



## THE FIRST MIRACLE

### Course 4, *The Promised One*, Lesson 5

The Problem: For centuries, theologians and pastors have debated the merits of the contemplative religious life versus the active, social religious life. Throughout Christian history, there have been individuals who believed that holiness could only be achieved through seclusion. They argued that pursuing holiness required withdrawing from social relationships, including marriage and family, and dedicating oneself entirely to prayer, fasting, study, and meditation. During the Middle Ages, monasticism was regarded by many as a higher calling, a way of life considered more spiritually pure than the typical human experience. While marriage was not viewed as sinful, it was often seen as a lesser good, with celibacy and virginity being exalted as closer to the divine ideal of spiritual sanctity.

The Renaissance and the Reformation (14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries) did much to change people's attitudes towards the religious life of isolation and contemplation. The Reformers married and encouraged others to do the same. They mingled with people in a spirit of brotherly and sisterly concern, showing respect for the common duties of everyday life.

Still today there are many of various religious persuasions around the world who see the everyday world of business and social interaction as a stumbling block to religious life. So they shut themselves away from the world and devote their lives to contemplation and prayer. There are others who marry and have families, but who have as little contact as possible with the world around them. They feel that mankind is evil, and the surest way to preserve purity is to associate as little as possible with the general run of humanity.

What was Jesus' attitude? Did He enter into social situations and mingle among people whose religious commitment was different from His? Did He relate to people with known bad reputations? Did He hold Himself aloof from any person whose class, color, or creed was different from His own? What was His attitude toward marriage? Did He think marriage was not quite as holy as celibacy or virginity?

In this lesson, we will turn to the life and teaching of Jesus for the answers to these questions

#### Objectives:

- I. We study Jesus' social life to determine His attitude toward people, their interests, and their problems.
- II. We note Jesus' attitude to His mother and her special concerns.
- III. We consider Jesus' miracle at the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee.
- IV. We ask why Jesus performed that miracle. What was the symbolism involved?
- V. We consider Jesus' teachings on marriage. Is marriage an inferior way of life for a Christian? What does the New Testament teach about this subject?

#### I. THE SOCIAL LIFE OF JESUS

There are many examples in the Gospel story of Jesus mingling freely with people in various social settings. He did not hold Himself aloof because the host's reputation might not have been satisfactory.

#### The Word:

1. What kind of ceremony and celebration did Jesus attend at Cana of Galilee? John 2:1-2
2. Give four other examples of Jesus as a guest in people's homes.

- a. Matthew 9:9-10
- b. Luke 7:36-50
- c. Luke 10:38-42
- d. Luke 19:1-7

3. How did Jesus defend His practice of associating with sinful people? Matthew 9:11-15; 11:18-19

Explanation: Jesus' willingness to accept invitations to social gatherings proves that He had no desire to exclude Himself from human society. He honored marriage by His presence at the marriage in Cana, and He honored many other people by His willingness to accept their hospitality. The fact that some of His hosts and hostesses were reputed to be of poor character, made no difference at all. Jesus came to save sinners, and He associated with them without in any way losing His divine purity and dignity. His presence was much appreciated, as the many invitations extended to Him testify.

When criticized for mingling in a social way with sinners, Jesus emphasized the vital point that such people are more likely to be saved by personal friendship than by Pharisaical aloofness. He never tried to preserve His ecclesiastical image or status by holding Himself away from people.

Relevance: Jesus taught us by example that the world of people is our place of service. We benefit others more by working for them and with them than we do by shutting ourselves away from them and only praying for them. Prayer works miracles, but our prayers for others can often be answered by the personal service we render them.

## II. JESUS' ATTITUDE TO HIS MOTHER

A man's character is often revealed by his relationship with his mother. And his concern for others is very often directly related to his concern for his mother. Human affection and relationships were very important to Jesus. He did not cut Himself off from family and friends as a means of preserving His holiness. He loved and served family and friends as evidence of His holiness.

The Word:

- 4. How did Mary manifest her faith in Jesus when the wine at the wedding feast ran out? John 2:3
- 5. How did Jesus answer her? John 2:4
- 6. What did Mary instruct the servants to do? John 2:5
- 7. How did Jesus reveal His love and concern for His mother a short time before His death? John 19:25-27

Explanation: Undoubtedly by the time of the marriage in Cana, Mary had heard from the group of young disciples, who were with Jesus, that they accepted Him as the long-expected Messiah. She was proud and would naturally want Him to work a miracle as evidence to everyone that He was the Christ. Jesus' answer was not at all disrespectful, even though to our ears it may sound that way. To address her as "Woman" was a customary, respectful semantic form of address. Compare John 19:26. Jesus had been a loving, obedient son for 30 years. He was the living example of His own command that parents should be honored. See Exodus 20:12.

The next phrase translates literally from the Greek: "*What to you and to me?*" It was a mild rebuke, suggesting that Mary had shown interest in something that did not concern her. Mary was honored as His mother, but it was important for her now to understand that His work as the Messiah was under the direction of heaven. Mothers tend to retain their natural maternal desire to direct their grown sons. Jesus gently reminded her of her new relationship with Him as the Son of God.

Jesus added, "*Mine hour is not yet come*" John 2:4. Evidently Mary wanted Jesus to proclaim Himself the Messiah. It would also have been quite natural for her to cherish the popular hope that the Messiah would restore Jewish

independence from the Romans and establish Himself as King in Jerusalem. Jesus' hour did not come until late in His ministry. Only then did He allow Himself to be publicly proclaimed as the Messiah. See Matthew 21:1-9. The crucifixion followed shortly after. At the time of the last supper Jesus announced, "*My time is at hand*" Matthew 26:18; compare John 12:23; 13:1; 17:1. His hour of glory involved laying down His life for the sins of the world, not becoming the king in Jerusalem.

Jesus' statement to Mary did not discourage her. She urged the servants to follow His instructions. Such was her faith in Him. Jesus rewarded her faith and manifested His love and respect for her. One of His last thoughts was for her, as the tender story recorded in John 19:25-27 indicates.

Relevance: Jesus honored His mother, even when He could not agree with all her attitudes. There is a real blessing in following His example and honoring our parents.

### III. JESUS' MIRACLE AT THE WEDDING FEAST

Jesus' concern for the happiness of the young couple, and the pleasure and comfort of their guests, as well as His respect for His mother's wishes, led Him to work a miracle at the wedding feast.

The Word:

8. How many stone waterpots were standing nearby? What was the capacity of each pot? John 2:6
9. What did Jesus instruct the servants to do? John 2:7
10. What happened to the water? John 2:8-10

Explanation: The six stone waterpots standing nearby each had a capacity of 2 or 3 firkins. A firkin was about 5.81 U.S. gallons. So each jar held about 14.5 gallons. All six contained about 87 gallons, or an amount nearly equal to the capacity of two 45-gallon drums.

Jesus commanded that the jars be filled with water. Human effort must combine with divine power for results to be achieved. God will not do for us that which He has given us the capacity to do for ourselves. When poured out, the liquid was not water but wine. It was the pure juice of the grape, not an alcoholic beverage, Jesus acted consistently with the counsel He had given on the question of wine. See Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-32; compare Isaiah 65:8; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19.

Relevance: Jesus would not turn stones into bread to satisfy His own hunger in the wilderness of temptation. But He willingly provided a little additional happiness for the bride and groom and their wedding guests. God is like that! He is loving and understanding. Not all of God's blessings are meant to rescue us from dire circumstances. Many are simply gifts meant to add a touch of joy and happiness to our lives. By focusing on your blessings instead of dwelling on what you lack, you may discover the benefits of a heart full of gratitude and be wonderfully surprised at just how much God has blessed.

### IV. THE SYMBOLISM INVOLVED IN JESUS' FIRST MIRACLE

Jesus' miracles were all designed to teach spiritual lessons. A number of times in the Gospels the verb "to save" is used when one of Jesus' healing miracles is being described. When Jesus healed, He saved. The healing of the body simply illustrated His power to save the soul from sin. So also in the miracle at Cana, a special spiritual message was taught by the miracle of the water and the wine.

The Word:

11. What is represented by pure water in the New Testament? John 3:5; 4:10-15; 7:38. Compare Ephesians 5:26; Hebrews 10:22; Revelation 7:17; 21:6.
12. What does wine represent? Matthew 9:17; 26:27-28. Compare Isaiah 1:21-22.

Explanation: The water with which Jesus instructed the servants to fill the jars represents the water of life. It is ours when we believe in Jesus Christ. The waters of baptism symbolize the inner spiritual washing that we experience when we give our lives to Christ. The wine is a symbol of Christ's shed blood, because of which we can be filled with His righteousness. The new wine, of which Jesus spoke (Matthew 9:17), represents the new experience of righteousness in Him that we enjoy when we have drunk of the water of life. We receive His life by the Holy Spirit, and He becomes righteousness in our hearts. See Romans 8:9-10; Titus 3:5-7. Thus, Jesus' miracle illustrated the cleansing of the soul from sin, and the infilling of His righteousness by the Holy Spirit.

Relevance: The only righteousness (wine) that is acceptable to God is that given to us by Jesus. All our righteousness is, in fact, unrighteousness (Isaiah 64:6). But Jesus' righteousness is perfect and thoroughly acceptable to God. The best wine at the wedding feast came last. Just so, the best experience possible to us often comes only after we have tried the inferior substitutes. There is no substitute for the indwelling righteousness of Christ.

#### V. DID JESUS BELIEVE IN MARRIAGE?

Jesus did not marry Himself, but He demonstrated His divine approval of the marriage relation by the blessing that He poured upon the young couple at the marriage in Cana of Galilee.

The Word:

13. Where was the marriage relation first instituted? Genesis 2:18, 21-24.
14. What did Jesus inspire the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews to say about marriage? Hebrews 13:4.
15. What illustration does Paul use of Christ's relationship with His church? Ephesians 5:25-29.
16. When the saints are married to Christ what kind of people are they? Revelation 19:7-8.

Explanation: Marriage was instituted by God in Eden and is still just as beautiful and honorable today as it was then (Hebrews 13:4). Christ is represented in Scripture as the heavenly Bridegroom, and His people are His bride. When we are married to Christ, we are filled with His righteousness by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The sacred relationship between a husband and wife is a beautiful illustration of Christ's spiritual relationship with His people.

There is nothing in Scripture to suggest that celibacy or virginity is superior to the marital relationship. Peter was a married man (Mark 1:30), and Paul asserted his right to marry, even though he remained single (1 Corinthians 9:5). Paul instructed that bishops and deacons should be married men (1 Timothy 3:2, 12). His instruction in 1 Corinthians 7, that in view of the "present distress" (verse 26), and the shortness of the time (verse 29), it would be better for Christian believers to remain single, was not given because the unmarried state is more holy than the married state. Paul saw marriage as hindering the worker for God, confronted as he was by numerous difficulties, challenges, and persecutions. If Paul, as a traveling evangelist, had been a married man, life would have been very difficult for his wife. In fact, he exalts the purity and sacredness of the marriage relationship in his opening remarks in 1 Corinthians 7, verses 1 - 5.

Jesus never married because of His special work as the Messiah, which was to be cut short when He was only 33 years of age. As the Deity, Jesus stood in a very special relationship with humanity as a whole. The overall teaching of Scripture, which is Christ's own Word to us, is that marriage is a sacred relationship that He has provided for the happiness and fulfillment of His people.

Relevance: When marriage is entered into by a man and a woman who are totally committed to Christ, home life can be a little heaven on earth. The reason for the tragedy and break-up of marriage is that Christ has not been permitted to control the life of one or both marital partners.

The most important and fulfilling marriage is our union with Christ. When He indwells and controls your heart by the Holy Spirit you have peace and joy. See Ephesians 3:16-19. Jesus wanted the young couple at Cana of Galilee and all their guests to be filled with His righteousness. That is why he illustrated that experience by turning the water into wine.

You also may be filled with His love and righteousness. If you trust Him as Mary did, He will work a miracle in your heart, and you will *“know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge”* Ephesians 3:19.

Will you receive Christ’s gift just now?

#### *Review Questions*

1. True or False
  - a. Jesus was a recluse.
  - b. Jesus’ mother had the power to take command of His work.
  - c. Jesus worked the miracle at Cana to illustrate a spiritual truth.
2. Discuss: The phrase, 'No man is an island,' resonates deeply with biblical principles. God calls us to engage with others, serving and working for their good, while remaining distinct in our values—living in the world, yet not being of the world. See John 17:15-16.

Further study: Ellen G. White, [The Desire of Ages](#), pp.144-153.