



Be Still.

a SUPER-abundance of blessing

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When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him. John 2:9-11

We are studying John's account of the wedding at Cana not only because it is a record of a historical event but because it is a miracle. The Son of God here on earth worked miracles—it was one of his ways, as John puts it, of showing us, of giving a sign, that he is indeed the Son of God. But we are interested in this incident primarily because it is at the same time a parable. **John's theme in his Gospel is that our Lord came to give us life which is life indeed, and this incident shows us how this fullness, this 'grace upon grace', is to be received.**

It is a blessing that always comes in response to a condition of **desperation**, and when our Lord acts **he changes the entire situation**. That is what he does here: from need he provides satisfaction. And that is what he always does. When our Lord acts, **it is always clear and evident**.

I want to show you something of the **fullness of the satisfaction** that our Lord gives.

THOUGHTS AND READINGS FOR MEDITATION



This comes out so clearly here. He does not merely turn just a little water into wine. There is a sufficiency, a **superabundance**. We find many illustrations of that. It is so typical of our Lord that when he fed the five thousand with five barley loaves and two fish, at the end of the meal the disciples collected twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over and above what was needed (Matthew 14:15-21). That is his method; it is always this overflowing sufficiency. This is emphasised right through the New Testament and that is why it is so important for us. If we receive of his fullness, then there is this element of superabundance.

We see foreshadowings of this in the Old Testament. By the eye of faith the psalmist is able to see something of it, and he puts it like this: 'My cup runneth over' (Psalm 23:5). It is not merely just full, it is 'running over', filled to the brim and overflowing. That is the characteristic of God's grace—not only its freedom but its fullness, its abundance, its all-sufficiency.

The Song of Solomon is undoubtedly a picture and a prophecy of the relationship between Christ and his church. Written in a poetic, dramatic form, it is a perfect representation of the church as the bride of Christ. This is a New Testament term but the Song of Solomon sees it long before it came to pass. This is how Solomon describes God's overflowing love: 'He brought me to the banquetting house. . .' and that is where he always brings us. It is not to some kind of 'soup kitchen', or to some temporary place where we can be given just a little food to keep us from starvation. No, no! It is a 'banqueting house'! . . . and his banner over me was love. Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick with love' (Song of Solomon 2:4-5). There is so much love that it is almost overwhelming me.

*"Give us a taste of the grapes of Eschol
that we may long for the promised land."*

**"THE THINGS WHICH GOD HATH
PREPARED FOR THEM THAT LOVE HIM"
1 CORINTHIANS 2:9**

This is brought out equally in verses 11-13 of the same chapter: 'For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.' That is the test that we apply to ourselves: Are we living in a kind of spiritual winter? We are not meant to be like that. What is the condition of our soul? Is it like a day which is overcast, cloudy, drizzling, foggy, 'neither hot nor cold' (Revelation 3:15)? No! When he visits the heart, when he exerts the glory of his power, when he grants us the fullness of his Spirit, he says to us, 'The winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; the fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.'

In other places in the Old Testament we find the same suggestion of overflowing abundance. Isaiah writes: 'The wilderness'—the desolate place—'shall be glad... The parched ground shall become a pool' (Isaiah 35:1, 7). 'Then shall the lame man leap as an hart' (Isaiah 35:6). That is the language and imagery of the Old Testament, as it puts this teaching so plainly to us. It can all be summed up in the sixteenth verse of that second chapter of the Song of Solomon. The effect of this love is to make us say, 'My beloved is mine, and I am his.'

But when we come to the New Testament, of course, the richness of God's blessing, seen in a pictorial form in Cana of Galilee, is made much more explicit. Our Lord says it clearly many times. There is no more beautiful illustration than his conversation with the woman of Samaria. There she is at a well where she has come to draw water. One of the hard tasks of her life is having to go to the well to draw water. In the middle of the day—when Jesus speaks to her—the heat is terrible, and drawing water is an awful burden. So there she is at the well, and our Lord asks her for a drink of water. Then he says, 'If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water' (John 4:10). The woman does not understand this, so our Lord expounds it to her. He says, 'Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again' (verse 13). Now that is life in this world, is it not? Permanent satisfaction? Never! There will be a thirst and a need to come again. You have to keep on going back to the well to get a little more water, just to keep you going.

The tragedy is that many of us are living that sort of desperate Christian life. Sunday comes and we get some strength, and then we lose some on Monday; a good deal is gone by Tuesday and we wonder whether we have anything left. On Wednesday it has all gone and then we exist. Or perhaps refreshment comes in some other way, some meeting we attend, some friends we meet...

Now that is the old order of things, that is not the new. So our Lord goes on to put it like this: 'Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water

that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life' (verses 13-14). **He puts a well within us. We are not always drawing from somewhere outside. The well, the spring, goes on springing up from within into everlasting life.**

Or listen to him again—I am just trying to show you that this is the great theme of this Gospel in particular, though it is the theme of the whole of the New Testament. This is true Christianity. 'In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly [out of his innermost parts] shall flow rivers of living water' (John 7:37-38). Rivers! From inside, from the depth of one's being, there shall flow out—oh, not just a little trickle but 'rivers of living water'. And John explains it. 'This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified' (verse 39).

And when we come on to the Book of Acts, we read that the Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost. That is the term that is used—'poured out'. Nothing is ever said about this except we get this impression of profusion. It is

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overwhelming; it is a baptism; it is a shower coming upon us and it is unmistakable. So we are told that on the Day of Pentecost the believers were all 'filled with the Holy Ghost' (Acts 2:4). **Filled!** And we find the same term in Acts 4:31, and in many other places.

And then take the way the apostle Paul puts it in Romans 5:5: 'The love of God,' he says, 'is shed abroad in our hearts.' It is not just a little touch of moisture but love is poured out, 'shed abroad' in a great profusion—'shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us'. And all the other terms have the same meaning. 'The **fruit** of the Spirit,' says Paul, and we think at once of an **orchard** where the trees are groaning with fruit. 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance' (Galatians 5:22-23). There is great profusion.

And then, of course, the apostle surpasses himself at the end of Ephesians 3. He has already talked about 'the unsearchable riches of Christ' (3:8); he has mentioned 'the exceeding riches of his grace' (2:7). He brings out all his superlatives and still it is not enough. So he can say nothing beyond this: 'that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God' (Ephesians 3:19). **God is eternal. There is no limit to him.** All his qualities are absolutes, and his fullness is endless; it is eternal.

Then, writing in a very personal and tender

manner to the Philippians, though he was in prison, the apostle uses terms which are quite extraordinary when we think of his position. He is in prison. He is suffering in body. He says he has become an old man before his time. Elsewhere he calls himself 'Paul, the aged' (Philemon 9). He is on the verge of death, and it is going to be a very cruel death. Yet he says, 'I have all, and abound: I am full' (Philippians 4:18). Now what more can a man say than that? There is a man who has received of his fullness, and grace upon grace.

John says the same thing: we have life, he says, and this life is in us. There is a seed that remains in us (1 John 3:9). And Peter says we are 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4). There is nothing beyond this, and the New Testament writers all vie with one another to try to give some impression of this fullness and superabundance of life that they have received through the Spirit in Christ Jesus. That, then, is what the Bible says—in the Old Testament, giving the preview and in the New Testament, showing the fullness. 'But,' says somebody, 'surely that was only for New Testament times. We must not take New Testament history too literally. That was the beginning of the church, and things like that only happened at the beginning. You don't expect it to continue in that way.'

Well, I would have thought that that view is a great denial of Scripture. The moment you begin to speak like that you are denying the teaching of the New Testament. 'The promise,' says the New Testament, 'is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off' (Acts 2:39). **If I believed that what I am told here in the New Testament was only for the first generation of Christians and not for us today, I would not be in this pulpit.**

The statement made by those people is a lie. And, of course, it is not only wrong as an understanding of the Scriptures, it is falsified completely by the long history of the Christian church.

This is why one sometimes thinks that the best thing for people to do is to read the history of the church and the lives of the saints. There, in almost every century, we see the continuation of what is described here. In the early centuries we read the thrilling account of the first Christians, the confessors and the martyrs—what a glorious body of people they were! We read of how they rejoiced in their sufferings for Christ. The spectators sitting in their comfortable seats in the arena in Rome and looking at 'these unfortunate people, these nobodies' being thrown to the lions, were staggered by the heavenly brightness which they could see shining from the faces of these Christians. It was this 'life', this 'fullness', Christ in them, making them 'more than conquerors' (Romans 8:37) as the New Testament had prophesied they would be.

Then as we move on through the centuries we find exactly the same thing. In all ages, in all countries, continents, climes, it is always the same. Perhaps we see more personal records of this in the eighteenth century than at any other

time, although in the seventeenth century we read the amazing testimonies of many of the Puritans. But when we come to the eighteenth century, we read of people like Jonathan Edwards and his wife, and Whitefield, and Howel Harries, and the Wesley brothers, and see how they were overwhelmed by the joy of God's fullness.

Whitefield preached so much—even too much—that he was physically exhausted and could scarcely stand. His friends persuaded him to lie down on his bed and have a rest, but he could not rest. Why? Because Christ was manifesting his love in such profusion and superabundance that he was thrilled by it and sleep was impossible. That is the kind of thing about which we are speaking. That is what is shown us here in this parable, in this miracle that was wrought at Cana in Galilee.

I could go on for a very long time quoting such experiences out of the diaries and journals of these various men, but God forbid that anybody again should say, 'But there you are dealing with very outstanding men.' Well, I agree I am dealing with outstanding and unusually gifted men, but they were human beings like all of us, and there was a time in their lives when, for all their brilliant gifts, they were very unhappy people. You do not explain what happened to them in terms of personality or in terms of human abilities or propensities or powers; they were the same before and after. No, this was the gift of God. As I am showing you, this was the action of the Lord Jesus Christ. The situation remained hopeless until he decided to act, then the whole position was entirely changed.

And what is so wonderful, therefore, is that we find this experience of God not only in the lives of outstanding men, great preachers, great thinkers and others, but also in the lives of the most ordinary people. And that is why we should thank God that these greater men have recorded some of the experiences told them by these others whose names are not even remembered. But they participated in the same thing. At every time of revival there is no distinction between great and small. The 'wind blows where it wills' (John 3:8), and the Spirit chooses people of all types. **You will find some of the most ordinary people filled until their hearts are overflowing and almost incapable of expressing what has happened to them.**

Now that is what we must realise: it is his action, and when he acts, he 'sheds abroad', he 'pours forth', with the result that out of our innermost parts flow 'streams of living water', and it is overwhelming.

John Ryland sums this up so well:

*No good in creatures can be found
But may be found in Thee;
I must have all things and abound,
While God is God to me.
He that has made my heaven secure
Will here all good provide.*

Then:

**While Christ is rich, can I be poor?
What can I want beside?**

I am in Christ; he is the Head of the body. There is an intimate organic relationship. So

the logical question is, 'While Christ is rich'—he is the Lord of glory, the Lord of everything—'While Christ is rich, can I be poor?' Beloved Christian people, there is something wrong somewhere, is there not? We are in him, we belong to him, he is our Head, we are his people and he is so rich—the unsearchable riches of Christ—so how can we be poor? What is the matter? Why do we not receive of his fullness?

It is all due to our failure to realise the riches that are in him and our relationship to him. We listen to the devil, we listen to our adversary, we listen to our own vain thoughts, instead of believing the Scriptures. And here, in the glory of the wedding of Cana, God, in his infinite tenderness through the Spirit, has even put it for us in a pictorial form. We are like the people in the feast who say, 'There is no more wine.' And we look to him, and he rises, and he gives the command, **and there is a superabundance.**

Listen to Anna Laetitia Waring:

In heavenly love abiding,

*"You will find some of
the most ordinary
people filled until
their hearts are
overflowing and
almost incapable of
expressing what has
happened to them."*

*No change my heart shall fear;
And safe is such confiding,
For nothing changes here:
Wherever He may guide me,
No want shall turn me back;
My Shepherd is beside me,
And nothing can I lack:
His wisdom ever waketh,
His sight is never dim;
He knows the way He taketh,
And I will walk with Him.*

We sing these glorious hymns but these people did not write them primarily because they were poets. There are many poets who do not write things like this, quite the opposite. Many poets, like Keats, were atheists or agnostics. They could not write hymns like this because they knew nothing about it. But hymnwriters record their experience. Take Charles Wesley. He was a poet in his own right, and even if he had never been a Christian he would have been an outstanding poet. He says,

*Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
More than all in Thee I find...*

And then he goes on:

*Plenteous grace with Thee is found,
Grace to cover all my sin;*

*Let the healing streams abound,
Make me, keep me pure within.
Thou of life the fountain art.*

That is it! 'In him was life, and the life was the light of men' (John 1:4).

*Thou of life the fountain art,
Freely let me take of Thee;
Spring Thou up within my heart,
Rise to all eternity.*

That is glorious poetry, is it not? But it is true experience. There was a time when Charles Wesley could not have written those words, but from May 1738 he was able to write like that. Then listen to George Wade Robinson:

*Led by grace that love to know;
Spirit, breathing from above,
Thou hast taught me it is so.
O this full this perfect peace!
O this transport all divine
In a love which cannot cease,
I am His, and He is mine.*

Do you hear the echo of the Song of Solomon? It is the experience of God's people throughout the centuries, in spite of all variations in circumstances and conditions.

So can we appropriate this language in any measure? This is what is being offered us in the New Testament. **This is true Christianity. Not men and women struggling to hold on, and, with a great effort of the will, just managing to keep themselves religious.** That is a terrible contradiction of what we have here!

And, of course, that is what has antagonised so many non-Christians. If we give the impression that the main effect of Christianity is to make us miserable, then it is not surprising that ninety per cent of the people are outside the Christian church. 'Miserable Christians,' they say, 'look at them!' And they add that they have life, they have joy, they have fullness. Shame on us Christian people!

But it is not merely a question of saying shame on us. What a terrible responsibility is ours if we are so misrepresenting this 'glorious gospel of the blessed God' (1 Timothy 1:11). We are meant to be witnesses to all people that we are filled to overflowing. We are meant to show the truth of the psalmist's words: 'My cup runneth over!' (Psalm 23:5).

My next point is that this is not one isolated experience in someone's life. Now many fall into the trap of thinking this. No, it goes on and increases. The wine that Jesus provides at Cana is not just a temporary supply to the marriage guests which quickly runs out. No, no; **it is enough for the whole occasion until the wedding is over.**

And that is a picture of what he does in our lives. Indeed, there is a phrase here which puts it very beautifully and will help us to remember it. The governor of the feast says, 'Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.' Not the beginning but now, much later on, when the proceedings have gone on for some time and it is towards the end. **This is something very wonderful: the best is at the end.**

Now many fail at this point. I have always found it depressing to listen to the kind of people who, whenever you meet them, will always for sure tell you the story of their conversion many years ago. They tell you that story every time. I have known people who do exactly the same thing with revival. Now there is a sense in which I can understand this. There is always something about an initial experience that is remarkable and outstanding. And a time of revival is so amazing and wonderful that it is not surprising that people go on talking about it. But they give the impression that they have had nothing since that wonderful experience, that ever after they have been walking through a wilderness, and travelling through a desert. There are many Christian people like that. Their idea of the Christian life is of a dramatic experience, perhaps at the outset, after which they just trudge along, living on the strength of that and partly keeping their eye turned backwards as they go forward. But this is absolutely wrong. It is almost a denial of this essential principle that I am outlining—and thank God that it is! What a tragedy it would be if it were only the beginning of the Christian life which could be described this way!

I remember once—forgive me for giving a personal story—I was preaching in a certain part of the country and staying with a man who was the Chairman of the Education Committee of his county. We were invited by the headmaster of the local grammar school to address the children in the afternoon. On the platform, I made this older man speak first, before me. He was a jovial type of man, and he did what I anticipated he would do. He looked at the children and said, ‘Boys and girls, what wouldn’t I give if I could only be back where you are! That was a wonderful time! Oh to be a boy again! I am an old man now, and if I could only go back, I would give the whole world!’

Well, when my time came, I said the exact opposite. I said, ‘Boys and girls, I thank God I am not sitting where you are, because I can tell you, life gets better as it goes on!’

And it can. I meant it. I still mean it. But there is a negative attitude that comes even into the Christian life, and it is wrong; it is a denial. The Old Testament is clear about this. Here is the psalmist, writing under the old dispensation, and this is how he puts it: ‘The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing’ (Psalm 92:12-14). (Did you know before where the expression ‘fat and flourishing’ came from?)

Thank God that Psalm 92 is true. If I am not a better preacher now than I was thirty years ago, shame upon me! This is a growing life; it is an increasing life. We do not just live on some original resources. No, no! The Christian life is not merely one experience. It goes on being repeated. And, ‘The best is yet to be!’ The best is at the end. Listen to God’s words to the prophet Isaiah: ‘And even to your old age I am he; and even to grey hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and I will deliver you’ (Isaiah 46:4). God does not merely start and then abandon us. No, no. He has said, ‘I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee’ (Hebrews 13:5). But come to the New Testament statement of all this and see how Paul, rising to one of his great mountaintops at the end of the third chapter of 2 Corinthians, says, ‘We all, with open face beholding’—and it means ‘going on beholding’—‘as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory’ (2 Corinthians 3:18). That is it. That is the Christian life. It is progressive. It expands and increases as we are ‘changed from glory into glory’. We do not just get born again and then remain there, static, holding on to what we have, rather giving the impression that we have lost something wonderful and that the great thrill we had at the beginning has gone. That is machinery, not life. This is a life that changes us ‘from glory into glory’, and it is endless and eternal.

Again, let the poets express it for us:

*Streams of mercy never ceasing
Call for songs of loudest praise.*

Robert Robinson

That is the characteristic of this life. ‘For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known’ (1 Corinthians 13:12). Again, if you examine the lives of the saints, I think you will see that this is constantly found in all their records, and, I say again, thank God for this! They went on enjoying this life, and it went on deepening and increasing. Then when we come to look at them on their deathbeds, we find, as John Wesley put it, ‘Our people die well.’ Some of them even had their greatest experiences of all on their deathbed. There they received in yet greater measure than they had received before.

The effect, then, is that our faith is increased. That is why John leaves the account of the miracle at Cana of Galilee with these words: ‘This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.’ Now they had already believed in him. That is the point—they were already disciples and they had already

believed—but as the result of this they believed more than ever. And that is one of the great principles and rules in the whole of the Christian life—the more you receive, the more you desire. It encourages you, it gives you proof, and you know, and therefore you seek him more and more.

That is Paul’s argument in Philippians. Here is a man who had experienced so much but he still tells us that his desire is, ‘That I may know him’—Paul knows him, that is why he desires to know him, he wants more and more—‘and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings’ (3:10). And Paul continues in verse 12, ‘Not as though I had already attained...’ By that he means: I have not got it all. I have not arrived at the end. **I have not exhausted it.** ‘Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended’—I have not got there—but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind—and I sometimes feel like telling many Christian people that: **Forget what has happened to you. What is happening to you now is the question. And what are you expecting?** ‘Forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus’ (verses 12-14).

The effect of all this, then, should be to make us utter something like this:


*O Lord, I cast my care on Thee;
I triumph and adore;
Henceforth my great concern shall be
To love and please Thee more.*

John Ryland

Or take another hymn:

*Teach me to love Thee as Thine angels love,
One holy passion filling all my frame;
The baptism of the Heaven descended Dove,
My heart an altar, and Thy love the flame.*

George Croly

So this first miracle performed by our Lord in Cana of Galilee is a picture which opens our eyes to the possibilities of the glorious fullness of the Christian life, this life which is life indeed, life more abundant. It is life developing and increasing until we find ourselves face to face with him, knowing no longer in part, but knowing even as we are already known, and filled and glorified and made like unto him. **May God by his Spirit give us the understanding to realise that this is Christianity and all this is meant for us.** 

Got a great view of Revelation 21:6, Christ standing at the fountain and giving forth blessing δωρεαν, “freely.” Last night in reading the passage I saw Him so gracious. We have come to Him and been made righteous and now He is continually giving, and will hand out to us blessing upon blessing. If we wonder, He will smile and say δωρεαν. If His love to me be expressed in marvellous fullness, and my soul feels it is utterly beyond expression why He should so love me, He will smile and say δωρεαν. Today I may stand with Him at the fountain, and ask “life more abundantly,” and He will give it δωρεαν. I may ask joy and peace in believing. He will at once give it δωρεαν, not because of anything in me, but because of His own grace. When I further ask blessing on my people, even a new revival, will He not do it? I have but one argument to use, and that is this most gracious word δωρεαν. When I get the crown from Him, the crown of righteousness, δωρεαν will be written upon it. — Andrew Bonar