

## **Spiritual Wine – Drink Responsibly**

Sermon by Rev. E. Kent Rogers; October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### **READINGS:**

- **Isaiah 28:1-10**
- **John 2:1-12**
- **True Christian Religion 372**

The Lord while on earth performed an array of breathtaking miracles. He gave light to the blind and freedom the paralyzed, He healed the leprosy, cast out demons, calmed the destroying sea, fed thousands, and even brought the dead back to life. So we wonder why the Lord chose, as His very first miracle, the turning of water into wine, which in comparison with His other miracles, feels almost like a parlor trick—entertaining, but lacking any obvious importance. Wouldn't one of these other miracles better exemplify His essential love—the salvation of the whole human race? However, the Gospel brings attention to the fact that this—the turning of water into wine—was the first of His miracles. We know, therefore that there is more here than meets the eye.

Looking beyond the natural, the spiritual meaning sheds light on why this miracle is the Lord's first miracle. The internal sense of this miracle shows the methods and final goal of the Lord's infinite love for the salvation of the human race.

Wine is one of the most central and holy symbols of the Word, Christianity, and New Christianity alike. The Lord secures its sacred preeminence when, during His final meal, He lifts the cup and says to His disciples: "Drink from it, all of you. This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:27-28).

We have learned that wine represents divine truth, but have we actually tasted this wine? Have we drunk it in until it alters our consciousness? The spiritual truth represented by wine possesses all the abilities and attributes of wine except that it affects our spirit and not our body.

Wine is a kind of truth that is higher than foundational knowledge of spiritual truth which is represented by rock. It is higher than intellectual understanding and insight by which we begin to see meanings in the Word, represented by light. Wine represents a truth that is higher than self-reflexive application of truth which is represented by waters. Looking at the effects of wine can shed light on the type of Divine Truth it represents. Wine causes people to feel affectionate, social, and friendly. It is able to dull pain and alleviate anxiety. It can lead people

into states of gratitude. It inspires people to sing, dance and celebrate. The kind of spiritual truth represented by wine achieves these same effects for our spirit.

What spiritual truth is able to make us happy, relieve anxiety, cause us to love one another more, cause our hearts to sing and dance? It is the truth of the Lord's Divine love and mercy for the human race. In fact, the Lord spells it out so clearly in the New Testament that even if you are deprived of access to the Third Testament, and take things only on a literal level, it is impossible to not see that the wine is a symbol of the Lord's saving mercy. Christians know that salvation is an undeserved mercy; they know that the Lord Jesus Christ lay down His life so that they might be saved. They have open access to the spiritual wine, the life blood of the body of Christ, which is the church.

When the mind comes to taste this wine, this truth—that the Lord's salvation is a free gift of mercy, not because of who we are, but despite who we are—we begin to feel a radical shift in consciousness which produces all of the same effects of wine. When we really drink in the truth that the Lord is Infinitely and Eternally sovereign, that His Love is Power Itself, and that there is no other power, our experience of reality is transformed.

This truth of trust alleviates spiritual pain. It evaporates anxiety. It causes us to feel affectionate and friendly towards others because we see that we are all equally in need of Divine Mercy, and we are all equally loved by Divine Mercy. We share equally the same enemy—selfishness; we share equally the same mercy—the Lord's love; we share equally the same path—the Lord's truth and means. What are fellow travelers. We are one family.

The wine of the Lord's mercy also leads us into states of gratitude because we now see that we have not earned the Lord's salvation through our hard work, our storehouses of knowledge and understanding, or because of our good behavior; these things have only ever been the Lord's given to us. The Lord's mercy does work only through such means, but these means are the Lord's in us, through us, for us. The Lord's life-blood, this wine, does not leave any room for judgment, and it causes us to sing and dance in gratitude of such sublime Divine Love.

Yet there is such thing as too much of a good thing. The Word is full of warnings against intoxication. Once the effects of this spiritual wine have been felt, it can be extremely tempting to seek out this state of mind where everything is joyful and perfect, where all pain and anxiety is numbed. It is especially tempting when we know that this is the ultimate truth—that life is absolutely perfect.

But we are human beings on earth. We are here for a reason, and that reason is not to escape pain and anxiety. That is not why we exist. The instinct to escape

problems with spiritual truth is a form of selfishness. Spiritual truth does not exist primarily for achieving any certain state of consciousness. What we have to realize is that those are secondary side effects. We have to realize that spiritual truth exists primarily to inspire us to lead a life of love for other people.

When Mary said to the Lord, “we have no wine,” the Lord’s response was icy—“Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?” Mary represents the natural will looking to the spiritual. The natural mind will frequently cry out, “We are uncomfortable here, Lord! We want to be happy. I know you are the source of happiness, so how about a little?” What else can the Lord say to this plea but, “What does your concern have to do with me, Woman?” There is no doubt that the Lord wants to render all of us happy, but when what we are seeking is happiness, we are estranged from the Lord; we are not understanding the Lord’s heart. The Lord appears icy to this state of mind because He can’t afford to pander to it, lest He feed entitlement.

The Lord’s words, as always, achieve their goal, which is to shift Mary into a humbler state. She lets go of her expectations, and instead tells the servants to do whatever it is that Jesus might happen to command. We exist to serve the Lord’s commands, that is, the Lord’s goals and ends. We may hear the Lord’s words to Mary and feel that He should treat her with more respect, or we can hear them and say, I don’t understand the Lord’s methods and yet I know His heart is good, so I will make myself to be His servant and do as He commands. I will trust Him in this story of life. He commands that I love others; that I lay down my life for the sake of the wellbeing of others.

Part of laying down our lives is to lay down our focus on attaining a certain state of mind. If the Lord seeks to give us enlightenment, He will give it as He ordains. If He seeks us to be relieved of pain and fear, He will do so as He sees fit. We can trust our state of mind to the Lord and the Lord’s commandments. Our role is not to try to seek more wine so that we can be merry, but to be a servant to the Lord, which is to say, to be a servant to the spiritual health of others.

The servants were ordered to fill six large pots full of water. The pots were made of stone. We begin with the cold, stony truth about the self—we are empty of good and truth. We have nothing of good to call our own. In the Old Testament, evildoers were stoned. The meaning is that stone-type truth is used to eliminate forms of selfishness. We start with this—acknowledging that of ourselves we are utterly depraved. We are spiritually empty. When we know this, we are ready to become useful.

We then fill that emptiness to the brim with water-type truth. We use physical water to wash ourselves and to slake our thirst. Water-type truth is day-to-day

application of spiritual knowledge to the purification of the mind and heart. We read the Word and apply what we see to our lives. Water-type truth includes a willingness and ability to observe one's own mind and heart honestly, without bias and excuse. And it includes a willingness to cleanse our heart and mind.

Water also slakes our thirst. Water-type truth satisfies our thirst for spiritual vitality. Spiritual truth gives context, meaning and purpose to our existence. We exist to love and serve the spiritual-natural wellbeing of other people. The New Commandment is the water of life.

So we fill up our inherent emptiness with this water of life. Just as there are six days of creation, and six days of labor leading up to the Sabbath, there are six pots of water. Six represents the work that we must do as if on our own from our sense of self. This is the spiritual work which we must do for six days. We cleanse ourselves of the impurities of selfishness, we drink in the New Commandment, and we serve others. That is what must always remain our pursuit and goal.

When we, by what feels to be our own intention and our own work, make ourselves to be servants of the Lord's goals, and so servants to the spiritual-natural wellbeing of all, then we are ready to receive the miracle. We give this water to the master of the feast, meaning, we acknowledge that all the good work and the true ideas involved in our spiritual labor is from and for the Lord, the Master.

When we have worked and then acknowledged the Master in this way, the Lord turns this water of life into the most delectable wine ever tasted. We will feel more joy than we can handle. Our fears will disappear. We will sing and dance. We will not be doing this on our own, but in the company of a great multitude—all of heaven and all on earth. Our laboring for the wellbeing of other causes this union.

And that is one of the secrets of the wine. It is to be had with the bread. The bread is love and goodwill in action. The wine goes with the bread. The blood exists to serve the flesh. The inebriating joy of the spiritual truth of the Lord's perfect Divine Love and salvation does not exist for its own sake. It is a function and servant of the bread, the flesh, which is a correspondence and symbol of Divine Love—not the truth of Divine Love, not knowledge and understanding of that love, but the living of that love in the Body of the Lord, which is the human race on earth and in heaven. The bread is loving service to other people.

When we feel the joy of the Lord's love we become strong to love all other people, regardless of whether we like them or not. We become strong in forgiving others and seeing the good in them. We become strong in sensing where others are,

what they need, and in lifting them up. We become strong in all manner of abilities to love other people in wise ways. The wine should never be separated from the bread. Spiritual truth should never be sought directly for the sake of its elating powers. Rather let us seek the waters of life—to cleanse ourselves so that we can better serve others—and let us leave it to the Lord to determine when it is right for Him to transform that water into elating wine.

We see that being a servant with water must come before the wine again when the Lord instructs His disciples to prepare a room for the Passover meal. He tells them to go into the city where they will find a man carrying a vessel of water. They are to follow him to the house of the master whom they are to ask for a room.

So truth must come, line upon line, precept upon precept lest we become intoxicated, as we read in Isaiah. We don't give alcohol to children. The Lord builds us up through the bread of loving service and the water of self-reflection until we are ready to receive the Divine Truth represented by wine.

In the miracle of water into wine, we see something about the Lord's love and plan of salvation that is not present in miracles of healing and deliverance. Miracles of deliverance focus on the relationship of the power of the Lord in relation to our weakness. But heaven is not the result of that personal deliverance alone. Nor is heaven a constant praising of the Lord for His saving power or His love and wisdom.

Heaven is a kingdom of loving service, or usefulness and love. Heaven is found within God's love as expressed in charity between us. The Lord gives the wine and the people celebrate with one another at the marriage party. The marriage union of the Lord with the human race, as the passage in *The True Christian Religion* stated, occurs when we love one another wisely from the Lord's Word.

May we recognize ourselves for what we are, empty vessels; may we seek that which we are to seek, serving the wellbeing of all souls; and may remain content knowing that in His mercy, the Lord will surely grant us to drink the wine in the measure that He sees fit.

Amen