

THE MARRIAGE MIRACLE

by

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Theme: Jesus' transformation of water to wine at the wedding feast symbolizes His transformation of the marriage institution. God's redemptive act in Christ lifted the curse, permitting couples to enjoy equality and mutuality in marriage without the control of one by the other and the abuse which so often results.

Theme Text: John 2:1-12

Presentation Notes: Throughout the following outline, numbers in parentheses (1), (2), (3) will indicate illustrations, quotations and other material found in the section called *Sermon Illumination* that may be helpful in your sermon development and delivery.

John 2:1-12. In the wedding feast at Cana, we see Jesus *endorsing* marriage, *transforming* marriage, and *supplying* married couples with their needs.

Jesus Endorsed Marriage

He enjoyed a wedding festival. The serious business of the work of the Kingdom did not stop Him from participating in the joyous, light-hearted atmosphere of a wedding reception. Such social fellowship was, and is, an important aspect to life in His Kingdom community.

He inaugurated His ministry for the human race at a wedding. At creation, a wedding ceremony marked the climax of the Creator's activity when He made the first man and woman. Sin had radically altered the relationship between the sexes and the institution of marriage. In His redemptive work, Christ's first activity was in the context of a wedding ceremony. Even as humanity was redeemed, so marriage itself as an institution was recreated by the Savior's ministry. (1)

God has not changed His mind about marriage. Despite the sad state to which marriage had deteriorated, He who created it and pronounced it very good still desired for His people to know the lasting commitment, the friendship, and the romantic delights it afforded. At Cana and elsewhere (Compare Matt. 19:4-8) Jesus announced that His ministry would endorse and uphold marriage as it was meant to be. (2)

Jesus declared Himself to be the Heavenly Bridegroom. In the most extravagant tribute thinkable, Jesus magnified marriage, making it a symbol of the union between Himself as the Bridegroom and the redeemed, His Bride (Matt. 9:15; John 3:29). A wedding parable described the kingdom of God (Matt. 22:1-14; 25:1-13).

Jesus Transformed Marriage

Marriage before and after the Fall. In their sinless state neither of the sexes ruled the other.

They were co-regents over the earth, each reflecting the Creator's image, each blessed and charged with the responsibility of procreation, two genders in one humanity, equal to each other in every respect, true partners in marriage (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:18, 23, 24). With the entrance of sin, marriage fell under the curse (Gen. 3:16). (3) Henceforth, where sin reigned, marriage suffered from human selfishness and the tendency to exploit or dominate one another. Even among God's professed followers, women fared but little better than in pagan societies. The practices of taking more than one wife, infidelity, easy divorce, and denigration of womanhood became commonplace. The Pharisee's daily devotional prayers included, "I thank God that I was not made a woman."

Difference between the curse and the gospel. Sin perverted marriage, but the gospel restored its purity and beauty. (4) The kingdom of God has come to us in Christ (Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20; 17:21). Believers are rescued from the powers of this present evil age (Gal. 1:4) and enabled to taste the powers of the age to come (Heb. 6:5). In Christ there is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). As Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, we may be "filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:17-19). In Christ the curse is removed. (5) In the place of division and strife between individuals, there is peace in Christ (Eph. 2:14-17). (6)

The miracles of Jesus have a symbolic purpose. The miracles are "signs" portraying the special characteristics of our Lord's person and work (John 2:18; 6:30). The loaves and fishes miracle, for example, goes beyond simply supplying a meal for a crowd of weary listeners. The disciples did not understand the greater meaning, otherwise their experience on the lake after the miracle would have been different (Mark 6:51, 52). On the day following, Jesus contrasts the manna of Moses' time with the "true bread" which the Father sends from heaven, namely Himself (John 6:26, 27, 48, 51, 58). He appeals to His hearers to receive Him, to let His words be spirit and life for them (John 6:63). Through this feeding miracle, the glory of Jesus is seen to supersede the practices and traditions of the past.

The wedding miracle manifests Christ's glory. The water-to-wine miracle is a "marriage miracle." Like the miracle of the loaves and fishes, its intention is more than the supply of an immediate need. It manifests His glory (John 2:11). Cana heralds the arrival of the gospel. (The gospel teaching of Jesus is compared to new wine in several places: Matt. 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37, 38.) The waterpots at the wedding reception represented the past with its customs and traditions. They have been supplanted by the One who offers an abundance of the new and better beverage of the gospel in His new kingdom age.

Jesus not only transformed water to a superior drink, but redeemed and elevated those divinely designed religious and social institutions that had been trodden down by the curse of sin. (7) He taught principles and practices of gospel living which would have a profound effect of renewal and change in the hearts of married couples and others in whom His Spirit dwells. These principles and practices would be incompatible with old forms and traditions and would require containers new and pliable, like new wineskins (Mark 2:22), believers with converted hearts (Ez. 11:19; 36:26).

Some Christians fail to see Christ's redemption of marriage. Many a woman even today can testify that the curse is alive and well. Around that curse has developed a model of marriage that some Christians perpetuate and defend. (8)

Radical changes in marriage in the gospel. The marriage miracle at Cana was not simply making the existing water more fit to drink or adding a few more minerals or flavoring. The miracle was a radical change. Marriage is different for Christians in Christ. Mutual submission to each other under the Lordship of Christ is God's new plan for marriage (Eph. 5:21-25). (9) Husband and wife are heirs together of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7).

Ellen G. White described the effect of the gospel upon the husband-wife relationship in marriage:

Woman should fill the position which God originally designed for her, as her husband's equal. . . . She should feel that she is her husband's equal—to stand by his side, she faithful at her post of duty and he at his. (*The Adventist Home*, p. 231)

Woman . . . may stand on an equality with her husband as adviser, counselor, companion, and co-worker, and yet lose none of her womanly grace and modesty. (*Evangelism*, p. 467)

Neither husband nor wife is to make a plea for rulership. The Lord has laid down the principle that is to guide in this matter. The husband is to cherish his wife as Christ cherishes the church. And the wife is to respect and love her husband. Both are to cultivate the spirit of kindness, being determined never to grieve or injure the other. (*Testimonies*, Vol. 7, p. 47)

Jesus Is the Source of Supply for Marriage

The Cana miracle was evidence of Christ's ability and willingness to supply our needs. (Compare Phil. 4:19). "They have no wine," said the mother of Jesus. What they lacked, Jesus supplied in abundance and in a way far superior to their expectations.

God promises to give if we will ask. Jesus spoke about God's willingness to give gifts to His people (Luke 11:13). His rest (Matt. 11:28) and His peace (John 14:27) can transform our homes, our marriages, as we come to Him in faith.

God supplies grace that we may give to others. In God's covenant we experience grace, love, forgiveness, commitment, acceptance, intimacy, and even sacrifice, that our deepest needs might be met. As what we have found in the gospel is reflected to our families, our relationships take on characteristics like God's relationship with us. Christian family members respond to the call to be gracious, to love, to serve one another, and to forgive just as He loves, serves and forgives us. Strength and grace from God are promised to accomplish that to which God calls us (Jer. 31:31-34; Matt. 20:26-28; Eph. 2:8; 4:32; Heb. 8:10-12; 1 John 3:16).

Some today may be in need of something very tangible, very material, as were the couple in Cana. We can lay that need before Him also. But in a special way today we ask Him to help us to repent of our tendency to disregard His will, to confess our need for His plan to be more fully carried out in our lives, and to enable us to receive the supplies of grace and truth He has offered.

Conclusion

The Cana miracle has implications for our homes. First, Jesus' endorsement of marriage must be proclaimed today. This institution coming from Eden, this twin of the Sabbath, is deserving of the kind of attention and consideration by Adventists that has been given to the Sabbath. Secondly, God's redemptive act in Christ transformed marriage, lifting the curse and permitting couples to enjoy equality and mutuality in marriage without the control of one by the other and the abuse which so often results. Finally, God will supply our needs. He will give to us His grace and power to carry out His will in our marriages and homes. Let us heed His call to live our married lives according to His gospel plan.

Sermon Illumination

One (1): He who gave Eve to Adam as a helpmeet, performed His first miracle at a marriage festival. . . . Thus He sanctioned marriage, recognizing it as an institution that He Himself had

established. (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 356)

Two (2): Neither Roman nor Greek civilizations provided an atmosphere that elevated the marital union. The Greek statesman, Demosthenes, (3000 B.C.) indicated that it might take several of this lesser order of being—women—to take care of man's needs: "Mistresses we keep for pleasure, concubines for daily attendance upon our person, wives to bear us legitimate children and be our faithful housekeepers." The wife could be repudiated and simply dismissed for barrenness or even if her husband found her unattractive or uncongenial. (Mazat, 1981, pp. 27, 28)

Three (3): When God created Eve, He designed that she should possess neither inferiority nor superiority to the man, but that in all things she should be his equal. . . . But after Eve's sin, as she was the first in the transgression, the Lord told her that Adam should rule over her. She was to be in subjection to her husband, and this was a part of the curse. (*Testimonies*, Vol. 3, p. 484)

Four (4): Like every other one of God's good gifts entrusted to the keeping of humanity, marriage has been perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty. (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 64)

Five (5): Without any fuss or publicity, Jesus terminated the curse of the Fall, reinvested woman with her partially lost nobility, and reclaimed for his new kingdom community the original creation blessing of sexual equality. (Stott, 1984, p. 136)

Six (6): Faith in Christ abolishes all barriers, whether religious, cultural, or social, that separate people from each other. Discussing further the unity Christians know despite their background as Jews and Gentiles, Paul exalted the cross of Christ as the source of reconciliation. In doing so, he used language that one could as easily apply to the separation between male and female (Eph. 2:14-18). "To create out of the two a single new humanity in himself, thereby making peace" (NEB) is good news that addresses the curse on marriage in Genesis 3 and makes the way possible for couples to know the "one flesh" experience of Genesis 2. (Flowers, 1992, p. 83)

Seven (7): Christ came not to destroy this institution, but to restore it to its original sanctity and elevation. He came to restore the moral image of God in man, and He began His work by sanctioning the marriage relation. (*The Adventist Home*, p. 99)

Eight (8): Robert Tislund was a powerful, pulpit pounding preacher. He had schooled his thirty-one year- old wife Lucy and five children in unwavering subjection to his demands. He expected perfection from them all, he said, and he beat them regularly to accomplish it, including their seven-year-old, twenty-five pound, blind, deaf and brain-damaged son. When the child died, Lucy grieved, but Robert beat her before and after the funeral for doing so, saying that her sin had caused this "imperfect child."

"He was my husband, and I knew I was supposed to follow his decisions. You get married and the Bible says you are to obey your husband. Right from the start he was the boss. 'Wives, be subject to your husbands as unto the Lord.' That was his main verse."

Despite the violence, he bragged that there were no problems in their marriage. She went

nowhere without his permission and had only twenty-five cents in her possession for a phone call. She never wore slacks or make-up, except when he permitted it to cover a bruise. Although he was her husband, Robert was referred to by Lucy as "Pastor" or "Sir."

One day he came home furious. His questionable relationship with a fourteen-year-old girl at the church school had been found out. When Lucy questioned him about it, he beat her three different times, beat the children and then, with a wild look in his eyes, went to bed. She would never see the light of another morning, he said, for he intended to kill her.

While he slept, she pulled the loaded revolver out from under his pillow where he always kept it. He opened his eyes and began to lunge toward her. Then she shot him. She then took her children to a friend's house and called the police.

A troubled jury deliberated over her sad testimony. She was finally acquitted. (Adapted from Alsdurf & Alsdurf, pp. 13-15, 1989)

Nine (9): In *Fulton's Footprints in Fiji* Eric B. Hare (1969) tells of the conversion of Ratu Ambrose. The cruel chief had squandered the lives of many of his faithful subjects while pursuing his aggressive goals. Scarred and broken in body, one old fisherman, Matui, had survived the torturous experience of being one of the human "logs," men bound with ropes and used as rollers upon which Ratu Ambrose had launched his heavy war canoes.

Pastor John Fulton's evangelistic efforts brought both Ratu Ambrose and Matui into the same Seventh-day Adventist church. God's power to transform hearts and habits powerfully demonstrated itself when the new believers celebrated their first Lord's Supper and footwashing service. Ratu Ambrose quickly took a towel and basin and knelt down before Matui to wash his feet. The bent, elderly fisherman at first resisted. "It is not right for you to wash my feet; you are a great chief." As Ratu Ambrose went on to bathe the feet of his former subject with tears filling his eyes and his heart, he replied, "There is only one Chief here in this room tonight, and that is Jesus." (Flowers, 1992, pp. 85, 86)

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