

INVITED TO THE FEAST

by

Roberto Badenas

*Director, Department of Family
Ministries, Euro-Africa Division
2001*

Theme: The gift of Christ to the marriage feast at Cana was a symbol of what He wants to do to our own marriages.

Theme Text: John 2:1-12

Supplementary Reading: Ellen G. White, "At the Marriage Feast," *Desire of Ages*, pp. 144-153.

Presentation Notes: The following material is not intended as a complete sermon, but rather provides ideas and concepts which each presenter may further develop. The use of personal or other illustrations will help to contextualize the material and make it practical. Throughout the following outline, numbers in parentheses (1), (2), (3) reference material in the *Sermon Illumination* section that may be helpful in your sermon development and delivery.

There was a wedding feast in the village of Cana, one of those old-fashioned country wedding feasts. In that time and place a wedding was not a private affair, as it more and more often is in our time. Then, a wedding was an event for the whole village. Everybody in town was invited—relatives, friends, neighbors, even visitors.

As we look in on this particular wedding occasion (John 2:1-11), it seems that everybody is going to the banquet. More people are coming than was expected, even a group of young men hiking around the region have been invited in.⁽¹⁾ There is joy and laughter around the tables. Everybody is having a good time. Everything seems perfect. Even the weather! The day is beautiful, but hot.

The people responsible for serving the beverages are especially busy, since all the guests are thirsty and asking for drinks at the same time. After the feast has gone on awhile, the servers seem suddenly preoccupied with some topic of absorbing interest. Something evidently has gone wrong in the kitchen. Laughter and joy have turned into embarrassing silence. Someone has found that the supply of beverages has failed. There is no more wine (John 2:3). If there is no more wine in stock, soon it will mean no more wine on the tables. And when the wine is gone, the feast is gone too. Little groups converse together in eager but quiet tones, and wondering glances are turned upon one of the visitors. . . .

When There Is No More Wine

Why this shortage of beverages? A wrong calculation of the number of guests? The hot weather? Too many visitors invited at the last moment? The urgent question is not why the shortage, but what to do next? This terrible discovery causes a lot of perplexity and regret among the relatives of the young couple. "There is no more wine," they repeat to each other. It was unusual to dispense with wine on such a festive occasion. Its absence would indicate a lack of hospitality. And there is no way to get more. What are the guests going to say? They will not

understand! How can the hosts explain? This couple's once-in-a-lifetime wedding celebration, this most lovely feast, may end as a disaster.

We all remember the rest of the story. What we do not always remember is that this first part of this story symbolizes the experience of many couples, many marriages, sometimes, as here in the biblical account, from the very start of their life together. There is something that we should never forget in our family life: our human provisions for happiness, represented in our story by the wine, are not inexhaustible. It is always possible to run out of wine, to run out of money, of health, of patience, of humor, of charm, of sex-appeal, of love. Happiness in marriage is vulnerable and it is always threatened.

This same story happens over and over in our own homes. "As men set forth the best wine first, then afterwards that which is worse" (vs. 10), so we usually do within our married life as couples. At the beginning we give the best we have, but as time passes, "the wine turns to bitterness, the gaiety to gloom. That which was begun with songs and mirth ends in weariness and disgust" (Desire of Ages, p. 148). The joy, the attentions, the affection and tenderness shown at the beginning lessen little by little and one day we discover that there is nothing left. What one day started with love, kisses, feasts and joy, too often ends with boredom, tediousness, indifference, and even hatred. After the good wine comes the bad, or perhaps no wine at all.

This wedding story reveals to us the three special secrets for a happy marriage:

- Be sure to invite Jesus (vs. 2).
- Do whatever He tells you (vs. 5).
- Serve the best now (vs. 10).

Invite the Guest Who is Often Forgotten

Experience and statistics confirm that, unfortunately, this "lack of wine" happens today in many marriages. The reason is very simple: we are human beings and we cannot live indefinitely on our poor human resources. The capacity of our reserves of patience and understanding, the capacity of our love jars is limited, and naturally wears out, in the same way as do the provisions in our refrigerators if we do not renew them. With the passage of time, with the urgencies and pressures of work, the routine of everyday life, the wine of love can be depleted. What was once sweet can become bitter and turn sour. Our jars of kindness may finally become empty and problems come up.

Problems may be little or big. Family problems, human problems, marriage problems that we do not know how to solve. Like the people at Cana, we do not see any human solution. Our eyes do not see further than the empty bottom of our jars. And we do not realize that the solution—when no solutions seem to be found—may only come from the forgotten Guest. The Guest who unfortunately is not always invited. . . .

The big difference between a Christian marriage and a secular one is that, in a Christian marriage, Jesus is first on the list of guests. Like in Cana of old, today Jesus wants to supply all our needs, to solve all our problems.(2) He wants to do so far beyond the limits of our human expectancies. The creativity of His love shall always be able to surprise us. He can make the empty jars of our love to overflow again. He has promised to give us abundant life, fullness of life.

Do Whatever He Tells You

God does not want that His children be a gloomy, unhappy people. In His word He has revealed the simple rules for a happy life. "If our eyes are fixed on Jesus, we shall see a compassionate Redeemer Wherever His Spirit reigns, there peace abides. And there will be joy also, for there is a calm, holy trust in God" (Desire of Ages, pp. 152, 153). We cannot depend on ourselves. "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Human illusions vanish with time,

But the gifts of Jesus are ever fresh and new. The feast that He provides for the soul never fails to give satisfaction and joy. Each new gift increases the capacity of the receiver to appreciate and enjoy the blessings of the Lord. He gives grace for grace. There can be no failure of supply. If you abide in Him, the fact that you receive a rich gift today insures the reception of a richer gift tomorrow. (*Desire of Ages*, p. 148)

Jesus provided help in so wonderful a way that none of the guests noticed that the supply of wine had failed. Everybody found the new wine superior to the one served at the beginning of the feast and better than any they had ever tasted before. They remarked upon the special quality of the drink, "the pure juice of the grape. . . . The unfermented wine which He provided for the wedding guests was a wholesome and refreshing drink. Its effect was to bring the taste into harmony with a healthful appetite" (*Desire of Ages*, p. 149).

Turning to the bridegroom, somebody made the following compliment: "Usually people serve at the beginning the best wine; and when the people have well drunk, then that which is worse: but you have saved the best till now" (vs. 10). The gift of Christ to the marriage feast at Cana was a symbol of what He wants to do to our own marriages.

Serve the Best Now

Our only hope is in Christ. Jesus began His ministry by coming into close sympathy with a family. He came to our midst to help us to be happy. He came to transform our life, to give living flavor to our human existence, which is always threatened by selfishness and mediocrity, always in danger of becoming like common water—colorless, odorless, and tasteless.(3) "The word of Christ supplied ample provision for the feast. So abundant is the provision of His grace to blot out the iniquities of men, and to renew and sustain the soul" (*Desire of Ages*, p. 149). "By attending this feast, Jesus honored marriage as a divine institution" (*Desire of Ages*, p. 151). Jesus can sustain couples. The same Jesus who intervened in the wedding at Cana, showed His sympathy for a young couple and ministered to their happiness, is eager to intervene in our own marriages if we really want "to save the best till now".

He [Jesus] reached the hearts of the people by going among them as one who desired their good. He sought them in the public streets, in private houses, on the boats, in the synagogue, by the shores of the lake, and at the marriage feast. He met them at their daily vocations, and manifested an interest in their secular affairs. He carried His instruction into the household, bringing families in their own homes under the influence of His divine presence. His strong personal sympathy helped to win hearts. . . . From . . . seasons [of prayer] He came forth to relieve the sick, to instruct the ignorant, and to break the chains from the captives of Satan. (*Desire of Ages*, p. 151)

Conclusion

Jesus knows that every person needs more love than he or she deserves. Whatever the circumstances may be in your family life, you can be always sure that:

- Jesus is with you.
- Jesus can help you.
- Jesus wants to bless your home and provide greater happiness in your life.

Even what seems like the last moments of a breakdown may become, by His power, a new honeymoon. Even for those who have found bitterness and disappointment where they had hoped for companionship and joy, the presence of Jesus with them personally brings comfort.⁴ May He daily fill our jars with the wine of His love until the day we will be forever with Him, finally at home.

Sermon Illumination

One (1): "There was to be a marriage in Cana of Galilee. The parties were relatives of Joseph and Mary. Christ knew of this family gathering, and that many influential persons would be brought together there, so, in company with his newly made disciples, He made His way to Cana. As soon as it was known that Jesus had come to the place, a special invitation was sent to Him and His friends. . ." (*My Life Today*, p. 186).

Two (2): "Here is a lesson for the disciples of Christ through all time, not to exclude themselves from society, renouncing all social communion and seeking a strict seclusion from their fellow beings. In order to reach all classes, we must meet them where they are; for they will seldom seek us of their own accord. Not alone from the pulpit are the hearts of men and women touched by divine truth. Christ awakened their interest by going among them as one who desired their good. He sought them at their daily avocations and manifested an unfeigned interest in their temporal affairs. He carried His instructions into the household of the people, bringing whole families in their own homes under the influence of His divine presence. . ." (*My Life Today*, p. 186).

Three (3): "The presence of Christ alone can make men and women happy. All the common waters of life Christ can turn into the wine of heaven. The home then becomes as an Eden of bliss; the family, a beautiful symbol of the family in heaven" (*Adventist Home*, p. 28).

Four (4): "The condition of society presents a sad comment upon Heaven's ideal of this sacred relation. Yet even for those who have found bitterness and disappointment where they had hoped for companionship and joy, the gospel of Christ offers a solace" (*Adventist Home*, p. 100).

References

White, E.G. (1940). *The desire of ages*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association.

White, E.G. (1952). *The Adventist home*. Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald Publishing Association.

White, E.G. (1952). *My life today*. Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald Publishing Association.