

There are no funeral sermons by our Lord in the New Testament because he broke up every funeral he ever attended. But there is one marriage sermon but it was acted out rather than taught out and I refer you to that marriage sermon in John, chapter 2. "On the third day there was a marriage at Cana of Galilee and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the marriage with his disciples. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what have you to do with me? Mine hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Now six stone jars were standing there for the Jewish rites of purification each holding 20 or 30 gallons. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the steward of the feast.' So they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water that had now become wine and did not know when it came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew, the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Every man serves the good wine first when men have drunk freely and then the poor wine; you kept the good wine until now.' This is the first of his signs; the beginning of his miracles, Jesus did at Cana of Galilee and manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him." There are about as many recorded miracles of Christ as recorded parables. In both instances the real number probably runs into hundreds but the ones recorded only number between 30 and 35 when we look at the parables depending upon whether some of the small ones are classified as metaphors or parables. The number of miracles is approximately the same.

The miracles are all like the ringing of the bell before the sermon. Christ breaks the bread, then he gives a sermon on himself as the bread of life. When he heals a man born blind, then he declares

himself to be the light of the world! When he raises Lazarus, then he preaches the sermon, I am the resurrection and the life. So a miracle was like the ringing of a bell and then he taught out what was implicit in the miraculous miracle. Some people think that there are miracles all the way through the Bible. That is not true. There are many, many books with not a miracle mentioned. If the Bible had been an invented book it would have said that John, the Baptist, Christ's predecessor, worked many great signs. He didn't work any. Miracles in the Bible only come in cluster forms as a rule, at some great crisis. There are religious ministries today that are great on signs and wonders but whenever that expression is found in Scripture, it only has to do with a special redemptive work by God such as the Exodus movement or the redemption accomplished by the cross. Let such folk take their concordances and trace every instance where sign and wonder occur. None of those instances are saying we can expect them every hour of the day. Most of God's miracles today are miracles of providence just as much a miracle the way he chooses now to perform them. What do I mean by miracle of providence? You and I live in time. Yesterday is gone, tomorrow has not come. We just live in the present. God lives in the past, the present and the future. God is not in time, time is in God. There is no past with God; there is no future with God. He spans and encompasses all of existence, all of time. He heard your prayers before you were ever born, every prayer you will yet pray he heard before you were conceived. God is the great master chess player. He does not take away the freedom of the other chess player but who always wins; always knows how to make a move that can correct and adjust and it may only come out at the end. It may be a long session and everything may seem so wrong for so long but, ultimately, the great chess player wins.

So that's what I mean that most of God's miracles today are miracles of providence. He has so arranged the world that without interfering in the freedom of people, he does not compel boys and girls to be good he does not compel mothers and fathers to be good, he does not compel kings and governors to be good. Human freedom is a fact; but divine sovereignty is a greater fact. And God who sees the end from the beginning has his way to bring relief--in his time and in his manner. So, while most miracles in Scripture are in cluster times at great crises, there are only 3 or 4 of them: the Exodus, the time of the reformation under Elijah and Elisha, the Babylonian captivity and the launching of the Christian church. There are the only four times in Scripture where miracles cluster. When Christians speak about miracles in their daily life it is usually a miracle of providence, nevertheless, wonderful, no less miraculous but saves us from making the mistake of thinking that we can do as we wish and God will always adjust it by interfering. That is not so. If we are dedicated to God, seeking to please God, all sorts of things will go against us, all sorts of trouble will exist but the Christian has the assurance that God will work miracles of providence in his time and in his manner. But were he to say to us, look, it does not matter how you live, work yourself to death, or never get any exercise, eat what you like, drink what you like, worry as much as you like and I guarantee I will make you well every time you get sick, that would lead us to folly. God does not do that.

In this story, the miracle is not just the bell before the sermon, it is the sermon. Look at that first verse, "On the third day, there was a marriage." In the previous chapter, Jesus was in the wilderness. He had just been drinking the cup of woe. Now he is going to give

the cup of blessing. You know, the wheel is a wonderful symbol of life. In a wheel what is up one moment is down the next; what is down one moment is up the next. Life is very much like that...feast and famine. Jesus has just been fasting for 40 days and now he is at a party that lasts a week. That's very much like life. Life is never the same for long. Life is very much like a sea, momentarily calm and then a sudden storm, then another calm and then another storm. Life never remains the same; what's down goes up, and what goes up comes down. It keeps revolving, keeps turning. This story says that whether in the wilderness or whether at the marriage supper, God is there, God is sufficient--we can trust Him. This story tells us that God is interested in us--we must not miss the obvious point. He does not work his miracles at the great time of display at the temple at Jerusalem but in an unknown family. We are not even told the names of the bride and the bridegroom...in a tiny village, not even in Judea but in Galilee where there were mainly gentiles, some Jews, but mainly gentiles. He begins the beginning of miracles the great sign of his ministry, that he has come to transform everything. He does it for an unknown couple, peasant folks in a small village. The story is meant to tell us that God is very interested in ordinary people. Abraham Lincoln was right, God must have loved the ordinary people, he made so many of them. So the obvious meaning of the story must not be missed. Why does it say on the third day? Come back to chapter 1. You will see what happens in verses 19-24, John the Baptist is talking to the Pharisees and then in verse 29 it says, "The next day." Notice that next verse, 29? Then look at verse 35, "The next day," again. Now look at verse 43, "The next day." Why is the Bible so clear at this point on matters of the calendar? Well, you remember, this book begins the same as Genesis, "In the beginning." Like Genesis,



it talks about light and darkness in the opening verses. It is a replay of Genesis. And Genesis began with six days and the marriage on the sixth day. When you come to chapter 2, verse 1, that says, "And on the third day," remember the Jews used inclusive reckoning and so what you have here is the record of six days and then a marriage. You understand what I am saying, in John, chapter 1 you have the day when the Jews and John are debating, that's day one; then in verse 29, day 2; in verse 35, day 3; then verse 43, day 4; and then in inclusive reckoning, the third day after is day six...fourth, fifth, sixth. So, here, on the sixth day of the first week mentioned in this new creation, the work of redemption, is a marriage just as at creation, just as in Genesis--on the sixth day there was a marriage. Why marriage? Marriage is the most intimate of all relationships, the best symbol between the relationship between believer and his Lord. In a marriage, all things are shared; in a marriage there has to be love to be real. And so, it is the best symbol <sup>of the relationship</sup> between God and his people. So this has deep significance for us as we contemplate the whole theme of Scripture--men's relationship to God.

Notice the reality of this story. We would like an event like a marriage to go swimmingly (I've conducted a lot of marriages and it is very rare that everything goes smoothly; there are times the bridegroom has taken fright and never turned up; there are other times when the bride is so late that a lot of people leave; things can go wrong with the food for there are times when guests have been poisoned by food poisoning at marriage feasts) but Murphy's law, whatever can go wrong will go wrong, we often find true. Even on the most happy occasion things can go wrong and things went wrong

here. "They have no wine," what an embarrassment! You can't run out of wine and the feast is going to last a week, you can't do that! The Bible is a very realistic book.

It has another family story, you remember, in chapter 4. Here a Nobleman's son is sick. You remember at Capernaum at the end of chapter 4? The first two allusions to marriage in the family that we find in John's Gospel tell us that even the most sacred, the most wonderful, the most privileged of all relationships--marriage and the family--things go wrong! I wish it were not so, but it's a fact. In a world that is cursed with sin, things go wrong! People like to think that marriage is of God, the family is of God, it's got to be just right...no, friends. Luther says marriage is a school for character, so is parenthood, so is childhood. Children have a lot to put up with with their parents and parents have a lot to put up with with their children. It would be nice to think that when you have children nothing is going to go wrong--friends, the only person who thinks that has never had children. Nobody who has ever had children thinks that things don't go wrong when you have children, of course, they go wrong! Children are born of the world like wild asses' colts says Scripture. But this story is trying to tell us that when things go wrong in marriage or the family, God is there and that God is sufficient and that in his time he will do what is best, that is what this story is trying to tell us.

I have just read a book that I found most impressive about the writer of hymns that we all know. Let me mention some of the hymns by this person that you will recognize: BLESSED ASSURANCE, PASS ME NOT OH 'GENTLE SAVIOUR, SAFE IN THE ARMS OF JESUS, RESCUE THE PERISH-

ING, ALL THE WAY MY SAVIOUR LEADS ME, THINE THE GLORY, SAVIOUR MORE  
THAN LIFE TO ME, I AM THINE, OH LORD JESUS KEEP ME NEAR THE CROSS,  
PRAISE HIM, PRAISE HIM; JESUS IS CALLING, SAVED BY GRACE, TAKE THE  
WORLD BUT GIVE ME JESUS, HOLD THOU MY HAND, TELL ME THE STORY OF  
JESUS; REDEEMED, HOW I LOVE TO PROCLAIM IT; HE HIDEETH MY SOUL IN  
THE CLEFT OF A ROCK, I SHALL KNOW HIM BY THE NAIL PRINTS IN HIS HANDS,  
SOMEDAY THE SILVER CORD WILL BREAK--who is that? Yes, FANNIE CROSBY!  
And, 8991 others. She wrote 9000 hymns. Now some of you know,  
Fannie Crosby was no ordinary girl. She was blind from the age of  
six weeks and she lived to be 95. Now, humanly speaking, if I would  
ask what thing I should dread among others, very selfishly thinking,  
I would think of blindness. I would hate to be blind. When I am  
working, well aware of the fact that there is very little that is  
original--the best things have been said a million times before,  
when I ransack a subject I try and find the best that has ever  
been said, distill the cream of it, let it rise to the top and  
present it--sometimes when I work in my library I say, what if I  
were blind? But this woman was. She was often sympathized with.  
What I want you to notice is, that she did not like that. Fannie  
Crosby, now get this, (it's hard for me to understand but this is  
a fact) she regarded as one the the greatest blessing of her life  
was the fact that she was blind from the age of six weeks. Is that  
not unbelievable? Let me read you something...I mention this because  
things are not always as they seem, things that are so terrible to  
us, things that are so overwhelming to us, things we don't know  
how to handle...this story is trying to say, God is still in control.  
The wine runs out, sight runs out, health runs out, children run  
out, partner runs out--God is still in control. That's what it is

trying to tell us. Listen to this. I am reading from this biography: "The one fact that most people knew about Fannie Crosby was that she was blind. She was often referred to as the blind poetess. She did not like this. One day a man came to her and said, 'The minister preached about afflictions today, then I thought of you.' 'Thank you' said Fannie, 'but I think you should know I do not consider myself afflicted.' A great many people sympathize with me,' she said, 'though I am grateful to them, I really do not need their sympathy. What would I do with it.' Far from feeling self pity, Fannie felt that on the whole, it was a special gift from God that she was blind." I naturally do not assume when things go wrong that it is a special gift from God. I ask, hey, what have I done? But mature Christian thought has to bring us to this conclusion, mature Christian thought has to accept the Biblical teaching that nothing can touch us except by our Lord's permission however grating, however hard, however much it riles us. God loves us too much to ever let us be independent of Him. That's never going to happen. As long as we are living we are going to feel we need him and enough things are going wrong to reinforce it, always, always, never outgrow it, never. She felt, on the whole that it was a special gift of God that she was blind. She often said it was the best thing that could have happened to her. "How in the world could I have lived such a helpful life as I have lived had I not been blind." She felt she had never had an opportunity for education had she not been blind, had she never gone to the institution in New York, she was born in a poverty stricken household. She attributed her great powers of concentration to blindness. You see, this girl, would sometimes spin out a hymn in half a hour. She had tremendous powers of concentration. She said, If I were like

other people, looking all the time, I am sure my concentration would not have been as good." She said, "I found it easy to concentrate because I was blind." She felt her lack of sight enabled her to develop a wonderful memory. She read the Bible constantly without a Bible. She had \_\_\_\_\_. Her grandmother and mother used to read her the Bible and she memorized it. She would often go to friends and read them the Bible from memory. She attributed her wonderful memory to her blindness. She was not distracted. You and I are distracted by a thousand things. I thank God, I am. But if God takes away one thing he will often give you something better. Everybody who loses one sense finds the others sharpened. That is a universal experience. Fannie felt her lack of sight was more than compensated for by soul vision she felt was made all the more keener by physical darkness. "Physical lack of sight," she said, "contributed to her abundance of spiritual insight. In one of the poems she writes, "Sightless, I see and seeing, find soul vision though my eyes are blind."

For me, this is one of the hardest lessons of the Christian life to learn. There are things that disturb me, upset me, the things that cause me to worry...our message is from God that he has a purpose in them, that if I trust Him he will be sufficient--in his time, in his way. I would have thought the way for God to solve this girl's problem would be to heal her; he <sup>didn't.</sup> / You see, "My thoughts are not your thoughts. As the heavens are higher than the earth, are my thoughts higher than your thoughts." Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom, the power, the goodness of God! How inscrutable are his ways--past finding out, see? What you and I think is the remedy may not be the remedy at all! We would have all said, God, heal us, he didn't

and the world was blessed with 9000 hymns. In eternity when she can see with the best angel, isn't she going to be a 1000 times as glad as even on earth that she couldn't see? Look at what a blessing she was!.

Occasionally you and I meet people whom the world has spared, who have been born with a silver spoon in their mouth and had never had much conflict or much trouble--you won't spend much time with such people, they have nothing to give you but all of us have been visited with people who have been battered by the passages of decades by poverty and sickness and often when you are with such people you come away the richer. I have often gone to comfort people and have been comforted by them. I have often gone to encourage people and receive much more than in my feebleness I could offer. These stories of the miracles are saying, hey, don't despair. The problems in your life are meant to turn into jewels. You know how pearls are made. Pearls are formed when an irritation gets into the oyster... no irritations, no pearls. That's the story. This is a hard thing; this is the Biblical teaching.

So, here is the first of the miracles, the beginning of miracles. It is like the parable of the sower, the first of the great parables. What is our part when troubles come? What are we to do? Please observe verse 5; even though Mary wanted Christ to demonstrate himself as the Messiah and take the kingdom, that's what she wanted, Christ said no, "Mine hour has not come." When he said, "Woman," that was a term of respect. The look and tone interpreted it, it was not disrespectful or unloving the way he said it the manner interpreted it but he said, "Woman, you cannot control the things

of God; the time has not yet come for me to take the Kingdom." This is what she wanted. She wanted him to make the wine in such a way that it would just be the beginning to the leap to the throne and dislodging of the Caesars. But his mother is not at all discouraged--verse 5, his mother says, "Do whatever he tells you." The old versions have, "whatever he tells you, do it." When I was in evangelism and used to run after meetings, I used to call this one 'The secret the virgin Mary learned from the Lord Jesus.' I think I copied that from Schuler (?). "Whatever he says unto you, do it." How am I to handle my problems? It is a very old recipe, it is so old it is despised...three words, TRUST AND OBEY. That is the only recipe for all of life's problems...trust and obey Jesus. That is the only thing that works in the long run and that's the order. Obedience without trust is useless. You may obey without feeling. God is never more pleased than when you and I look around the universe and he seems to have died and the angel only a myth, heaven a folklore and, yet, we still choose to do what is right. God is never more pleased than we look around on a universe where every bit of God seems to have been banished and we decide to do what God says regardless. Faith is not feeling...God does not ask how you feel, he asks how you choose...trust and obey; whatever he says unto you, do it.

What is meant by the miracle? Well, some things we have already said, God is interested in us. First Peter 5:7 is a great verse, "Casting all your care upon him." That's a beautiful verse! Notice it says ALL. I would it could be done in one lot. Usually when I cast them upon God I've got them back on my shoulders in five minutes and I have to cast them again and again, and again...casting all your care upon him for he careth for you. When Spurgeon's wife was very



ill, he said, "Sweetheart, tell me what I can do for you, tell me what I can get for you." She looked at him and smiled and she named a very rare type of talking bird and said, "Get me one of those." He laughed and said, "You know I can't do that for they are hard to come by." But within a day someone from across the country sent him one saying, "I hear Mrs. Spurgeon is ill; this bird may be company for her." We have a God who knows and cares. You remember Charles Stott (?), the great cricketeer of Britain, he became so involved in the Lord's work his teeth were decaying one by one as he never took time to go home to a dentist, he worked in India, in Africa and here he is in the middle of Africa and his teeth are falling out one by one and even the natives told him to go home and get his teeth fixed-- "If God wants to fix my teeth, he will send me a dentist." One day down the great African stream comes a newcomer and it's a dentist from England--God cares...casting all your care upon Him. That's the obvious meaning of the parable. But the next one is also worth our consideration. This was the miracle of transformation. And all the miracles in John's Gospel are like that. They all take something and then change it, transform it...so a man that is blind is made to see, a man who is dead is made to live, a storm is made to be calm, the wilderness yields bread, transformation, transformation. Christ came to change things, they need changing. This is a cruel world. You know, we don't talk about some of the worst things of war. Some of the worst things in war are not what one army does to another, it is what members of the army do to each other. Whenever men get together they don't get together for the better, they get together for the worst...in any army, Australian, German, French, American. Whenever men get together they deteriorate rapidly unless they have a personal hold on Jesus Christ. War is a terrible thing. We are

in a world where cruelty prevails. Ethiopia has lost millions by famine. Even when this country and other countries have sent relief, that relief has usually be pirated and has not reached the people. It is a cruel, cruel world. And Jesus came to transform it and he begins with the individual heart. He came to change that. We should observe the contrast with Moses' <sup>first</sup> miracle. The prediction in Deuteronomy was, "The Lord will raise up unto you a prophet like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken." Christ was to be like Moses, like Moses, he left the palace to redeem his people; like Moses, he controlled the waters of the sea and multiplied food for the people; like Moses he is willing to be blotted out for the sins of his contemporaries; like Moses in so many things but he is like him not only in the things accompanying redemption, but he is a great teacher in himself of the Gospel. Moses taught law; our Lord, Jesus, taught Gospel. Moses' first miracle was turning water into blood. That was very fitting for a teacher of the law. The law is a school master to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Moses is a school master. Moses' law can say, "This do and thou shall live." And the Saviour came, a man like unto Moses, he complements Moses and he says, "Live and thou shalt do," not, this do and thou shall live. Moses could say, in effect, the wages of sin is death; Jesus comes and says the gift of God--not wages--eternal life. Moses is saying pay me what thou owest; Jesus says, I freely forgive you all; Moses says, make you a new heart; Jesus says, a new heart "I'll give you. Moses says thou shall love the Lord by God with all thy heart and soul and strength and thy neighbor as thyself and Jesus says, herein is love not that we love God but that he loved us. Moses talks about what a man can do for God; Jesus came and said what God can do for man. The law demands holiness, the Gospel gives it. When the law was given,

3000 men died within a few weeks, at Sinai, you remember, the molten calf. When Jesus proclaimed the Gospel, by the power of the Spirit at Pentecost, 3000 men lived. So while the first miracle of Moses was to turn water into blood telling us that the law leads to condemnation, that the conscience alone never gives us good news...if I listened to my conscience only I would be depressed a 1000 times a day. The conscience never tells us good news. The conscience is forever pointing out what we have not done as well as what we have done wrongly. The conscience points out the sins of omission as well as the sins of commission. Conscience never gives you any assurance--that's Moses. Conscience is just a law operating and God's purpose in it is that we might flee the blood of death, condemnation, eternal loss. Moses turns the water into blood; it was a symbolic way of saying that all associated with Moses alone will only bring us into condemnation, loss, death. The law is not a Saviour, law can't run anything. The Jewish people are great with laws but law can't forgive. Law does not motivate enough but when the Gospel takes the heart it motivates: "I'll write my law in your heart."

The Gospel is like that mighty stream that is pictured in Ezekiel, it seeped out first a few inches from the temple and then it was up to the ankle, then up to the knee, the thigh and then, finally, it is rivers to swim in! So true religion is not something we carry. True religion is something that carries us. The religion of Moses became a yoke of bondage when Jews forgot the meaning of the symbols and the prophecies and the types, when they saw them externally only as a means to find Heaven, it all became a yoke of bondage. Paul could say, "Even this day when Moses read, the veil was still upon their hearts. Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty and when

the spirit breathes upon those Old Testament laws, types, symbols and prophecies and sacrifices, we suddenly see they make up the lineaments of the Saviour. The law is a school master to bring us to Christ and when we come to Christ and he writes the law in our hearts and we want to do what is right, it is out of gratitude. The only obedience God will accept is the obedience of gratitude. He will not accept any other. Whatever is not of faith is sin. And so I will leave with you this thought that the story in giving us the beginning of miracles of the Son of God is making an obvious contrast with the first miracle by him who symbolized the law. Moses had to die before the people got to the promised land; law can't take us in. Joshua took them in. That's the same name as Jesus! Moses brings blood; Jesus brings wine... a symbol of gladness. It was not intoxicating wine. Isaiah 65 talks about wine in the cluster, destroy it not there is a blessing in it. Christ was not there to give them a drunken spree. In his time there were hundreds of types of wine. Most common type was evaporation of the grape juice until it became a jam and then sealing it with a wax and when they had their great festivals they would take off the wax and they had water. That was a non-intoxicating wine. Other wine had a very low alcoholic content and it was safer to drink that than water in some places. That's why in Europe intoxicating drinks are often used because the water was unsafe. But what our Lord made was a symbol of his blood. Moses turned water to blood and Jesus has that in mind when he gives the cup of blessing which points forward to his blood instead of ours being shed that we might have the wine of joy...knowing that God is for us, that he had dealt with our sins and now there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ. We can sing and rejoice and be glad all of which is symbolized by the wine.