

II

When the Wine Runs Out

Remember the famous story of the wedding at Cana of Galilee when the supply of wine ran out? The account is recorded for us in the Gospel of John, chapter 2. I have visited the traditional spot where that miracle took place on at least 15 different occasions. It is one of my favourite stopping places when leading a pilgrimage in the Holy Land, and on that site I have witnessed scores of married couples recommit themselves to God and each other, following the reading and an exposition of that matchless story in John's Gospel.

The account opens with these words: 'There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee ... And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage' (verses 1-2). 'God must love a marriage,' said someone, 'because he makes so much of them in his word, the Bible.' The reason for that, I think, is because marriage teaches us more about the nature of the Almighty than perhaps any other human activity.

The Bible both begins and ends with a marriage. It begins with the account of the marriage of Adam and Eve, and ends with the marriage of the bride (this is generally understood

to mean the church) to Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom. And the very first miracle Jesus wrought was at a marriage in Cana of Galilee, when he saved a young couple from embarrassment after their supply of wine ran out, by miraculously turning water into wine. They were glad, I'm sure, that they remembered to invite Jesus to their wedding!

The most intriguing point in the whole story of the marriage at Cana of Galilee is, to me at least, the fact that before Jesus performed the miracle of producing wine, he first asked the servants to fill the waterpots with water. Why was this necessary to the divine plan? Could not Jesus have produced wine right there and then in those empty water-pots? I think he could have done; but the reason why he did not do so is brought out best, I feel, by C. S. Lewis in his book entitled *Miracles*.

'The Son can do nothing of himself but what he sees the Father do.' That doctrine, as I understand it, is something like this: there is an activity of God displayed through the creation, a wholesale activity which men refuse to recognize. The miracles done by God incarnate, living as a man in Palestine, perform the very same things as this wholesale activity, but at a different speed and on a smaller scale. God creates the vine and teaches it to draw up water by its roots, and with the aid of the sun, turns that water into juice that will ferment and take on certain qualities. Thus every year God turns water into wine. The miracle of Cana of Galilee will have its full effect on us if, whenever we see a vineyard, we remember that here works He who sat at a wedding party in Cana of Galilee.

Here Lewis is pointing out that whenever Christ worked a miracle on earth, he followed the pattern of his Father in heaven, but on a smaller and speeded-up scale. It takes

several seasons for water to become wine by the natural method, but Jesus, by divine power, speeded up the process and produced it in just a moment of time. Lewis also goes on to point out that God, in nature, *begins with what there is* and goes on to increase and multiply it:

Every year God makes a little corn into much corn. The seed is sown and there is an increase. The close-up, the translation of this annual wonder, is the feeding of the five thousand. Bread is not made out of stones, as the devil once suggested to our Lord in vain. A little bread is made into much bread. The Son will do nothing but what he sees the Father do. There is, so to speak, a family style.

So although divine power in Christ could have produced wine in those empty waterpots, our Lord would not do so because it would not be in harmony with the highest laws of the universe. He begins with what is available and proceeds from there to work a most amazing miracle. This, as C. S. Lewis says, is the *family style*.

This insight has particular relevance to what I want to say in this closing chapter, because it may be that in your own marriage, the wine of happiness and true love has run out. You need a miracle. Christ can give you that miracle, but, in doing so, don't expect him to run contrary to the laws of the universe, and suddenly change your feelings and attitudes towards your partner without any effort from yourself. But once, by an action of your will, by commitment and determination, you show God you are willing to do all he asks you, then, and only then, do you position yourself for a miracle. You supply the water and, I promise you, God will turn it into wine.

I am often asked the question: can husbands and wives who have become total strangers ever fall in love again? Is there a way in which a love which has been lost can be re-captured? I believe there is. It is a combination of two things – human effort and divine enabling. Let's look at how it works.

We must begin by examining the three stages of love that are evidenced in human relationships. Richard Strauss in his book *Marriage is for Love* describes these three stages based on the Greek words *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*. *Eros* means sexual love, need love, love that seeks sensual expression. *Philia* means friendship love, companionship love, love that shows concern and care for the other person. *Agape* means unconditional love, self-giving love, love that goes on loving even though the other person becomes unlovable.

Sometimes when I am engaged in counselling a couple prior to marriage I ask them, 'Why do you want to get married to each other?' The usual answer is, 'Because we love each other.' Although it would not be tactful at that stage to ask, 'What type of love – *eros*, *philia* or *agape*?' that is the issue I seek in time to get them to understand. I am convinced that many couples break up because the basis of the 'love' that led to wedding bells was *eros*. And that, in itself, has little staying power. It is interested primarily in what it can get.

It might be helpful now, having introduced you to these three stages of 'love', to look at them in greater detail. *Eros* (as we said) is sexual love, need love, and it is this type of love that, in most cases, leads to marriage. This is not to say that *philia* or *agape* love is not present, but most couples begin their marriage with a preponderance of *eros* love.

LeRoy Koopman, a marriage guidance counsellor, says that eros is:

- the lingering touch of the fingers
- the deep kiss
- candles and music at dinner
- the 'I promise you' wink
- him giving her a see-through negligee for her birthday
- her wearing it for him the same night

Of course, a certain amount of eros love is necessary in order for a marriage to succeed. It provides the motivation for a couple to relate to each other, touch each other, explore each other and to know each other. Some time after a marriage has taken place, however, the eros, or physical excitement phase begins to diminish.

Elaine Walster, a professor of sociology and psychology at the University of Wisconsin, USA, interviewed 100,000 people over a period of 15 years in order to study the differences between 'passionate' and 'compassionate' love. Her studies showed that eros love is short-lived. She claims that for most couples intense passion lasts from six months to about two-and-a-half years. How sad, when eros love diminishes, if there is no philia and agape love to ensure that a marriage functions on a higher level.

Philia love is on a higher plane than eros love because it involves being interested in another person, not for what they can give you, but for what they are. A good word to describe philia love is *companionship*. What is companionship? One writer describes it in this way:

- enjoying each other's company
- reminiscing on the struggles you had to pay your way during the first months and years of marriage

- going shopping together
- sharing breakfast without the morning paper
- turning off the TV to discuss something of mutual interest
 - feeling lonely when your partner is away from home on a business trip
- going for a walk together
- washing and drying the dishes together

Philia is a dynamic word, inferring the deliberate overcoming of those forces that work for separation in a marriage. There is enough eros in most marriages to bring people together for a comparatively brief emotional and physical liaison but, sooner or later, if *philia* love does not ignite, the relationship will grind to a halt.

Agape love is the highest love one can experience in this life or in the life to come. *Agape* is the way God loves. Anders Nygren, a Greek scholar, has drawn up some parallels between eros and *agape* which help us to see the nature and meaning of both. According to Nygren, there are three main aspects of *agape* love:

1. *Agape is spontaneous and unmotivated.* In Christ, there is revealed a divine love which breaks all bounds, refusing to be controlled by the value of its object.
2. *Agape is indifferent to value.* If God, the Holy One, loves the sinner, it cannot be because of his sin; it must be in spite of his sin. But when God's love is shown to the righteous, there is always the risk of our thinking that God loves the person on account of his righteousness or godliness. It is only when all thought of the worthiness of the beloved is abandoned that we can understand what *agape* is.
3. *Agape is creative.* God does not love that which is already, in itself, worthy of love but, on the contrary, that which in itself

has no worth acquires it just by becoming the object of God's love. Agape does not recognize value, it creates it.

Agape love is a commitment of the will in which a person *decides* to love. It is self-giving love, the love that goes on loving even though the other person may be unlovable. This kind of love can revive or resurrect eros love and philia love when they have diminished or died.

I saw this happen recently in the lives of two friends of mine, Alistair and Joan. They came to me with the news that their marriage had 'died', but before moving on to the divorce stage, they felt they owed it to themselves and their family to consult a Christian counsellor, hoping, as they put it, 'that he would confirm our incompatibility'. It was pretty obvious right from the start that there was no eros or philia love left in their marriage. Alistair said, 'I'm not blaming Joan for the predicament we are in because the fault is most certainly mine. But, for some reason, I just don't feel anything for her any more. Whatever existed between us has gone. The spark that brought us together has died.' Joan said, 'This is how I feel, too. It isn't that I have fallen in love with anyone else. What was in my heart towards Alistair the day we were married is no longer there.'

After listening to their story for some time, I said, 'I understand how you both feel, but I'm afraid that my understanding of the Scripture, coupled with my experience, prevents me from confirming your incompatibility. I accept that you have lost the will to make it work. But what I cannot accept is that it should end right there. As you are both committed Christians, I believe God wants you to stay together and make your marriage work.'

'But how can we do that?' broke in Alistair. 'You just can't turn on feelings of love by an act of will.'

'No, that's quite true,' I responded, 'you can't make yourself feel differently just by an act of the will, but what I think you need to discover is that the feelings of romance, and feelings of care and concern, *follow* the doing of the right things. When we begin to do the right thing, the loving thing, towards those we are commanded by God to love (whether we feel like it or not), then God, seeing the commitment of our will and our obedience to his commands, comes to our aid and gives us the feelings.'

'Wait a moment,' said Alistair. 'Do I understand you to say that it is possible for Joan and me to love each other again as we did on our wedding day, by simply following certain procedures?'

'Well, I don't think I would agree with the use of your word "simply",' I responded, 'because the kind of commitment I am talking about is of such a nature that it will mean working hard at what God wants you to do, even though you don't feel like it. But when God sees you are willing to do that, and vote against your feelings, voting instead for him and his word, then he will bring about the change in your feelings. Now if you are willing to give God a chance to renew your marriage by showing him that you are committed to doing what he asks, irrespective of what you may feel about it, then I am willing to work with you and show you some practical steps you can take towards that end.'

Alistair and Joan were silent for a few minutes and appeared somewhat stunned by my words. Eventually Alistair spoke and said, 'I'm willing to try.' Joan took a little longer to make up her mind, but ultimately she too

was willing. I then took from my files a commitment sheet which I keep for such occasions, and went over it together with them, asking them finally to sign it, thus validating their commitment by so doing.

OUR COMMITMENT

As committed Christians, believing in the authority of the Scriptures and in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, we together make the following decisions in a spirit of repentance and humility, believing that as we throw ourselves upon the grace and mercy of our Lord, he will enable us to become the people and partners he wants us to be.

WE DECIDE:

1. *To rebuild our relationship and not end it.* Without this decision we know that nothing really will happen. Hopes and wishes are not enough. Our decision is based on the knowledge that God wants us to stay together and make our marriage a reflection of the oneness he enjoys with the Trinity in heaven.

2. *To face the future with patience.* We recognize that the growth between us may at times be painfully slow and that it may be so gradual that it will seem as if nothing is happening. It took time for our marriage to reach the stage it has and we accept it will take time for it to be rebuilt.

3. *To forgive each other here and now for past failures and mistakes.* We are willing to let go of the bad feelings and memories which have been built up over the past, and to start a clean, new sheet in our relationship. We know that just as God has forgiven us, so we too must forgive each other, and this we do in Jesus' name.

4. *To minister to each other's needs and concentrate on being givers rather than getters in our marriage.* We will endeavour to be

sensitive to each other's needs, and attempt each day to do things that bring pleasure to each other, irrespective of whether our needs are met or not. We will especially try to do at least *one* thing each day that will give our partner delight.

6. *To accept responsibility for any hurt feelings we may have, by saying 'I feel' rather than 'you are'.* We realize that projecting blame can damage relationships, and we will seek to build good lines of communication by accepting responsibility for our own personal feelings. We will also seek to share our feelings and not suppress or repress them.

7. *To end each day by praying together and reading Scripture.* We accept that as our spiritual life develops, we will have the resources to handle our human problems with greater insight and understanding, so we will pray and read the Scriptures together daily with the goal of building a deeper relationship with God and with each other.

8. *To establish clear lines of communication and have appointed times for dealing with important issues.* Now that we understand the principles of communication, we will (a) deal with all problems whenever possible on the day they arise, (b) accept responsibility for our own feelings and not project blame on to the other partner, (c) talk through issues until we achieve mutually satisfying resolutions.

Naturally going over the '*Commitment*' point by point with Alistair and Joan took several hours. Some of the issues needed clarification and called for immediate action. Take point 3, for example, *To forgive each other here and now for past failures and mistakes.* At this point I counselled Alistair and Joan first to ask God's forgiveness for their failures and mistakes, and then to ask each other's forgiveness. I asked them to bow their heads in prayer and individually ask God for his forgiveness. When they had done this, I then

that they turn to each other and say, 'Will you forgive me for any hurt I have caused you in our marriage?' I find this to be an electrifying moment when going over the Commitment, for, once forgiveness has been received and given, the personality often experiences a freedom and release that is wonderful to see. I confess I had a lump in my throat when I noticed that as we moved on to point 4, Alistair and Joan were holding hands!

Permit me to focus on another example — point 4 — *To minister to each other's needs and concentrate on being givers rather than getters in our marriage*. Here I said to Alistair and Joan, 'Write down some of the things you would like your partner to do for you — things that give you pleasure and add a new dimension to your life together.' After they had done this, I got them to exchange their sheets of paper and then commit themselves to doing one of the things their partner had listed each day of the following week. They were to take them in random order, but focus on doing at least one thing that would bring pleasure to the other.

Before Alistair and Joan left me that evening, I set up an appointment for one week later, explaining that at that time I would not be looking for major changes in their relationship, but simply to see whether they had kept to the rules I had laid down for them. I almost hesitate to begin to go into detail on the next meeting I duly had with them one week later, in case anyone might think that the results I am about to describe invariably happen in this way — because they don't. Sometimes it takes weeks for positive changes in the relationship to begin to emerge, but in Alistair and Joan's case the changes were immediate and dramatic.

As soon as Alistair and Joan sat down in the counselling

room, and before I had time to ask them how things had gone, Alistair said, 'If someone had told me two weeks ago that I would be sitting here today wanting to make a go of my marriage, I would not have believed it possible. We did as you said, right down to the letter, and already I am beginning to feel towards Joan the way I felt when I first met her.'

'That goes for me, too,' said Joan. 'Part of me says that this is too good to be true, but I believe, with God's help, this is the answer to our problem.'

Much of that counselling session was taken up with reinforcing what I said in the previous interview — that they were not to concentrate on developing loving feelings for each other, but focus on what they knew God wanted them to do — behave in loving ways. I saw them for several weeks after that, mainly as a point of reference to which they could report. Two months later, Alistair said to me, 'I really don't think we need to come any more. We pray together, read the Scriptures together, have sex together and sort out our problems by following the lines of communication you suggested, so what further need do we have for a counsellor?'

'Fine,' I said, 'all counsellors like to work themselves out of a job. But write to me once a month over the next three months, letting me know how you are getting on. After that there will probably be no need for us to be in touch again, unless, of course, you have something of particular interest to share.'

Alistair did as I asked and kept in touch with me, giving me reports of positive progress. I especially liked the line in his last letter that went, 'Thanks for caring enough to

that we faced some months ago. I just *know* God is going to use our experience to help them rebuild their marriage in the same way that ours was rebuilt.'

Alistair and Joan's transformed marriage came about through the introduction and application of agape love. What happened in their marriage was this: as they applied agape love — a commitment to do what God wanted them to do even though they didn't feel like it — this gave the Almighty the opportunity he needed to flow into their *philia* and *eros* loves, reviving and restoring them, and bringing feeling and romance into their marriage.

There are many marriages in which agape love is not present, and where *philia* and *eros* have diminished. When this is so, some couples ask the question: 'Was I ever in love in the first place?' This, however, need not be the pattern for a marriage in which the partners are Christians. If the individuals concerned commit themselves to doing what God asks by demonstrating agape love, then God is able to flow into that marriage and bring about a change in feelings. It is as I said at the beginning of this chapter, a combination of human effort and divine enabling. It is obediently putting the water into the waterpots and then watching the Master turning it into wine. Agape, because it contains the ingredients of God's nature, can keep a marriage going and renew it even when *eros* and *philia* are low.

The reality of agape love can best be seen by examining the words of I Corinthians 13 in the J. B. Phillips paraphrase, verses 4-8:

This love of which I speak is slow to lose patience: it barricades itself against all irritations and knows how to accept problems and make them work towards further development.

It looks for a way of being constructive: it focuses on the other person and designs ways in which one's partner can be benefited. *It is not possessive:* it allows the other person freedom to develop without pressure to conform, without objection and without jealousy.

It is neither anxious to impress: it is secure in its own identity and, because of this, it does not need to draw to itself the positive opinions of others.

nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance: it does not see life as revolving around itself and is, therefore, open to the ideas and suggestions of others.

Love has good manners: having respect for itself, it has respect also for others, and knows instinctively how to do the right thing.

and does not pursue selfish advantage: it does not make its primary concern the satisfaction of personal needs, but has concern for the needs of the other person.

It is not touchy: it is not easily hurt. It does not get too emotionally involved with another's opinions so as to reject the person who gives them.

It does not keep account of evil: it doesn't keep score or continually review and reflect upon the wrongs of a person, but destroys the evidences of past failures and mistakes. It forgives — and forgets.

or gloat over the wickedness of other people: it doesn't use other people's failures to excuse itself.

On the contrary, it shares the joy of those who live by the truth: it is concerned with truth, for without it the universe would fall apart.

Love knows no limit to its endurance: it is able to live with the faults and imperfections of others.

no end to its trust: it goes on believing the best about a person, seeing not merely what the person is but what he can be.

no fading of its hope: it has the assurance that every setback can become a springboard and every stumbling-block a stepping-stone.

It can outlast anything: it goes on loving even when love is not returned.

I remember reading those words from the J. B. Phillips paraphrase many years ago when my own marriage was in the spiritual doldrums, and saying to myself: how can anyone love like *that*? Paul's picture of a love that has 'no limit to its endurance', coming at a time when I did not feel particularly loving towards my wife, raised great problems in my mind. It drove me to cry out: 'Lord, how can I do it?'

As I wrestled with God, I began to realize that God held me responsible to produce not loving feelings in my heart, but loving attitudes. I came to see that the qualities of agape love are not emotional but attitudinal. Emotions may be there, but they are the result rather than the cause of the right attitudes. It slowly began to dawn on me that, in asking me to demonstrate agape love towards my wife, God was not asking me to change how I feel but to change my attitudes. This, of course, demanded a dedicated action of my will. I was unable, simply by an act of choice, to experience loving feelings, but I was able to set my will to see the situation from God's point of view and behave in ways that reinforced that attitude.

Many Christians, I find, have difficulty in accepting the fact that, according to Scripture, man is a responsible being. People tell me over and over again in counselling sessions, 'But I can't do that.' What they are saying, in other words, is, 'I am not able to do what you ask and, therefore, I am not

can choose and what it is we can't choose. We can't choose to change our feelings but we can choose to change the direction of our will. This is all that God asks. And this is the evidence of agape love.

Of course, it is not as easy as it sounds. As I came face to face with my own personal crisis of loving my wife as God wanted me to, when my feelings were fast diminishing, I went through a period of intense conflict and struggle. My cup of eros and philia love was low, but then I made an act of commitment to God, held up my almost empty cup under the great waterfall of his agape love, and said that I *wanted* to love my wife the way he had commanded me in Ephesians 5:25. He then strengthened my resolve and enabled me to love the agape way. And his agape soon kindled my eros and philia love. I found also that, not only setting my will in the direction the Lord wanted me to go — to love my wife as Christ loved the church — but choosing to act in loving ways (occasionally buying her flowers, taking her out for a meal, helping with the dishes, hanging my clothes up after me, etc.), reinforced my commitment, enabling God to restore to me many of my lost feelings. I did my part — and God did his. The result was that our marriage took on a dimension it never had before — eros, philia *and* agape.

So, if the wine has run out in your marriage, and you believe that the next step is the divorce court — please think again. The one who stepped into a marriage predicament in Cana of Galilee, and rescued it from embarrassment, is with us still. Take the advice of the mother of Jesus who said to the servants: 'Whatever He says to you, do it' (John 2:5 NASB).

Fill the waterpots with water,
Fill them to the very brim.
He will honour all your trusting,
Then leave the miracle to him.
(Anonymous)

Whatever he says to you, do it.

Selwyn Hughes, 2005,
Marriage as God Intended
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