

A WORTHY LIFE



(Statue of St James, Camino de Santiago Pilgrimage Walk)

INTRODUCTION

We are currently in the season of epiphany. Doug Chalk explained in his recent sermon on Epiphany Sunday that the word “epiphany” comes from a Greek word associated with *manifestation, appearance, revelation, unveiling* and *awareness*. The critical question ever since Jesus walked on earth is who was Jesus really? Was he a super prophet, a confused Jew or indeed God incarnate? The focus of epiphany is the revelation or manifestation of Jesus as the promised Messiah, the Son of God.

There are 4 major historic manifestations of Jesus as the Son of God: the virgin birth of Jesus, the visit of the Magi revealing Jesus to the gentiles, the baptism of Jesus and His first miracle at the wedding at Cana.

John recorded the events of the wedding at Cana in the second chapter of his Gospel. Whenever we read the Gospel of John, we should start with John 20:20-21: “***The Purpose of This Book: Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His Name.***”.

The significant impact of the Jesus’ first recorded miracle is emphasised when John wrote: “***This, the first of His signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested His glory. And His disciples believed in Him.***” John 2:11. It was indeed the inflection point for the disciples. At the wedding, they grasped that Jesus was not a prophet but the Messiah, the Son of God. And most importantly, they believed in Jesus!

John recorded seven signs in his Gospel with the purpose that the reader may believe:

1. Changing water into wine at the wedding
2. Healing the official's son
3. Healing the invalid
4. Feeding the multitude (5,000) from two fish and 5 bread loaves
5. Jesus walking on the water to meet the disciples in a boat
6. Healing the man born blind
7. Raising Lazarus from the dead

Jesus did many more signs and it would be interesting to understand how John went about to select these seven signs. We do know that God's work is by design and with a clear purpose. The first sign was indeed not simply a random miracle at a random event. The elements of wine and wedding/marriage are significant in the Bible.

In the Old Testament, wine is a symbol of God's blessing and joy. Psalm 104:15: "**You cause the grass to grow for the livestock, and plants for man to cultivate that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart.**".

When Jesus instituted the Lord's supper, he chose wine as the symbol of His blood that was to be shed to wash our souls clean and to introduce a new covenant with God. Matthew recorded in chapter 26:27: "**And He[Jesus] took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them saying: "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."**. And in Luke 22:20 Jesus said: "**This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood**".

The miracle of turning water into wine clearly brought joy and was a blessing to all at the wedding feast in Cana. But the significance of to the wine in our Eucharist is profound, as a symbol of Jesus' blood shed once for all to bring eternal joy and blessing for all who believe throughout the generations.

For clarity, wine is indeed a symbol of blessing and joy, but drunkenness is clearly prohibited in the Bible. The responsible consumption of wine is what brings joy but abuse can bring destruction, harm and shame.

The other important aspect of Jesus' first miracle is that it was done at a wedding. The Bible uses the narrative of weddings and marriage to describe the relationship between God and His people.

As an example, Isaiah used poetic language and the narrative of marriage to describe the restoration of the relationship between God and his chosen people: "**As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.**". Isaiah 62:5.

In Revelation, John described Jesus as the Bridegroom and the church as the Bride. He described the future marriage supper of the Lamb: ***“Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and the Bride has made herself ready...”*** Rev 19:7

Given the narrative of this future wedding celebration, it is clear why Jesus manifested His glory for the first time at a wedding in Cana. We all look forward the most magnificent wedding feast where all who believe will be united with Christ for eternity and have the eternal joy and blessing of God’s presence in the New Jerusalem.

The question is – what do we, the bride of Christ, do between now and then?

LIVING A WORTHY LIFE

The apostle Paul provided a valuable answer to this question: ***“I...urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called...”***. Eph 4:1.

What is our calling? And more generally, what makes a worthy life?

This is indeed a question that so many grapple with. We live in a time where so many feel lost and don’t know what the purpose of their existence is. Geo-political tensions, natural disasters, mass migration, rising cost of living, artificial intelligence and robotics and many more factors are major contributors to a sense of uncertainty and fear. Conspiracy theories and “truth according to the internet” contribute to further confusion and fuel divisions and polarisation. Social media often promotes an illusion of bliss, happiness and material wealth, which is simply not attainable. No wonder mental health indicators are at alarmingly low levels and suicide rates are at all time highs.

As Christians, we are not exempt from the influences of the generation that we live in. However, we should have a different view of what our purpose is and what we are meant to focus on whilst living on earth. Paul referred to this as our calling.

There are many ways of describing our calling as children of God. In business, we are coached to have an elevator pitch. It means that any businessperson should be able to describe in 2 to 3 minutes to someone next to them in the elevator what their business does and why a client should use their services or buy their products.

Here is a version that you can consider when you are asked to elevator pitch what our calling is:

*Our calling consists of 3 C’s: **Commandment, Commission and Community.***

*Jesus said that the most important **commandment** is love: firstly, love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength; and secondly love others in the same way as yourself. Our love is not just for others who love us in return, but also for our enemies.*

*When we love God, others and ourselves, our **commission** is a natural consequence. Jesus commissioned us to share the Gospel with all nations and make them followers of Him (the Bible calls them disciples). People become followers by faith alone. As a sign of becoming a follower of Jesus, a person must be baptised and thereafter be taught how to observe Jesus' **commandment**.*

*We are called to be a united **community** of followers, which is called the Church. Christ is the head of the Church. The Church is the body of Christ on earth where we collectively live our **commandment** of love and fulfil our **commission** to grow and teach.*

It is not possible to do the above in our own strength. We have been given a Helper, the Holy Spirit. Our Helper is the power that enables us to adhere to our commandment and commission, and to be a living community. The Helper gives everyone a unique gift to serve. No gift is more important than another. We know that the power of the Helper is at work in us by the fruit that we bear.

The purpose of our calling is to bring glory to the Name of our God, the only true and living God, the Creator and Sustainer of all.

Clearly, there is much more to our calling. The Bible, which is still the most published book of all times, is the primary source of our teaching and our guide to calling. There is also an exponential number of books and digital resources about the Bible. John said that if everything that Jesus did have to be written, then the world itself could not contain the books. We should certainly guard against an information overload, which then subtly nudges us away from “walking” in a manner worthy of our calling.

Thinking about the past year, how do we feel, individually and collectively, about our walk in the light of our true calling? What would Paul say if he was able visit us: worthy or unworthy? Or have we perhaps strayed off and started walking a worldly path?

Thinking about the year ahead, what should we continue to do, stop doing and/or start doing so that Paul could indeed say: “you are walking in a manner worthy of your calling!”?

PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

Brothers and sisters, no doubt we have many shortcomings, and we will probably have a long list of stop and start items to attend to, both individually and collectively. Please do not be discouraged. We never walk alone and simply need to turn to God for our strength. Draw strength from this prayer of Paul in Ephesians 3:14-21:

***“I bow my knees before the Father,
from Whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,***

**that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened,
with power through His Spirit in your inner being,
so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith –
that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength
to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and
height and depth,
and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,
that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or
think,
according to the power at work in us,
to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus
throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.”**

AMEN

Collect (Prayer before the readings): Almighty God, in Christ You make all things new: transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known Your heavenly glory; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Readings: Old Testament: Isaiah 62:1-5 (Page 621)
New Testament: Ephesians 4:1-16 (Page 977)
Gospel: John 2:1-11 (Page 887)

Hymns:

1. 609 (Common Praise): To God be the Glory
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-15v9iworAU>
2. 432 (Common Praise): From heaven You came
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpwfDXcKrNQ>
3. 1072 (Mission Praise): In Christ Alone
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p2vuh-_yTRQ
4. 393 (Common Praise): Brother, Sister let me serve you
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttW9oQ-yiuU>