

With Jesus in the Family

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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One can hardly think of today being September 11 without recalling the horrific news 9 years ago when Islamic extremists hijacked American airplanes and steered them as Kamikaze weapons into the twin towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon building, resulting in thousands of lives being lost. We will never be the same after that, and our hearts still go out to those who lost family, friends and co-workers in that event.

It reminds us that the devil has been on the attack, as we've been studying in the 12th chapter of Revelation for the past couple of weeks. Today's sermon, although not from the book of Revelation, has threads in common with that theme. We're going to take a look at a story from the Scriptures from which we'll draw lessons pertaining to the blessing of the Christian home, an institution against which the devil has launched a massive 9/11 style attack. Even if you're currently not married, there are lessons in this story that are relevant.

The Bible opens with the story of God creating Adam, the highpoint of His creative activities. The rest of all creation was spoken into existence by the mighty voice of God, but when He brought forth Adam, the Creator shaped the form of the man with His hands, then kissed life into him. There was a difference in the way the planets, the trees, the animals keep into being, and the way in which Adam was created. Then the Lord spoke the first "not good" in the Bible, noting that it was "not good that man should dwell alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." From the side of Adam, God then made his mate, the woman. "Two are better than one," noted the wise man Solomon. Ecclesiastes 4:9.

Thus the gift of marriage was bestowed on the human family, intended to be a blessing even before the curse of sin visited our world. As soon as this world was born, the dragon "stood ready to devour" what God had made. He attacked through the receptacle of the serpent, deceiving Eve into believing that she would be better off by disobeying the command of the Lord. After accomplishing this goal, he set about to attack everything that God had given to mankind, including the gift of the institution of marriage.

It wasn't long before man chose to abridge the model of marriage given him of "one man, one woman" and polygamy came into existence. Lamech, six generations from Adam, was the first to practice this misguided attempt to find happiness outside the bounds of God's plan. Genesis 4:19. Others followed in his footsteps, including even some of those whom God called to be His

covenant people. But none of them, whether it was Abraham, Jacob or the hosts who walked the same path, found that it brought blessing or happiness to the home. Sarah quarreled with Hagar; Leah and Rachel vied for Jacob's affection. Jesus' comment "from the beginning it was not so" is filled with wisdom on this subject. Yet even today some are tempted to find a higher degree of happiness in a path not of God's choosing, but it won't succeed. It didn't work for Lamech or Abraham, and it won't work today.

A marriage built on the model God gave to mankind in Eden is still the best. Those agitating for the definition of marriage to be redefined, so as to include partners other than "one man and one woman" may someday succeed in obtaining the approval of the state, but will never find that format to be approved by God. That movement represents yet another attack by the devil to undermine something beautiful given to mankind by a loving Creator. The institution of marriage was made by Jesus in Eden, and it was blessed by Him while He spent time on this earth, honoring it by His attendance and gracing it by the performance of His first miracle.

Turn to the second chapter of the book of John where we find the story of the Cana wedding. From this story we will draw four lessons; four very simple principles that, if put into practice, will make our marriages and our homes better. "On the third day (going back in John's account to the story of John the Baptist introducing Jesus as the Lamb of God) there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding." John 2:1, 2. There's some discussion as to the precise location of the biblical Cana, but it is clear that it was situated in the territory of Galilee and no doubt was close to where Jesus had been brought up. The word "Cana" means "place of reeds." Our word "cane," as in a walking stick, comes from this derivation.

"And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, 'They have no wine.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.'" John 2:3, 4. Wedding feasts back then typically lasted many days, even up to a whole week or more. It would have been a terrible social blunder to have run out of beverage, and regarding this disaster the mother of Jesus, Mary, now spoke to her Son. It's possible that Mary herself may have been a close acquaintance or even a family member of the wedding party and a part of the committee to organize the details for the wedding feast. Notice this: how interesting that a failure to make all the necessary preparations for a feast, in this case a wedding feast, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry led to a marvelous teaching moment, while the failure to make all the necessary preparations for a feast, the Passover feast, at the end of His ministry led to another marvelous teaching moment. What was that? That was when Jesus washed the disciples' feet at the Last Supper.

Some today wonder about the way Jesus spoke to His mother, when He said, 'Woman, what does your concern have to do with me,' but His answer was given with due respect and honor to his mother within the language and culture of His day. He was in no wise rude or discourteous to her, as shown by the care He demonstrated while on the cross, delegating the responsibility of her care into the hands of John, the only disciple who was not martyred, as one of His last acts. Or was

it because John was one of the few who remained by and stood by the cross that he was given this privilege, and therefore his life preserved from the Roman sword so he could fulfill his commission? We'll have to find out about that some day.

Some attempt to use this story as a justification for the use of alcoholic beverages, but that argument is not persuasive. The word "wine" in both the Greek language (*oinos*) and the English that was spoken in the days of King James did not distinguish between unfermented juice ("sweet" or "new wine") or fermented drink. There is no reason to suppose that the juice that was served at this festival was nothing but delicious unfermented juice of the grape. The Lord has been good to us in allowing us to enjoy a wide variety of products grown in our yard. Apricots, plums, peaches, nectarines, pluots, squash and tomatoes we've enjoyed for the past several months, beginning with the first week of June when the first of the apricots come ripe. Last week I harvested the grapes which have grown in my backyard, and one of the sisters in the church assisted as we made grape juice. There is nothing quite like fresh squeezed grape juice! Next year I'm going to plant even more vines. It's hard to imagine that Jesus, the Giver of life, would have supplied this feast with a drink calculated to destroy brain cells and dethrone reason. It surely must have been unfermented juice.

"His mother said to the servants, 'Whatever He says to you, do it.' Now there were set there six water pots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the waterpots with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, 'Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.' And they took it." John 2:5-8. Mary sensed that disaster was looming as the supply of beverage dwindled. That would have been a monumental social faux pas. What to do? Without any history, any precedent on which to base her faith, but simply knowing Him, she brought the need to the attention of Jesus. Remember, this story is going to end with the comment that this was Jesus' first public miracle. Why did Mary tell Jesus about this need? What made her think that He could do something about it? It's because she knew Him. She trusted Him. And even though His answer seemed to indicate that help was not to be expected, Mary still retained her confidence and alerted the helpers to do whatever He asked them to do, without question or hesitation.

Jesus told the servants to do something that must have seemed very strange. There were six stone jars there, each with a capacity of 20 to 30 gallons. What did Jesus do? He told them to fill the stone jars with water. They might have quibbled. They might have questioned. They might have wondered what the purpose would be in filling the stone jars with water; but they did it anyway. Not only did they fill them, they "filled them to the brim."

If you let your mind wander for a bit, you might recall other stories in the Bible that describe vessels filled with water and important consequences that took place afterwards. Was it not when Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, came to the well in Mesopotamia and Rebekah drew water from it to satisfy his 10 camels that the bride of Isaac, a mother in Israel, was found? Was it not when Elijah commanded that barrels of water be poured over the altar of the Lord, that the fire fell from heaven that consumed the sacrifice, the altar, the water and licked the dust? Was it not later

that when a lonely woman came to Jacob's well at noon to draw water that Jesus spoke to her about the "water of life," a message which brought salvation to her and most of that Samaritan village? Interesting stories in the Bible about filling vessels with water.

After the servants had filled the water jars with the approximately 150 gallons or so of water, Jesus told them to draw some out and take it to the master of the feast. The question naturally arises--at what point did the miracle take place, when the clear water was miraculously transformed into the fruit of the vine? Was it when the servants filled the stone jars? Was it when they drew the fluid out? Was it at some point in their journey to the master of the feast? Or, was it when he lifted the cup and it touched his lips? We're not told. But from other stories in the Bible, we may gain the idea that it would have been closer to the end of the journey than the first. God has a way of waiting to the moment of extremity before doing His saving work. It was on the seventh dip into the Jordan that Naaman was healed. It was after the seventh circuit on the seventh day that Jericho fell. It was when the feet of the priests waded into the Jordan that her waters were rebuked. In His great mercy, to help our faith grow, God has a way of waiting to the last minute to solve our problems. Have faith in God! Don't give up praying for your problems to be solved!

"When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, 'Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then that which is inferior; but you have kept the good wine until now. This beginning of signs (miracles) Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed on Him.'" John 2:9-12. I think of all the faces I would like to have seen at that moment, it would have been the expression on the face of the servant who carried the cup to the master of the feast. To be sure, the expression on the face of the master of the feast would have been an interesting study. His comment reveals surprise in that the better quality of beverage as been reserved till the last, out of keeping with what happened at most festivals. But it is clear from the text that he did not know the whole set of circumstances surrounding this miracle. I have to believe that the expression on the face of the servant who delivered the cup is the one that I would have wished to have seen. Somewhere in that face there was written relief, for the problem having been solved, wonder at the miracle of water becoming wine and delight to have been in the presence of such a gracious Person Who, although dressed in the common garb of a guest, had power to change water to grape juice. Yes, even the best juice that was ever served. Someday I'm going to check out the DVD (or whatever format Heaven uses to record what happens here) on this incident and study it frame by frame.

This was indeed a miracle, make no mistake about it. But we are deceived into thinking that it is a "unique" happening in that it is time compressed. I told you about the grapes that have grown in my backyard over the last 4 months or so. They are every bit as much a miracle as what happened in Cana two thousand years ago. The vines drink deeply of the water that is sent to them and somehow, through the power of God, the vines have ability to grow the berries which I crushed last week which became grape juice. Jesus changed the water into wine in my backyard. We

should be no less amazed at happens here every year than what happened at the wedding in Cana back then. When I went to pick up my dear wife last week, I drove up the lovely Napa valley where thousands of acres are dedicated to the growing of grapes which will be crushed and marketed as wine, fermented wine. As I saw the beauty of the vineyards, I couldn't help but think of the broken homes and wrecked cars that will result from the intoxicating beverages that are made from something that is a miraculous gift of God. Jesus turns water into wine every year. Just because it takes a few months and not a few moments, has the miracle lost any of its power?

Let's think of some ways in which this story speaks to us, and to our homes today. The devil is out to attack and demolish the home, knowing that the home is the nucleus of society. If he can successfully undermine the foundation, he will have gone a long way to bring upon humanity more misery and sorrow. Remember though, even if you're not married right now, there are still valuable lessons that come from this story. There are four point that come from this passage we wish to highlight. Four simple principles that are built into this charming account which will help us in our marriages, and in our lives.

The story opens by telling us about the wedding in Cana and that the mother of Jesus was there and then it says, "Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding." It's such a simple point, it might be overlooked. Jesus was invited to be there. Someone took the effort to write an invitation or extend a verbal notice to specifically invite Him to be there. Did you invite Jesus to be in your life today? Did you invite Jesus to be in your home, in your marriage today? When I was younger, during vacations taken in the family car, we would often sing as we drove along. One of the songs I remember was one that would highlight each member of the family individually, and say, "With daddy in the family, happy happy home. Happy, happy home. Happy, happy home. With daddy in the family, happy, happy home. Happy, happy home." Each member of the family would be highlighted in the song, with the last verse always being "With Jesus in the family, happy, happy home." Did you ever sing this song when you were young? There's a whole lot of good theology in those lyrics! Did you invite Jesus into your heart today? Did you invite Jesus into your home today? Did you invite Jesus into your marriage today? I know it seems like such a simple thing, but did you do it today? Did you get on your knees and pray to the Lord and invite Him to take charge of your life today, to be your Lord and Savior today. If you did that thirty years ago, wonderful! But did you do it today? Do you do it every day? I'm not sure what they would have done in Cana if Jesus hadn't been invited, but the story of the water changed to wine would not have been written!

The second point is just as simple. "When they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, 'They have no wine.'" It doesn't take long to read verse three of that chapter, and I don't suppose it took long for Mary to utter those words. She expressed her need to the Lord. Oh friends! How often it is that we will express our needs to family members, acquaintances or neighbors but not to the Lord! We'll murmur and complain to many people, but do we cry out to the Lord when we have a problem? Do we tell Him of our need? The lyric of that beautiful hymn comes to mind, "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry

everything to God in prayer. O what peace we often (“What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” written by John M. Scriven).

When their beloved leader John the Baptist was beheaded by the ruthless Herod, “then his disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus.” Matthew 14:12. When trials come, when needs arise, tell Jesus. When the path of your marriage is rocky, tell Jesus. When it seems that there’s no answer for the problems that come, tell Jesus. He wants to know; He wants to hear from you! The One Who designed mankind and invented marriage can help with your challenges. He can bring healing to relationships. He can soften hearts that have become hardened by time, calcified by disappointment. He can bring forgiveness where there is resentment. He can create love where love has waned or died. When He promised that He can make “all things new,” that includes a new vibrancy to your marriage. Tell Jesus!

The third point is arrestingly simple. “His mother said to the servants, ‘Whatever He says to you, do it.’” Is it so simple that it is overlooked? “Whatever He says, do it.” You couldn’t come up with a more simple expression than that, yet what a wealth of wisdom; what a treasure of blessing! If you will follow the simple counsel in Scripture of applying the Golden Rule in your home; of never raising our voices with one another; of showing at least the same courtesy to our family members that we might show to strangers we meet in an elevator; of treating each other with the same love that Christ has for us, what a blessing our homes would become! If you obey Christ in all you do, you will experience life to the fullest, and that will include a rich marriage. He came to give us life “more abundantly,” and by accepting Him as Lord of our lives, as Lord of our marriages, our homes can become “heaven on earth.”

The last point comes from the reaction of the master of the feast when he tasted the wine that Jesus had made. Contrary to what he was used to, in that as the festivities wore on the quality of the beverage decreased, the best had been saved for last. Thus it will be in the relationship to which Jesus is invited, in which He is sought as the Answer, and within which He is obeyed. It will mature and ripen in deepness and richness. The way of the world is opposite. Young couples often experience the fire of passion early on, and then fade into a dull routine of staying together only by compulsion. They stay together only because of the children. They stay together only because they can’t financially afford the alternative. The love has long expired, but the corpse of the marriage still is present. This is not God’s plan. If we live according to His will, marriages will increase in fervor. Fueled by the flame of agape love, the relationship will grow stronger as time goes on. Gray hair may crown the head; wrinkles might crease the skin. The wedding pictures may look less and less like the couple that once stood at the altar as time etches her silent pen, but the love that was planted in the heart will flourish and grow and bear fruit to the glory of God as the years go by.

Does this type of relationship sound interesting to you? God can make it happen in your home, if you let Him. Invite Him in. Go to Him when there are problems. Obey His word implicitly and you will discover exactly what the master of the feast discovered, that the best will be saved for last. You’ll be singing, “With Jesus in the family, happy happy home”!

