

GOOD WINE

A SERMON

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“And his disciples believed on him.” John 2:11

I SHALL this morning preach, not exactly from the text; not that I intend preaching more than once from this text; yet I shall rather this morning dwell upon the occasion referred to in our text than upon the words of the text itself; for I myself have had, I hope, a little encouragement from the circumstances, upon which our text is based; and the apostle says, that “we comfort others with the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” My chief business, therefore, this morning will be to try to point out to you that which encouraged the disciples; that which renewed their faith; that which strengthened their hearts, that which lightened their eyes, that which endeared the Savior, that which was subservient to the revelation of an increased degree of glory unto them. That shall be my focus this morning; and may it be said of us when we retire this morning from the house of prayer that we do believe in him, and that we are sure not only that he is the Christ of God, but that he died for us, that God is our God; for it is a great thing when we can get so far as that. But still I know we can come into that spirit of relationship only by the spirit of adoption; we can never cry Abba Father, except by the power of the Holy Ghost; for it is as much the work of God to stop a sinner from calling himself a Christian when he is not a Christian as it is the work of God to enable the Christian to realize his interest in eternal things, and to speak with confidence when he can do so.

In setting before you this morning that which encouraged the disciples, I shall of course take the whole range of the circumstances; and in so doing, notice the following four things; first, *we have here illustrated the truth, “Them that honor me I will honor”* secondly, *the defense of the disciples;* and third, *a gospel order of things suggested;* and, fourth, this one truth among the rest brought before us, *that there is not anything too hard for the Lord.*

First. Now the first thing I notice, in this circumstance that encouraged the disciples was the fulfilment of the words, “Them that honor me I will honor.” There was a marriage, we read, in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there. It is quite possible, and probable, and indeed we may be pretty sure, that she had spoken pretty highly of the Lord Jesus Christ; and this perhaps induced the bridegroom, and the bride to call Jesus to the marriage; and so, Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. Now the first thing I notice here then is, “Them that honor me I will honor.” And what was the honor here? Why, the honor was simply this, that if the Lord be with

them, they shall not lack any good thing; their needs are sure to be supplied; only of course the Lord is the proper Judge as to what our real needs are. Now as to the way in which he in this case supplied their needs, that will come in as we go along, when we get on farther with our subject; I simply dwell here for a moment or two upon the fact of honoring the Lord by wishing him to be present. Jesus was called, and his disciples, unto the marriage. So that where the Lord Jesus Christ is, our needs are sure to be supplied. Now I have said that the mother of Jesus being there, no doubt so spoke of him that they wished him to be present. What an infinite mercy it is, friends, that he who is made to desire the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, he who is made to seek the Lord Jesus Christ, he who becomes a seeker of the Savior and wishes the Savior to be with him, that that man shall not be denied the desire of his heart, he shall not be denied that which he seeks. Hence, said the angel to the honorable women, "Fear not; for I know that you seek Jesus, which was crucified." And what shall we understand by this wonderful Person? It is a Person that meets us in our necessities, it matters not at all what those necessities are. I dare not branch out in this part to enlarge upon these necessities; just a word or two. Now the very circumstance of a sinner in the scriptural sense seeking the Lord Jesus Christ proves that there is life in the soul; because this is the very name which is first given in the opening up of the New Testament, and as you are aware signifies a Savior. Here then is the sinner; and above all what he wants is the forgiveness of sins; here is a lost sinner, and that which above all he wants is the salvation of his soul; here is a condemned sinner, and that which above all things he wants is exemption from that condemnation; here is a helpless sinner, and that which above all he wants is that help that shall enable him to have access to God, that help that shall enable him to escape the wrath to come. Now this seeking Jesus, and this longing for him, this is the way to God; for there is no other way to God but this; and if we are blessed with these desires and can receive the testimony that is given of Jesus Christ, that he came into the world to save sinners; he has said, "Him that comes unto me I will in no way cast out." If Jesus then did not refuse to go here to the marriage; to grace, shall I say, and favor this marriage with his presence; if he complied with that, how much less will he reject the desire, the cry, the longing of the soul that is seeking for eternal salvation by him? Only, as I have said, it is one thing to seek him un-scripturally, and another thing to seek him scripturally. Perhaps you will say, where is the difference between the two? The difference lies here, the Pharisee certainly sought God as well as the Publican; but you must see what a very great difference there was in spirit between the two men. The one sought God in order to boast before God of what he had done; the one did not seek God in order to obtain mercy, and a supply of his needs; but the other did. There was therefore, a mighty difference between the two. And so, you find at the head of the 15th of Luke that "the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, this man receives sinners, and eats with them;" but the publicans and sinners came near to hear him. So that those three beautiful parables which he there sets forth all belong to those poor sinners. It is one thing, therefore, to seek the Lord scripturally, and another thing to seek him un-scripturally. I have often thought what a mercy it is that those sins and those weaknesses of which those who are taught of God are conscious they are the subjects, which have a tendency to sink them into despair, and make them tremble at God's holiness, and righteousness, and perfection; I say, what a mercy it is that so far from these being any denial, they are as so many, I hope I shall not be misunderstood when I say it, but they are as so many qualifications for the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not the clean that needs the fountain, but the unclean; it is not the righteous that needs the righteousness of Jesus Christ, but the unrighteous; it is not the whole that needs the physician, but the sick; it is not the full that needs the fullness of Christ, but the empty; it is not the man who can come to God when he pleases that needs the Savior as the great Surety to bring him before God, but the man who feels his need of him. Now then, my

hearer, if we can say that we wish this Jesus Christ, and God the Father by him, in his eternal love and counsels, to dwell in our houses, or rather closer than that, to dwell in our hearts, he will not say no to us; But then observe, his disciples were called also; so that this seems very beautifully to throw a light upon the spirit in which the Savior was thus called; he and his disciples were not separated. You may depend upon it, if we belong to the Lord, if we possess the Spirit of God, we shall not separate Christ and his disciples; that is, those who are his, they will be manifestly ours. I was struck the other day with the Savior's words upon this very subject, when he says, "All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I am glorified in them;" "All mines are yours." I tried to put myself, as it were, in the Savior's place in a certain sense there; I thought within myself, those that belong to God the Father in eternal election, are they mine? Can I say of these lovers of eternal election that they are mine, that they are my people, that I have a union of soul to them? "Your people shall be my people." Can I say that those who are included and secured, in the bond of an eternal covenant, they are mine? Can I say of those that are constituted complete in Christ, they are mine? Can I say of those whose sins were by the Father imputed to Christ and Christ's work imputed to them, and they by the Father ordained to eternal life, can I say that that people are mine, that I feel a oneness with them? Ah, then I may in the scriptural sense of the word say, "All yours are mine." But suppose I dislike such a people; suppose I am at enmity against such a people; suppose I prefer some other people, and object to these people; then I cannot scripturally say, "All yours are mine." This matter then, my friends, of oneness of mind with the true disciples of Christ, as well as with Christ himself, certainly is a very important matter. I cannot myself, and never could, come into what is called a kind of duty love to the brethren. So, and so is a good man, and you ought to love him, and deal with him as such. Well, I can tell you this upon this matter, that I never did receive n person yet as belonging to God only just as they are made manifest to my conscience. They must give me some reason for the hope that is in them; they must tell me something about the way in which they found out that they were sinners, and something about the way in which the Lord was pleased to manifest his mercy to them. If they can give me no account of this humbling work, this breaking down, this pulling to pieces work, and this scattering work, this soul trouble work; and can give me no account of how the first ray of hope came into their souls, can give me no account of how the first manifestation of mercy to their souls raised them up; then how am I to have a union of soul with them? There is a man who is a child of God, and he stands manifested to my conscience as such. Well, that man has an old man as well as a new; and circumstances may be so that he may treat me most barbarously, most shamefully, most unchristianly, most unjustifiably, and most un-scripturally. I have seen this among the people of God, treating each other in this way. There comes another man, who is not manifest to my conscience as a good man; that man treats me kindly, that man treats me more like a Christian than the real Christian does; that man does everything he can for my comfort, and shows every possible feeling of friendship to me; but not-withstanding all this, I cannot put one in the place of the other. Now which is the good man of these two? Which is the real Christian of these two? I must still say though it may seem paradoxical to some, that that man notwithstanding all his inconsistent conduct towards me, is a good man; and the other, notwithstanding all his kindness to me, I cannot see in him the grace of God; I can see in him a noble spirit, I can see in him a great deal that I admire; and what the one has done is almost enough to make me reject him, and what the other has done seems almost enough to make me try and flatter myself into the notion that he is a Christian. Ah, that is a very awkward position to be put in; but I have been in it, and no doubt some of you have as well. Now I mention this just to show that while we can distinguish between good and bad in all people, still there is no excellency can constitute a man a real Christian, nothing he can do,

unless he can give some account of the work of grace in his heart; and on the other hand, notwithstanding the wrong doings of those who are Christians, they still remain Christians. I do believe that when one Christian treats another Christian unbecomingly and unkindly, I believe it will come back sooner or later, more or less, upon him; for after all, notwithstanding the hard speeches on the tongue, there is a union of soul; and where that union of soul is once formed, it is not easily severed. Jesus Christ then and his disciples are one; and no real, no vital, separation can ever take place. But coming back from this digression, keeping to the point that if our souls are set on the Lord Jesus Christ, if we can say with the apostle that we desire to know him, and the power of his resurrection, then the scriptures are everywhere encouraging. This is one circumstance, then by which the disciples were led to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. "Fear not for I know that you seek Jesus,"

Second: And then I think the next idea in this circumstance is that of DEFENDING THE DISCIPLES. The mother of Jesus said unto him, they have no wine; and we see the way in which he supplied them. And I think that one reason why he supplied them was for the defense of his disciples; for you may depend upon this one thing, that if the Lord had not thus supplied them, there were persons there that would have thrown the blame of there being no wine upon the disciples; they would have said, These men have drunk it all, depend upon it; you know what the rulers and chief priests have said, and what the current and common report is, that the Master is a wine-bibber (i.e. an alcoholic); and if the disciples had not been here, there would have been plenty of wine; they have drunk it all up. You may depend upon it; this accusation would have fallen upon them. I think, therefore, as the Savior was there, one reason why he turned the water into wine was to defend his disciples; it may not have been so, but I am inclined to think it was. You are aware that the scriptures set before us plenty of instances where the ungodly world blame the people of God for things instead of blaming themselves. Hence, I have no doubt that the ungodly world would, if they could, have got at Noah, have blamed him for the world being drowned; but it was not Noah's fault, but theirs. It is very likely that the cities of the plain would have blamed Lot for the cities being burned; but it was not Lot's fault, it was their fault, their own sins. And hence it was that Ahab blamed Elijah for the famine, "Are you he that troubles Israel?" But it was not Elijah's fault, it was the wickedness of Ahab that brought the famine. And so in the Savior's day, the Jews were so perverted and deluded that they actually thought it was the fault of Jesus Christ that they were not yet freed from the Romans; they thought that if they put this Jesus Christ out of the way, they should do God such a great service that he would then appear for them, and everything would go well. This is the way I understand that prophecy of Caiaphas, "You know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spoke he not of himself, but being high priest that year." Mind, we are not to understand that Caiaphas meant that Christ should die in that sense in which he did die; but his idea was this, this Jesus of Nazareth has introduced a new religion, and he is so opposed to the laws and customs of Moses, that he is setting up a system of such dreadful rebellion against God, of such awful sin against God, that if we let this go on, the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation; whereas, if you put him out of the way, and get rid of him, then all the children of God, meaning the Israelites after the flesh, shall be gathered together into one nation, and we shall all do well. Depend upon it, the reason we are so oppressed by the Romans, and the reason we have not more freedom, is because we tolerate this Jesus Christ. And they, therefore, thought that in putting him to death they did God service. Hence, Saul, or rather the apostle Paul, tells us that when he was in a state of nature, from what he had heard concerning

Christ, he thought that he truly ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus. And that which the people thought in that day concerning Christ is now transferred to his truth and to his people. I know a minister, I could mention his name, which I will not do, that in private conversation a little time ago, said he believed those hypens really ought to be put down; if there were any sect that the law of the Land ought to put down, it was those hypens. So that really there are people now who think that if they could get rid of eternal election, or stop every one's mouth that speaks about it, they would do God service, if they could get rid of the great truth, that the Lord Christ laid down his life for the sheep, and for the sheep only; if they could get rid of that, and substitute for it something more congenial to the taste of the world; if they could get rid of the great truth of a covenant ordered in all things and sure; then, say they, we should be in a fair way of bringing about universal conversion. And I know other ministers too, and very public men, that have said that the evangelization, or conversion, of the world will never be complete all the time these hypens are in it; and until we preach down, and write down, and reproach and revile down, and get rid of those dreadful doctrines, and get rid of those hypens we can never evangelize the world; and, therefore, the reason we do not get on is because those hypens are in the way. And thus, in all ages the people of God have been in the way. But did the Jews save their nation by crucifying Jesus Christ? Did not that step which they took to save their nation, become with awful certainty its destruction? Were they not given up to that very power which they thought by putting Christ out of the way they should escape? And so now, my hearer, if you took every real high-doctrine preacher out of this country, where would old England be? Look at your Church of England; why, it is becoming like the Roman Catholics as fast as it can be; and there are classes among Dissenters that are getting parts of their services chanted; why, they are all by degrees leaning that way; and we have dissolving views, and lectures, and I don't know what all, now in places of worship, in order to attract notice, and to gain the attention of the people. Ah, my hearers, all these things savor not of God, but of men; all these things are from beneath, and if the truth were now driven out of this country, you know what I mean by the truth, I venture to say before this day twenty years, and that is a very short time, they would all amalgamate, and go down into the traditions of men; and I would not give three straws for old England; I believe that in fifty, sixty, or one hundred years' time, the foreign countries that are now trembling at us, would come and destroy us with perfect ease. But all the time we have the truth in our country, and all the time we have a people in this land that are determined to stand out for that truth, God will make this land a terror to the nations around. What was it made Abraham a terror to those around? It was because the living God was with him; Abraham held fast the truth, and carried it with him wherever he went; so that wherever he went he was safe, because Jehovah was with him. What made Abimelech with his army so afraid of Isaac, and half-a-dozen men with him? what made him treat him with such respect? Because Isaac was a possessor of the truth; Jesus was with him, the everlasting God was with him and God therefore, made that solitary man a terror to those around. And what was it that kept Laban from injuring Jacob? What was it that turned Esau from a lion into a lamb? Jacob possessed the truth, held fast the truth, and the Lord was with him. And what carried Joseph with such glory through all his troubles to that destiny which God had designed? It was because the truth was with him. Yes, my hearers, what is it that has given the 11th of Hebrews, with the heroic and wonderful deeds therein recorded? It is simply the blessed fact that they were men of truth. I should think that the Lord performed this miracle to defend his disciples; and I know he does defend his disciples. Well, but, say you, he cannot defend them in all things. I know that. The Lord will defend his disciples, or justify them, in what he can; but they have their faults; and there are some things in which he cannot justify them. What can he do then? Why, he has a

means, an ample means, by which that which he cannot justify them in, he will justify them from, and defend them with as much certainty from what he cannot justify them in, as he defends them where he can justify them. There is on the Christian's side the eternal perfection of Christ, the eternal righteousness of Christ; and while the world beholds hardly anything in the Christian but sin, the Lord will not behold iniquity in Jacob, nor see perverseness in Israel. The Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. The next thing by which their faith would be encouraged was the certainty of their need being supplied. We know not, friends, what may take place between this and a dying hour; but here is the assurance, the Lord will supply us. As the Savior here, where he was welcome, supplied the need at the marriage feast, much more will he supply the necessities of our souls, as well as the necessities of our bodies.

Third. But the third point is that of an ORDER OF THINGS SUGGESTED. When this wine was taken to the governor of the feast, he did not know where it came from; so, he said, "Every man at the beginning does set forth good wine; but when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but you have kept the good wine until now." There are no less, I think, than four things suggested in this circumstance. The first is that of substitution, "Men set forth that which is good, but you have kept the good wine until now." as though he should say, the other was very good, I thought it was very good, but now I have tasted this, the other won't do at all. Well, now, friends, when I was first concerned about eternal things, I had a little Church of England wine; I drank out of the Prayer Book, and said a great many prayers, and I thought it was very good; but I found that that would not do. Well, then I drank some Wesleyan wine; that was rather better. I used to go to Wesleyan meetings; I got up at six o'clock on Sunday morning, and was very busy all day long attending half-a-dozen services in the day. Well, I thought, this is very good; I shall be better now. But still somehow or another, I remained heavy-hearted, could not be cheerful; I tried everything; I had three round me all praying at once; but I could not get a drop of comfort. Well, at last they said, You won't believe. I said, I do believe: I believe I am a sinner, and that Jesus Christ died for sinners; but if you gave me a thousand worlds, I could not believe that he would save me. Well, they got out of patience with me at last, and said, if I would not believe, then I must be lost. Then I came to a duty-faith Gospel, what they call a Calvinist. Well, I thought, that will do very nicely; a little election, here, a little predestination there, mixed up with a great deal of universal exhortation and suchlike. But I found that that would not do either. By and bye the Lord brought home with power divine to my soul that never, never, to all eternity, to be forgotten verse, "In a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you, says the Lord your Redeemer." Ah, the peace that flowed into my soul; the light that came into my mind, the cheerfulness that came into my heart; then I was refreshed like a giant with new wine; then I cared nothing for my sins, because they were all gone; I cared not for Satan, he was put down; I cared nothing for the troubles of life, I saw they were all 'shadows'; I cared not for death; I could say, come welcome death, I will gladly go with you; I could look through the vista of time into the attractive fields and wide spread glories of eternity, and seem to be there; and was more happy than language can describe. Thus then, the first idea is that of substitution; substituting the living truth of God for the inventions of man. Then the next idea is that of contrast. "You have kept the good wine until now." That is the order of God's dealings with his people; he gives his Lazarus all the worst first, and then keeps nothing but that which is good at the last; Death is the last unpleasant drop of wine that we have; after that there is no enemy; the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. The world gives its best wine first, and its worst afterwards; but the Lord gives

the worst first, and the best afterwards. There is no real happiness apart from Jesus Christ. As the poet says:

“Tis religion that can give;
Solid pleasure while we live;
Tis religion must supply
Solid comfort when we die.”

Then the next idea intended in this good wine is that of purity. Water was made into wine, there was no harm in it. You don't know what you drink when you drink wine now; I don't know how much strychnine is employed every year; they do make things to suit your taste nicely. Why say you, that's enough to poison one. No doubt about it. What do they care about that, if they get plenty of money? But this wine was made of pure water; here is purity. How nicely that sets forth the pure blood of the grape, how nicely that sets forth the purity of God's truth. And then the fourth idea is that of testimony. The governor of the feast could not help bearing testimony; and perhaps somewhat inadvertently; he hardly perhaps intended to say so much. “You have kept the good wine until now.” Do you know who the author of this is? Well, no; but I know it is the best. Well it is Jesus of Nazareth. Is it? If I had known that, I would not have drunk it. Ah, it's too late now. And so, let a man in legal chains and bonds hear the truth; let me illustrate it by a person coming here; we have had men of that kind. A man came in, a man from the country; he may be here now for what I know; before he left the country, he asked his minister, I am going to London; who would you advise me to hear? “Well first I would caution you who you should not go to hear;” and he mentioned the name of your humble servant. Whatever you do don't go to hear Wells! Well, the man thought I was some curious animal or another, I suppose, and he came; and the word was blessed; and he was glad enough it was not that Wells preaching; Wells could not preach like this from what I have heard of him, I'm sure. Can you tell me who that gentleman was who preached this morning? Mr. Wells, sir. Was it; well, I should not have thought he could preach like that! Ah, it's too late now. So, he says, I shall come again; and he has been here ever since. And so, my hearer, the Lord will sometimes cause a man to taste the pure wine; and he says, is this the gospel that people run against? Is this the Jesus of Nazareth that they say ought to be crucified? Is this the sect every where spoken against? Why, good old John Berridge preached sour wine for a long time, until God brought him into soul trouble, and gave him to taste of the pure wine of the kingdom; and then he was obliged to become as high in doctrine as the rest of us. So it is; men speak against the truth because they do not know the truth.

Fourthly. Then, lastly, this truth is brought before us here, that **THERE IS NOT ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD**. Ah, he can thus turn water into wine, he can sweeten the bitter waters; he can bring water from the flinty rock; he can keep the cruse of oil and the barrel of meal going; he can bring manna; he can feed the multitude; there is not anything too hard for the Lord. Oh, what a precious life is a life of faith in the Lord. Many things you look at, and say, I shall never get over this, and that, and the other; no, that you would not, if it were left to you. You know what Moses said upon this subject to the Israelites; when they came to the sea side, and saw the host of Egyptians in the rear, they were all exceedingly distressed, and said it would have been better they had died in Egypt; Moses answered, “stand still, and see the salvation of God; for the battle is not yours, but the Lord's. The Lord shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.”