

William Carey University

Hattiesburg, Mississippi, USA

Sermon Preached in the University Chapel

Delivered on 18 November 2015

By Dipankar Haldar¹

Greetings and Thanks

Warm and hearty greetings to each of you of this prestigious William Carey University in the matchless name of our Lord Jesus Christ, on behalf of me, my Principal, Professors, staff and students of Serampore College (University), which was founded by William Carey nearly 200 years ago! I take this opportunity to sincerely thank William Carey University's President, Executive Vice President, Four Vice Presidents, Deans, Professors, all supporting Staff and all students for making my stay at William Carey University, Mississippi, a life-long and memorable experience with the best of hospitality, cordiality and Christ's love. In that sense, I esteem William Carey University of Mississippi as a unique, awesome and unparalleled one in the world. I congratulate the University Choir for singing just now so beautifully a Bengali song composed by William Carey. I thank Dr. Caldwell and concerned authorities of the University for offering me this rare privilege to share from God's word in this Wednesday's morning devotion.

Introduction

For our spiritual nourishment this morning, I want to take you two thousand years back to a grand wedding feast at the village of Cana in Galilee where Jesus for the first time in his life gave the best and the most tasteful wine to the guests who were invited. The theme for our reflection is "Fill the Jars with Water." I think most of you are very familiar with this incident of Jesus' turning water into wine at Cana of Galilee. It is always a very difficult task to preach on a familiar passage. Once I had a difficult time preaching on the same text. About twenty years ago I was Associate Pastor of an English congregation in Kolkata. Every Sunday I used to prepare my sermon with lots of preparation. One Sunday I had to preach on this text. While preaching I tried to explain even about the type of weather and soil in Galilee though I never visited that place. At the end of the sermon I thought I did quite a good job. People listened to the sermon attentively and I noticed a white young man sitting on the front bench and listening to me very carefully. At the end of the service I as usual stood at the exit gate to say hello to all who came to the service. Lastly that young foreigner came and I curiously asked him, "Where do you come from, my friend?" He replied, "I am from Galilee." I was little bewildered. Then I tried to be over smart saying within myself that Galilee is a vast place and I talked about Cana which is a small town, which he may not notice. So I asked again, "which part of Galilee are you from?" He answered, "I am from Cana." I was shocked and I asked, "how far is the wedding place I talked about?" He said, "Very near from my house." I was stammering and then I said, "My friend, if I knew that you are from Cana itself, I would have asked you to preach today." Then I asked him, "Did I say anything wrong in my

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sermon?” He replied, “No.” But to my surprise he told me that he did not believe many of the things written about Jesus. He said he was a Jew. Today, in this congregation, I hope here there is no one from Galilee or Cana. Of course, I am not much afraid now because God gave me an opportunity to visit Galilee and Cana in 2012. Let us enter into the text.

Wedding Banquet according to Jesus

Jesus in his conversations compared the wedding banquet with the heavenly joy and fellowship. While talking about things of the future heavenly glory Jesus used to tell parables of the wedding banquet. So, Jesus compared the situation of the wedding banquet with some of the experiences in heaven. Because in a wedding, people experience lots of happiness, joys of being united with near and dear ones, feasting and satisfaction. But the wedding at Cana was not so. Jesus, his mother and disciples were invited in that wedding because Jesus was probably a close relative of that family. This wedding was found to be with lots of deficits and problems. But because of time limitation I will be dealing with only one deficit and problem and its wonderful solution by our Lord Jesus Christ. When the feasting and rejoicing were going on, suddenly there came a serious problem. The mother of Jesus who was already in-charge of the store reported to Jesus saying, “They have no wine.” In Palestinian context, wine must have been one of the most important items of a marriage feast. So, without wine in the middle of the feast, the Master of the wedding banquet would have been thrown into a very embarrassing and shameful situation. But the Master of the banquet was very fortunate that Jesus who came as the Saviour of the world, the redeemer, the perfecter and the great provider, was quietly present there. After his mother’s pleading, Jesus gave his maiden order to mark the beginning of his ministry. The order was, “Fill the jars with water.” We will meditate on this very powerful order in and through four points.

Firstly: “Fill the jars with water” indicates that those jars standing there were empty. And filling those empty and dry jars with water signifies filling them with life. Water stands for life. And this was the sole purpose of Jesus’ coming. Jesus said, in John 10: 10, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” Jesus also said in John 4: 14, “Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty and this water will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”

Secondly: It is written that the servants filled the jars up to the brim with water. Servants immediately filling those empty jars with water mean – obeying Jesus, following Jesus, trusting Jesus and filling their lives with the eternal life offered by Jesus. This is the best part of this miracle or sign. If the servants would not fill the jars with water, people present there would not be able to see the miracle or the sign. To see a miracle and change in our life, we need to obey Jesus word by word, trust Jesus at every moment, follow his order at every step and fill our lives with his eternal life which he has offered to us. Luke 1: 53 says, “He has lifted up the lowly, he has filled the hungry and thirsty with good things.” So, today wherever we are, sometimes like empty, dry, sorrowful, lifeless, aimless, powerless and purposeless jars, let us fill our empty jar like lives with the eternal life offered by Jesus.

Thirdly: When Jesus said, “Now draw some (water) out, and take it to the chief steward” what could he mean? Jesus could mean that he was asking us to pour out that eternal life which we received from him and show it to others. This indeed is a Gospel command. Jesus expects us not to keep our joyful experiences in tight secret within us. If we do that, we are shy of sharing the Good News to others. We are not obeying and following Jesus’ command. As we fill our lives with the eternal life of Jesus, we also need to pour out or take some out for sharing and testifying

to others, be it chief officials or ordinary people. Testifying to others is as important as enjoying ourselves.

Fourthly: When that water of life was shared, there was the actual realization of the miracle and transformation that took place. As the transformation was realized there was great joy and excitement. This part is also important as well. The proper acknowledgement of God's grace with proper thanksgiving and testimony is necessary in our lives. The chief steward shouted out and testified saying, "Everyone serves good wine first and then the inferior. But you have kept the good wine until now." This is something like acknowledging the grace of God through Jesus Christ who solved the problem. This is like thanksgiving with praise and worship and glorifying God for all the wonderful things we received in our lives.

In conclusion, I would say, according to Jesus' promise, here also we find that the water is gushing up to eternal life. Jesus himself is life and eternal life. If we accept him and follow him day by day, we shall be gushing out and pouring out with the abundance of his life. Jesus died and he rose again for you and me. Even today He lives and because He lives we also can live and face all hopes and joys of tomorrow! Let us invite Jesus in our lives as our Saviour and Redeemer and all our problems will be solved by Him. Our lives will become the most tasteful ones which will be testified by others. May God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit bless every one of us through this sharing. **Amen.**