumption that has been for so long and so widely made, that it is not a miracle of any great significance and very odd to have been the first one Jesus ever performed. However, as we have already noted, assumptions can altogether miss the mark and be wrong. And this one, about the miracle of Jesus turning water into wine, is just that. It is an assumption and it is wrong.



A statement of purpose

It is true, that the miracle of the turning of water into wine doesn't seem like this on first reading, that it is of any great significance. The reality, however, is that it had immense significance. Once we come to understand it more clearly and deeply, we are able to see what is taught in the Writings that **this was a “Statement” of the whole purpose of the Lord’s Coming into the world and about what His focus was ever going to be.**



More than two thousand years ago the human race had reached a low point of spiritual darkness. The Jews of those times had not just **weakened the power of the Word** and of the light which generations earlier had shone through it, but they had **totally falsified it**. It is in both Matthew's and Mark's Gospel that we read the words of Jesus, about the scribes and Pharisees, that they had "made the Word of God of no effect through (their) traditions". (Matthew 15:6 and Mark Chapter 7:13.) And one of the memorable and terrible indictments of the spiritual state which the Jewish Church had come to be in is in the prophecy of Isaiah. In a rare moment of honesty the members of that Church, more so the few that still valued a genuine connection with God, acknowledged, "we look for light, but there is darkness! For brightness, but we walk in blackness! We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as



This was a Church - **the Jewish Church** - which **had the Word of God** but in whose keeping it had become insipid and **nothing more than information and history**, about which, in their unregenerate state, the people boasted. They believed that they had a special relationship with God; that they were His “chosen” people; and that therefore all was well and would continue to be.

They had added layer upon layer of traditions and interpretations to the Word making it burdensome and joyless.



Jesus chose His miracle of turning water into wine to be a declaration that He had come to **revive** the Word; to **restore** it; to invest it with **new relevance**; to bring it to **life again**; to transform what had become **ordinary into something extraordinary**. This is what makes it so outstandingly important and relevant.



Both within Himself and outwardly, **among the people**, Jesus took on the battles to **clear away the falsities which had come to suffocate the true meaning of the Word** and to restore it as a bright beacon of light to guide people to a life of righteousness and peace. And so we have the teaching, where Swedenborg wrote, “The Lord’s making the water wine signified (or was a statement of His intention) to **make the truths of the external church truths of the internal church, by opening up the internal things which lay concealed within them.**” (“Apocalypse Explained” 376:29)



In the “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew Chapters 5 to 7) we have examples of Jesus doing exactly that. “You have heard that it was said to those of old”, He said “You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgement. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement.” (Matthew 5:21 & 22) And so, too, with regard to the teaching of the Word about adultery, divorce, oaths, revenge and loving the neighbour. The Lord turned water into wine. **He gave new meaning to these teachings. He showed the people that so much more is involved than just what lays on the surface.**



There are several ways to describe the purpose of the Lord's work on earth, and this is one of them, that He came to re-establish the power of the Word; to give it renewed life and renewed energy. And it was vitally important that He do this. As is the teaching of the Writings on this point, **“Unless therefore the Lord had come into the world and disclosed its inner contents, contact with the heavens through the Word would have been broken, and if that had been broken the human race on this planet would have perished...**

The Word is what opens heaven.”

(“Arcana Caelestia”
10276:9)



Do you remember the story in the Gospels about Jesus, how on the day of His resurrection He anonymously joined two of His followers returning in sadness from Jerusalem to their home in the village of Emmaus? And what did Jesus talk about as He walked with them? Do you remember? “Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” (Luke 24:27).

He opened up the Word to them; He showed them how alive the Word is; He wanted to get them to see the life-giving deeper levels of meaning within the Word. He turned water into wine for them.



So, too, that night, when Jesus appeared to the eleven remaining disciples hiding in fear in Jerusalem. “He opened their eyes that they might comprehend the Scriptures”. (Luke 14:45) **Once again, water was turned into wine.**



We can be sure just how much the angels in heaven will have rejoiced! They had anguished for centuries over the darkness that had descended upon the human race. And they had been **sustained in hope that one day this would all change. And such is the change that the Lord made possible.**(See “Arcana Caelestia” 2523).



The apparent “ordinariness” of the Word of God

There are always exceptions, but many, many people, when they first turn to the Word read it for the sake of information, or for its history, or to have some knowledge of the life and teaching of Jesus. And this is entirely fine. But **as we grow in our love for the Word and in our commitment to live by the teachings and values we find there**, such as the Ten Commandments , the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12) or the New Commandment (John 13:34) **what was at first water becomes wine**. We find that the Word comes alive to us in new and wonderful ways.

As Jesus declared it to be His work on earth to restore and to transform the Word, all those centuries ago, when He came on earth and began His public ministry, this is what He says to each one of us.



Take as an example Jesus stilling the storm which threatened to capsize the boat He and the disciples were in crossing the Sea of Galilee.(Mark 4:35-41). When, as children, we first learn about it we are thrilled and in awe of the amazing and miraculous power Jesus possessed to be able to bring that storm to an end.

But when, as adults, we wrestle with the complexities of life and the challenges of decision making and are tossed about by temptations, this story takes on a whole new meaning. Now, as adults, we see meaning in it that we hadn't really appreciated it held for us. **When in temptation we feel ourselves being tossed about by sinful inclinations**, such as the desire to see someone suffer for something they have done to us or the longing to have something which we don't really need but have convinced ourselves we should have. And **so this story speaks to us in a way that it never spoke to us when we were children. Water is transformed into wine.**



I hope it is clear now that water corresponds to Divine Truth understood on a very external and natural level. We all start there. But the promise of this miracle is that **we can move from this external and natural understanding to a much more real, insightful, and spiritual understanding.**



Here is another example: we all know the story of how the serpent came to Eve in the Garden of Eden and persuaded her that she could ignore what God had commanded both her and Adam that they must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But when she saw “that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took its fruit and ate. She also have to her husband with her, and he ate.” (Genesis 3:6). At first, when we read this story, or hear about it as children, we think of how it must have been long ago and are sad about this bad decision which, first, Eve made and then Adam made as well. But once we are older, and if we have chosen the path which leads to becoming a re-born person, this story opens up for us in an altogether different, and personally relevant way. We come to know that **we, too, can be deceived by the serpent, meaning sense-based thinking and reasoning,** and that - when we do - we fall from grace and from the peace and happiness of a close connection with the Lord. What was water is transformed into wine.

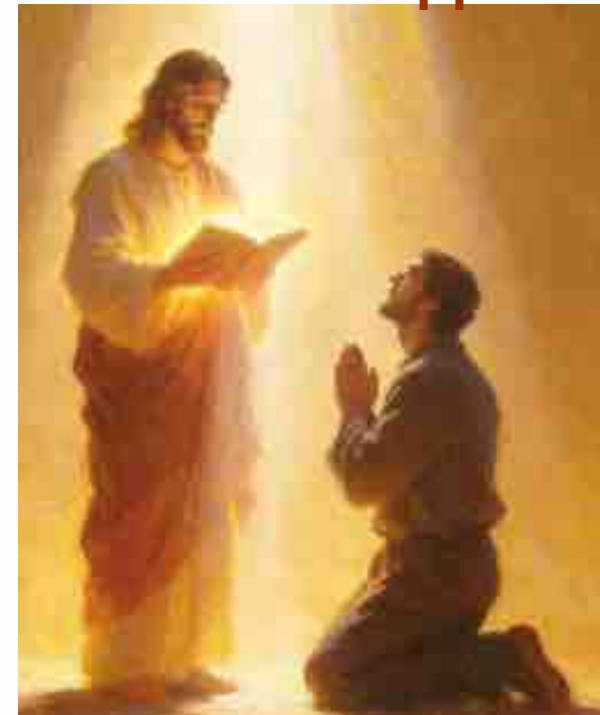


Whilst I have told you here something of the inner and deeper meaning of this story, your actual experience of the transformation, water into wine; an external and natural understanding into a spiritual and insightful understanding; will be something **very personal to yourself**. You will see things, and be inspired, in ways which are almost indescribable. And what you come to see and understand, and the way it impacts on your life, will be different from what other people come to see and understand in the same story.



A recurring experience

This move from what is external and natural to what is spiritual and from the Lord, is not a single experience, happening only once as we move from our childhood into our adulthood! It is **a recurring experience**. There are endless truths we learn, come to know and think about, which - hopefully - will come to be transformed as we grow closer to the Lord and as His life of love and wisdom increasingly infills us. And the transformation of the same truth can happen many times. As we become re-born people there will always be new insights into the truths we know; insights given to us by the Lord; enlightenment that we can only receive **as we open up our hearts and minds to the life the Lord presses on us and invites us to enjoy.**



What we need to do if this miracle of transformation is to take place

If this miracle of transformation is to happen for us there are things we need to do.

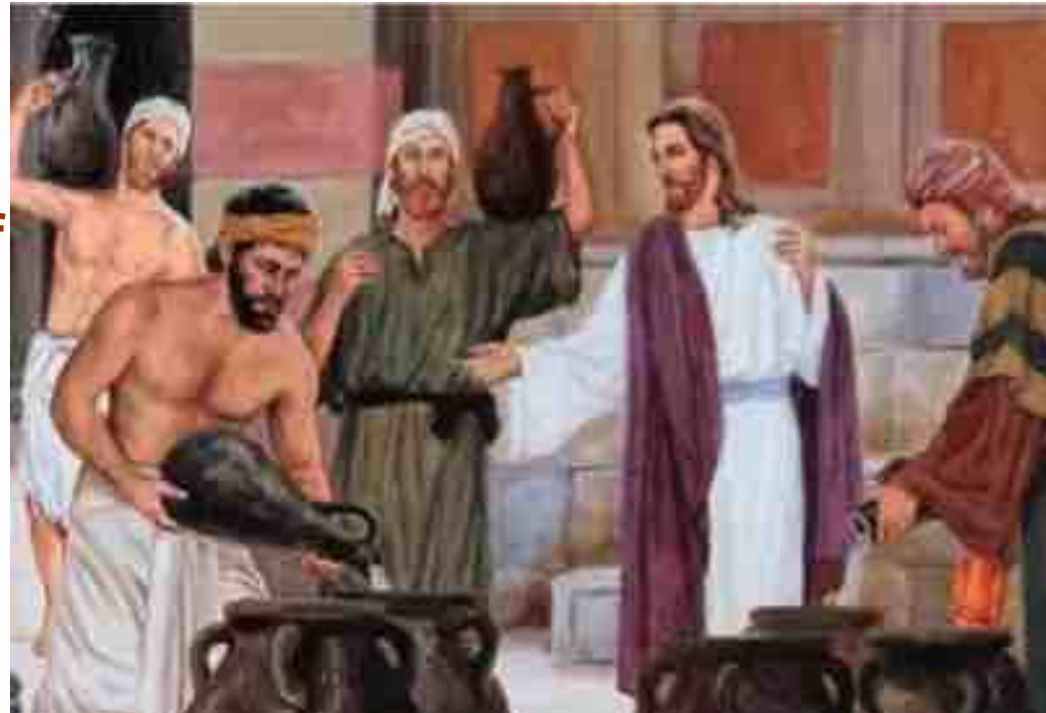
Firstly, it took place at a wedding; and where weddings, or a marriage, are mentioned in the Word what is being highlighted is **the effort to bring our lives closer to the Lord**. In several places in the Word Jesus described Himself as a Bridegroom; His clear implication is that we are, as it were, the bride. **It is within the context of this relationship with the Lord that miracles can take place.**



Secondly, it was at this wedding that Mary drew attention to the situation. And what this means is that it is within the context of our efforts to draw closer to the Lord (the wedding), **an affection for what is a better and more spiritual life is stirred and draws attention to what is lacking.** Things have gone flat. The passion for living as the Lord teaches has drained away. Our excitement for reading and growing in our understanding of the Word has temporarily deserted us. But something **stirs us** and draws our attention to this lamentable situation. And that “something” is Mary in us.



Thirdly, and at the house where the wedding was being celebrated, “there were set six water-pots of stone, according to the manner of the purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece”. These water-pots were mostly empty and Jesus commanded that they be refilled. Do you ever feel empty and that what you know and have learned from the Word has seemingly left you? Maybe you have lost interest in the Word? These are the times we need to **re-fil the water pots; go back to the Word;** and set ourselves a schedule of reading the Word every day, even if it is just a few verses.



Fourthly, it was not in the act of re-filling the water-pots that the miracle took place. It was only as they drew the water out and started to distribute it that it was discovered to have been transformed into wine.

This is so important! It is only when we **start using the truths of the Lord's Word, applying them to life;** that they are transformed into what is exhilarating and inspiring.



Let's just think about this for a moment. Your water pots may have become empty. Empty because you feel **the ideals and teachings the Lord urges on you are too much beyond you; too remote from the challenges and complexities of day to day life.** After all, how can we forgive someone who has really hurt us? However can we be expected to turn the other cheek? Who does not worry about the future? About what they are to eat or drink or wear?

Listen carefully, because at such times the Lord is quietly urging you to re-fill the water pots; to go back to the Word; to affirm with yourself that what is of **immense eternal significance and relevance in the truth we find there.** Now draw on these truths and start applying them, again, to your everyday life, relationships, and situations. You will then see in a wonderful new light. You will see so much more in them. They will mean so much more to you.



Over the years of my being a pastor it has been my privilege to walk for a time with different people whose faith, and excitement, and enthusiasm for the teaching and guidance of the Lord in His Word has faltered. Maybe it was because of life becoming too busy. Maybe it was because of doubts that had arisen in their minds. The wine had run out.

Wonderfully, and in most cases, it didn't stay that way. Something caused them to **go back to the Word**; to **re-evaluate**; to **commit again to living the life the Lord urges on us**. And so **a whole new appreciation, and love for, that life was awakened**. They filled the water-pots again with water and started pouring that water out and, amazingly it became wine. I have seen those people glow with their renewed excitement, seeing in the Lord's Word depths of meaning they hadn't seen, or even dreamed, is there.



Be encouraged, brothers and sisters, that **this same miracle can happen for us**. Very few of us don't have times when the wine runs out. This is the time to apply ourselves, even more vigorously, to **filling the water pots with water and carefully and thoughtfully inviting the Lord to show us how and in what way it applies to our lives**. And, as we use it, it will be miraculously turned into wine.

AMEN



Reading:

John 2: verses 1 to 11

Psalm 119: verses 145-152

“Arcana Caelestia” 10400:3

“The actual internal sense of the Word is to some extent open to every person who, though he or she may not know what the internal sense is, **has his or her external (self) subject to his or her (internal) self...For heaven, which is in possession of the internal sense of the Word, flows into such people when they read the Word, bringing them light, giving them discernment, and in this way teaching them. Indeed, if you are willing to believe it, people’s internal (higher) self is of itself in possession of the internal sense of the Word...And when people’s internal, or higher, self is open they are consequently present with the angels in heaven and therefore also possess discernment similar to theirs.”**



“Arcana Caelestia” 10683:4

“Those people who love to do truth for its own sake love the Lord; for truth comes from the Lord, and the Lord causes it to become good through the willing and doing of it.”



THE END

