

This afternoon I will be officiating at the wedding of Joey Archuleta's daughter Kathy. Unfortunately, this is something that I don't get to do often with the age of our congregation with fewer young people in churches today. As a matter of fact, it has been over five years since I performed a wedding. Therefore, since I have the privilege of participating in a wedding today, why don't we discuss weddings this morning. Did you know that the first miracle Jesus performed was at a wedding? Jesus and some of His disciples had been invited to a wedding in Cana of Galilee. This event is recorded in the second chapter of the Gospel of John, the first eleven verses.

Read John 2:1-11

Weddings are interesting and most preachers can tell you some wild stories about the weddings that they have officiated. Take for example the wedding of one of my son's best friends in Santa Fe. Now Ryan was big guy who played center on the high school basketball team, and his bride was very petit. He was nervous, sweating like pig, and he asked me if he could hold his bride's hand during the service. I said of course, which turned out to be a good decision because she spent the entire ceremony holding him up; he was ready to pass out at any moment, and fall on either me or his bride.

I once did a wedding just north of Albuquerque and was warned before the service that we might be interrupted by a train. Sure enough, I was just half-way through the vows when here comes the train, and we had to pause and stand there looking at each other, allowing the groom to rethink what he was doing, until it passed by. I did another wedding at the Botanical Gardens in Albuquerque in August. It was so hot that the bride's mascara ran and by the time the groom kissed her she looked like a zombie.

But my most interesting wedding experiences were in Grants. On one occasion we had to wait an hour and a half for grandma to arrive. Judy and the organist Carol played every hymn and song they knew. At the end of the service the bride's father only gave me \$25 for performing the service; I guess that was all he thought his daughter's happiness was worth.

Then there was Frank, my barber, who asked me to perform his wedding at a local restaurant. He too was nervous and sweating. After the service, I told him that the marriage was not official until we had signed the marriage certificate. So, he ran out into the parking lot and got into his car and there were papers flying all over the place as he searched for the certificate. Then he rushed back in and gave it to Judy to be filled out. Judy glanced at it and said: "Frank, this is your car insurance statement!" He rushed back out and finally we had the proper paperwork.

Now Frank was a tightwad; so, he paid me in free haircuts for the next three months. Right after that a member of my congregation asked me if I would perform the ceremony for a waitress who worked at a local restaurant. I said sure. Well, before the wedding we found out that she was also known as the town prostitute. Judy quickly informed me that I was not to take in-kind service for payment this time.

But back to the wedding at Cana. Weddings were a big event back then as they are now. We really don't know whose wedding this was, or why Jesus and His mother were invited. From other writings outside the Bible, there are stories that the bridegroom was a nephew of Mary, and may have even been the Apostle John, the author himself.

For a Jewish feast such as a wedding, wine was essential. It was not that the people were heavy drinkers, but in the Ancient East wine was as common a drink as bottled water and coffee are today. Drunkenness was in fact a great disgrace, and they actually drank their wine in a mixture composed of two parts wine to three parts water.

Hospitality was a sacred duty, and in our text for this morning, this young couple was in danger of a major social embarrassment – running out of wine. It was like running out of firecrackers and beer at a redneck wedding. Mary must have had a special relationship with this couple and wanted to help them. So, she goes to Jesus and tells Him that there's a problem.

Now at first glance, Jesus' initial reply to His mother: "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" may seem rather harsh and rude. But this is really not the case. You have to understand the tone and the language of this time period. This was a common conversational phrase. When spoken in anger, it indicated disagreement, but when spoken gently it meant – "Don't worry, you don't quite understand what's going on; leave it to me, and I will settle it in my way." Jesus was simply telling His mother to leave the situation to Him, that He knew how to deal with it. Mary had complete confidence in her Son, and she tells the servants to do whatever He tells them, and she goes back to the party.

Now there are many ways to interpret this story, and there's a lot that we can learn from it. But this morning I want to focus on the fact that Jesus took time out from His busy ministry of healing and teaching to have fun and enjoy life. Here He is at a wedding with family and friends. I bet that He was even caught laughing, smiling, slapping some backs, and telling jokes. Of course, this is contrary to the image that some religious people and churches want us to have of Jesus and Christianity. To them, being a Christian is not supposed to be any fun. We are supposed to go around wearing black and looking gloomy; like we have been baptized with vinegar. You've seen Christians like that, haven't you? Instead of rejoicing because they have found Jesus Christ, that He dwells within their hearts and the fact that they are on their way to

spend eternity with Him and the Father, they walk around looking like they are headed to the dentist for a root canal or to the IRS for an audit.

By allowing His first miracle to be turning water into wine, Jesus sent a clear message that the Kingdom of God that He had come to proclaim and establish would be one characterized by life and joy. It should be noted that in the Bible wine was a symbol of joy and of the blessings of God. Thus, here Jesus demonstrated that He came to bring us joy and the blessings of God through a personal relationship with God. Jesus says in John 10:10 – “I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” The *Message* translates this verse this way: “I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.”

Real, deep joy comes only by letting Jesus rule our lives. Have you ever thought what the letters in the word “JOY” stand for? The J represents Jesus; the Y stands for you; and the O signifies zero, or nothing. Joy is when “nothing” comes between “Jesus” and “you.” It’s a great biblical formula for life.

Jesus told the servants to draw some wine out and take it to the master of the banquet for his approval. When the master of the banquet tasted the new wine, he praised the host by saying: “What a generous thing you have done. Instead of holding the cheap wine until the last when the guests have drunk so much that they can’t tell the difference, you have saved the best for last.” Therein lies the lesson for us. The world seduces people by offering what initially appears to be the best of material things and pleasures. Then when you have wasted your life on these empty promises, the world has nothing more to offer but dregs in your old age.

The Christian life is the complete opposite; it gets better with time. When things run out, whether it’s wine, health, hope, bread, or life itself, Jesus is still the only true source of life. In a world where there is never enough, Jesus is all-sufficient. Like the wedding in Cana, Jesus comes to us when everything appears lost, and turns what could have been a disaster into a miracle of joy and abundance.

During my messages at weddings, I usually warn couples that married life is not one continuous wedding day. Those of you who have been married for a long time know this for a fact. Weddings are like a violin. After the beautiful music is over, the strings are still attached. Any relationship worth its salt requires some effort, hard work. When I counsel young couples about to be married, I always ask if they ever argue and how they handle their differences. If they say that they are in love and never disagree or argue, we extend the number of counseling sessions. Because we all know that in any relationships there will be disagreements on many things such as money, in-laws, and how to raise the children. To ensure that couples can work through these disagreements and have a successful marriage, I encourage them to put God at the center of their marriage.

There are many similarities in the Bible between marriage and our relationship with God and His Son Jesus Christ. Throughout the Old Testament the allegory of marriage is used to illustrate the relationship between God and His chosen people the Israelites. In the New Testament, it is used to represent the relationship between Jesus and the Church. Now while you will not find the phrase “personal relationship with God and Jesus” in the Bible, the concept is there. From Genesis to Revelation, from the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem, there is the idea of our Creator desiring to dwell with us, to commune with us, and to relate with us in spite of our sins and the mess we make of our lives.

As Christians we are not called to a religion, a church, or a denomination, but to a personal relationship with the Lord. Jesus didn’t die so we could have a religion. He died so that we could have a deep, intimate relationship with God. As in a marriage, this relationship requires some effort on our part. The quality of our lives is determined by the quality of our relationships.

We all know that communication is essential in any relationship, and this especially holds true with the Lord. As we have discussed quite often, a daily quiet time and prayer should be an important part of our daily lives. Just as a couple in love long to be with each other, so should we long to spend time with the Lord. It should be something that we look forward to and not something that we dread or consider an obligation. We should use this quality time to share our needs, concerns, secrets, and dreams with the Lord as we do with our loved ones.

Another key to any relationship is trust. Without trust there cannot be any relationship. You need to know that you can depend on the other person. Do they keep their promises? Are they always there for you? Those of you who have been married for a long time know what I’m talking about. Unfortunately, sometimes the one we love lets us down and disappoints us. But God always keeps His promises; He’s always there for us; and He will never let us down.

The wedding is the beginning of hopefully a long-term relationship. Have you ever noticed that couples who have been married for a long time start thinking alike? Because Judy and I have been married for 54 years, she knows what I’m going to say before a word comes out of my mouth. Many times, she will say: “don’t say it or don’t think it.” The longer we are married the less I can get away with; she sees right through me. The same is true the longer we walk with the Lord. We begin to imitate Jesus more and more in our thoughts, words, and actions. We don’t have to ask “what would Jesus do?” We instantly know it because of our relationship with Him. We become the people that God wants us to be.

What a wonderful day it is when we finally realize that joy doesn’t come from outward circumstances, but from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Are you experiencing the joy

that only Jesus can bring into your life? If not, then give Him control of your life and let His joy fill your heart.

Work each day to improve your personal relationship with Him. Then act like it; if Jesus is in your heart, then let your face know it; – smile, be happy, sing for joy – because God loves you and there is no greater gift in all the world. He truly has saved the best for last! Amen