

Miracles and Mayhem

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[0 : 00] I'd just like to spend a few minutes tonight looking at chapter 2 of John. It's great when we sing the Psalms because they often express for us what we're afraid to admit.

And if you're here this evening and you're struggling and it's a battle and it's difficult, well you're not, you're in good company. Because the psalmist expresses very often that and comes round to knowing and trusting and relying on God.

And that is what faith is about. It's recognising that and holding on to that. And that's one of the reasons, one of the prime reasons we meet together.

To worship God and focus on Him and sing His praises and learn about Him so that our faith grows and we encourage one another and build each other up.

I know for many people in the church, related to the church, not just related to your work, generally in your studies but also church work. People have been very busy this last week and I know many of you are tired having really put in a lot of effort to come at 7 o'clock in the morning to pray here and that's been great.

[1 : 17] And so I will be short and if you fall asleep then you will have a dispensation.

Great thing about John's Gospel is it kind of, it's like an hourglass of revelation.

John spends a lot of time emptying our thinking, particularly maybe of the Jewish people, of the Old Testament rituals, emptying it out and revealing Jesus Christ and filling up the hourglass at the bottom with the glorious truth of Jesus Christ and who He is.

And John's focus is very much on the last three years of Jesus' life. You know, you look at the beginning of John, we know it well, we've been talking about it a lot recently.

It doesn't start with the angels came down and talked about the birth of Jesus. It doesn't deal with any of that stuff, it doesn't deal with his temple excursion when he abandoned, or his parents abandoned him, doesn't speak about his upbringing, goes straight to the reality of who he was and went on to the baptism of John.

[2 : 40] It's right focused on the whole Gospel of John is focused on the last three years of Jesus' life and in a very particular way. It spends the first 12 chapters of the book, it's often called the Book of Signs and it signs about Jesus and who Jesus is and what makes him very like this morning in many ways, what we're looking at, what makes him much better than anything else, Jesus being much better than anything else.

And in this chapter, I just want to speak about two words very briefly, transformation and revolution. Because both of these things are significant in the stories that we have.

The first one is the story of Jesus changing the water into the wine. I've entitled this section more than just a wedding. It's a very well-known but it's a beautiful passage, a very simple passage and we love it.

It's really easy, it's a great passage about the miracle of Jesus and what he's done. It's just so very, there's so much in it, even I was reading it again, I was thinking of various, lots of things I would love to spend time on but we don't really have time this evening to do so.

And a Jewish wedding and again, they would generally be weddings that lasted for days. The celebrations lasted for days. Do you think a Highland wedding is a kind of marathon?

[4 : 04] Well, it's nothing like a Jewish wedding because we go on for days and it starts with a very small circle of family, then it grows to the relations, then it grows to the neighbours, then it grows to the whole village.

So everyone ends up coming in, so you need a lot of wine. You need a lot of food but you need a lot of wine. And of course, it would seem fairly early on in the proceedings, this wedding to which Jesus and his disciples and Jesus' family were invited, they ran out of wine.

And that was unforgivable. It was an inhospitable thing to do. It was a disaster for the family name.

Now even at this point, Jesus and John is making clear that Jesus' mind is on the cross. My hour, he says, or my time in verse 4 has not yet come.

He's not yet come to this hour but he recognises that he will work a miracle here. I think there's a very interesting little point where he says, Dear woman to his mother.

[5 : 16] And it may be, maybe reading more into this than it is, but it would seem to suggest that even by this point he's beginning to change or signify to his mother that the relationship is changing.

He is now in his public ministry, he's the redeemer, he's the saviour, still her son. But it's a bit like what he says on the cross to her woman, to behold your sons and hold your mother. And there's almost a slight stepping back from his natural relationship into this new relationship with him.

And he asks for these six ceremonial washing containers to be brought to him. That in itself is significant, linking with the Old Testament and with the rituals that the Old Testament believers would have been involved in the washing.

And in a miraculous way, he turns these huge jars, probably if Declan or Ross or James or Thomas were to stand up or jump in, and they would fit in standing up into these jars. They were big jars, they were kind of like not jars we would have.

They're big, you know, the kind you see in the Lawrence of Arabia, these big things, people could go in. And they held huge amounts, as we're told there, 20 to 30 gallons.

[6 : 44] So they could have stood in it and Jesus changes miraculously this water into the very best wine. And you see what they did? The best wine, they started with the family, and people had had to drink too much cheap wine. You know, it's an old ploy.

And the host says, this is the very best wine, and you've kept it till now. Now primarily, this is not a miracle, or this is not Jesus attending a wedding to sanctify marriage.

It's often used at weddings, in fact, I think it's in some of the blurb that some churches use. And Jesus attended the wedding, and sanctified the significance of marriage by attending the wedding.

That's not really the point of the story. We know from many other places in Scripture, the reality and the significance of marriage. He's no more sanctified marriage here than he's sanctified fishing when he goes in boats.

Not as a legitimizing drink. You know, people have often said, oh well, you know, it's Jesus, he produced enough wine to make everyone absolutely paralytic. It's not about that.

[8 : 08] It's not really about that at all. It's not about him legit. It's not saying there's other places in the Bible that talk about alcohol, but it's not here. We're missing the point, if that is what we take from it.

What we recognize, the central message really for us, or maybe two central messages, is he did it to reveal his glory. Verse 11 says that, this, the first of his miraculous sign, Jesus performed at Canaan Galli, he thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him. So it was a sign.

This is the book of signs, the first 12 chapters of John. And here we have the first of these great signs, and the disciples put their trust in him, because God, Jesus revealed his glory. Now we know this story, don't we?

But it was a remarkable miracle that reveals Jesus as God, because he didn't even touch the water, as far as we know. All we're told is that he filled it with water, and when they went to draw it, it was the best of wine, because he is a great miracle working God.

And there's something beyond that, that the disciples would have come to recognize, and to think about, and that we need to think about also, is that Christ has come to replace the emptiness and the ordinariness of the Old Testament ritual with life, and with abundance.

[9 : 45] Wine in the Bible often has that connotation of life, and opulence, and celebration, and joy.

And we see that this is the coming age of the Messiah, who is going to introduce it for his people, a wedding banquet. Here is the bride of Christ, and salvation is going to be a marriage feast.

And he's going to make his... We are the... Sorry, did I say he was the bride of Christ? The church is the bride of Christ, and we are being prepared to meet with him.

And there's this great picture of opulence and joy and celebration, which is mirrored even in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which we take as a reminder to us of the Lord's table, of the marriage feast of the Lamb, which moves forward from the Passover through the Lord's Supper, and we do it until he comes.

And so there's a picture here, it's a sign of transformation, that Jesus comes into our lives, and comes into the lives of his people to transform them, to transform us from the inside out, and to bring us this great life. He empties their religion and their ritual.

[11 : 19] And there's much in the New Testament, there's much in John particularly, I think I may have mentioned this before, about contrasts, that Jesus talks about darkness and light, about death and being alive, about heaven and hell.

And he comes to bring abundance, and this is a picture of that abundance. He's provided far more than they need, he's provided the very best, absolute, kind of flicks back to the great picture in Isaiah of heaven, and the opulence of heaven, have been like a great feast, and wine on the leaves, and all of these great pictures.

And it's a reminder to us that Christ has come to bring transformation into the life of his people, and he is glorious. He reveals his glory in so doing.

And that is what we are to look for and remind ourselves of in our Christian lives, that he's come to transform us. He doesn't want us to be in the gutters. He doesn't want us to be treating him as if he is insignificant.

He wants us to move beyond the ritual and know the abundance of life that he brings through the Spirit of God in us, and it reminds us of what he gives. He's a great and abundant and beautiful saviour.

[12 : 45] He is here to transform us, transform our heart, and transform our lives, and give us hope in a future. And I think within this great sign, within this great picture of abundance that the Gospel brings, there's a really strong parallel between that and what we were talking about this morning, is a simple reminder that Christ cares about every day needs.

Yes, he does an amazing miracle, and he does it to perform, reveal his glory, and the disciples put their faith in him. But it's a very everyday situation, isn't it? Well, it was in the sense he comes and is willing to cater for very ordinary needs.

His time has not yet come. It's three short years. That's the time of a degree for you young people who are doing degrees. It's not like it passes very quickly. In three years, what are we doing in three years' time?

It passes like a flash for us. People are away from here and we're giving them books in the summer before they've hardly arrived. They go time moves so quickly. In fact, so quickly, sometimes I give people books and they're not even leaving.

That's a different story. That's just synonymy. But, you know, here's the three years, and Jesus has got this three years, and he's focused already at this point on this great burden and this great weight of what's happening, and he's making his declaration. He's been 30 years on there and he's making his public...

[14 : 12] It's our hasn't yet come, but he's moving towards that time. And the word has been made flesh. His face is set to Calvary. Yet he's at a wedding. It takes time to accept the invitation that his mother, and I'm sure at that point he was very probably the head of the family because his father, we presume, may have died by this point. We presume he would have been mentioned here.

And his mum comes to him with a problem. Isn't that interesting? You know, they have no more wine. That's all she says. This is Jesus. Why did she go to Jesus and say that?

Did she know that Jesus would be able to do a miracle by this stage? Remember, it says a couple of times in the Gospels that Mary treasured these things up in her heart. So she had this knowledge of who Jesus was. We don't know if she would have been taught, but she goes to him even at this point, saying they have no more wine. His mum comes with a problem.

And he deals with it and uses it in a remarkable way to show his glory. Now you may be sitting here this evening and you may think that God is so great that he is not interested in your inconsequential problems.

Now, I'm not saying you're going to pray to him about you running out of wine in your cellar tonight. But you know, the ordinary, everyday problems of life, he is a great sovereign king.

[15 : 43] And he wants us to come to him with our needs and with our troubles and with our difficulty. This is our God. Why has this prayer week been so significant and is so significant?

Because we are learning to live by faith and bring our ordinary insignificant troublesome lack of faith to him in prayer and looking for miracles and looking for answers. That's what it means to live by faith.

It's not necessarily, it's not having great orthodox understanding of the Gospel alone in our heads and the truths of the great God in our minds. It's taking these things and applying them to the everyday struggles and battles that we face and believing that he cares and is interested in our lives.

And that's what prayer is about, taking our burdens to the living God and seeing him. He will reveal his glory. Why are so many of us struggling in our Christian lives to our greater or lesser degree? Because we don't believe in the power of Jesus Christ.

We don't believe that he's worthy of worship and that he is glorious. That's why we try and sort everything out ourselves. That's why we try and come to our own conclusions. That's why we shake our puny fists at heaven when he doesn't give us what we want.

[17 : 07] Because we're not praying in his will and we're not praying at all. We're independent, self-contained, self-righteous sometimes and he isn't glorious to us.

He isn't worth worshiping. He isn't worth turning up for. He isn't worth praying to. He isn't worth speaking to and giving our lives. This is our God, the servant king.

This is our God who is glorious and he reveals his glory in this remarkable way. We need the Spirit of God to open up Scripture to us and we need to be students of Scripture so they will see these truths and apply them and believe in them and be moved by them.

Jesus changes the water into wine more than just a wedding. In the second story very briefly is Jesus in the temple.

I've entitled this section, the temple is not a church. We can maybe go on to look at that just very briefly. The situation here being that the Passover which was about to happen and they went up in Jerusalem to the time of the Passover.

[18 : 23] The situation by this point in Jerusalem was the Passover had become hugely commercialised. It was an end in itself.

The temple had become the centre of Jewish life, of law, of government, in a sense of religion, even of taxation. It had lost its original intention to be the place where God was in the Holy of Holies and where he was to be worshipped.

Yes, these animals were being sold for sacrifice but there was a good old business going on here and people were abusing the situation and were using religion to make money and to profiteer and to squeeze the poor out of what they almost didn't have at all.

Jesus takes the situation and again he empties it. He empties the Old Testament understanding of the temple and replaces it with himself and his claim to be the one who would be raised from the dead.

He would destroy the temple in three days, it would be raised again and Jesus was speaking about himself at this point even though the people didn't understand it.

[19 : 45] So this story, this second, we looked at the first story briefly. This second story, this is not about Jesus losing his temper. It's not about him losing control, he's raging and throws everything out of the place.

It's not about that. Not as a point about the churches should not be used for anything but worship. They shouldn't have coffee mornings and all these kind of things in churches because they should be used for worship because there are special places where God is.

There's nothing to do with that. This is not about equating the church building with the Old Testament temple. It's very different altogether. The message is again that Christ is coming with a revolution.

He's coming to empty the Old Testament of its religious ritual. He's coming to blow apart the reality of God being unavailable to the people and in his death and across this holy of holy switches, unattainable and can't get close to except through the priest once a year at the Passover, is going to be ripped in two from top to bottom.

And there will be free access for you and me into the nearer presence of God through Jesus Christ because he is the one who is the temple and he is the one who is destroyed and who is resurrected on the third day.

[21 : 18] There is great recognition that what he is doing is radical and life changing. You can't imagine how dangerous it was to do what he did at the beginning of his ministry.

It probably is what set the religious leaders of the day against Jesus because he appeared to be so blasphemous and he appeared to be so crazy in what he was saying and the temple being rebuilt in three days and they set their minds and their hearts against him from that point.

But he was saying something absolutely crucial and radical that Christ was going to be the Saviour and the Redeemer and would turn the world upside down.

And these disciples who remembered what he had said were told in verse 22, after he had risen were the disciples who turned the world upside down. Ordinary, unschooled people who turned the world upside down because they saw what Jesus had come to do and the radical nature of emptying the ritual of the Old Testament and bringing himself into that place of glory and honour and redemption.

It's the message even at this point is his hour has not yet come that had Satan trembling and the angels questioning and is unique in the history of humanity and that Christ comes into our lives to turn our lives upside down.

[22 : 54] And he has done that and wants our people to follow him who are his bride, the local church. Yesterday was very interesting. It was just amazing.

Do you remember, because I've said this many times here, when I first came here in 2001 to text from the Bible were very important.

I have many people in this city and I will do a new thing. Now at that point, 13 years ago, I had no concept, even that point, no concept of what God would do to get us to this point.

I couldn't have begun to imagine even in any way that we would have what we have here and that we planted churches and we're looking to plant more churches.

And when we come to the stage we're in here, it was a church, it was a city that was, where the church was fragmented. Everyone was doing their own thing.

[23 : 57] Nobody cared really about what other people were doing. It was maybe the odd kind of pastors lunch, things like that, but nothing much. But there's been a remarkable change and God, I mentioned it this afternoon, we're talking about it.

These are dark days in the city, spiritually. It's almost as dark in many ways you think it could get, but we're almost at that point probably where we're going to get very near legally and we're probably to be persecuted.

And there's a kind of agenda of rampant atheism or secularism where you feel that that philosophical mindset is winning the day and is a bit like a steamroller.

And we say, what can the church do? Well, I do feel and I honestly feel that the darkest moment comes before the dawn. And I believe spiritually that God is setting in place great things to turn this city upside down.

There's huge opportunities and God is moving people and yesterday to have 450 people or whatever together, not only worshiping, but with a single mind for the gospel.

[25 : 21] And the gospel in this city and well beyond it was really moving for me. And I think where the devil thinks, it's a bit like the darkness of Gethsemane, where the devil almost you feel that he thought it was his point of victory.

And maybe even the nails going into the hands and feet of Christ, it's the greatest moment, but it becomes his absolute destruction. And similarly, God is turning this city upside down and I believe that.

And I want us to pray about that and I want us to see and ask God to work and to reveal his glory and reminders of himself.

Because that whole concept of the Old Testament and the Old Testament temple is destroyed in Jesus Christ. The church of the New Testament, the building, for example, is not the temple anymore.

Christ is our representative. He is our high priest. He is the focus of our worship. We worship, as he said to Samaritan women, and spirit and in truth. And involves his destruction and his resurrection and our hope is in him.

[26 : 40] Not in a building and not in a denomination and not in a church and not in a form of religion.

And then as he becomes the temple that is destroyed and is rebuilt, so in salvation, we become the temple.

So we become the dwelling of God. Not that you don't come in and we use the language. You know, I'm coming to church to meet with God. No, you're not. You're not coming to church to meet with God.

God is in our hearts. We are the temple of the... don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit lives in you? God's temple is sacred and you are that temple. We don't get a bus to come into church to meet with God in this temple.

The temple is destroyed. God is not in this building as his dwelling place. God inhabits the praises of his people and we are his people.

[27 : 42] Do you not know that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit whom you have received from God? You are not your own. You're bought with a price to have. We're on our God with your body. So whenever people are gathered together, God's presence is with them because God is in them.

And God is with you when you leave from here. So it's not like you act differently when you come into church because you think, well, God's here in some way. And then you can act a different way every other day of the week.

Or that God's different because it's the Lord's day. And then on Monday to Saturday, you act differently because you think, well, that's my days. God is with us because we're his temple. So your conversation, anywhere that you go in your workplace, in your studies or your homes or in your mind, your morality, my morality or private behavior, we should never have them until it is as long as no one finds out.

It doesn't matter because God dwells in us as Christians. And it's not like I need to act a certain way in church, but I don't need to act in that way with my friends.

I don't need to think that way when I'm with other people. And we have a kind of, there's such a danger, isn't there, of hypocrisy that we act one way with our Christian friends.

[28 : 53] Or when we think God is watching or when we're in church and we act differently at any other point. Ultimately, I think that's why it doesn't matter what kind of clothes we wear at church.

We dress up for church. Why would we do that? I have no problem with anyone dressed. That's fine. No problem. Then you're dressing up or dressing down. But the reality is God is God. And he sees, he sees well beyond our outward demeanour and our behavior and he sees into our hearts.

And we can dress just like the Queen of Sheba. And it makes no difference to God's understanding. God knows us and we need to remember that.

He came with this great revolution to destroy the temple and to be raised up himself to bring in this glorious new kingdom where we become.

So he dwells in us. He doesn't leave us as orphans. And we remember that this evening. And so, as you sit at the large table for a few moments this evening, please remember and think about Jesus, how great he is, and how he is always with us.

[30 : 00] And as I mentioned this morning, that even when we die, when in our moment of death, his spirit remains in us and our soul goes to be with him. Because we will no longer be dead ever. Because he instills his spirit to us and we are his children.

And that same resurrection hope is ours today, which we worship him on the Lord's Day. This resurrection day. It's so significant and so important. And we see his glory so that we put our faith in him like the disciples.

The disciples put their faith in him. In whom is your faith this evening? It really matters. And it's not a, I don't mean by that, your head knowledge of Christ or your standing at that level.

I mean, in whom you have entrusted your life in eternity and whom you live to serve. hugely significant. Where to be those who believe in him.

Believe by faith in him. That last verse is interesting verse 24. Many people saw what Jesus did and they believed in his name.

[31 : 18] But Jesus would not entrust himself to them for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony, but man for he knew what was in a man. He could well be there a difference between head knowledge and believing in him because they were impressed with his miracles.

And entrusting themselves to him because he was the glorious Son of God. Because many of those who seemed to believe, who followed him in the early days, who loved him.

We're told when he started talking about their need and their lostness and their sin, it turned away and said the sayings are hard or difficult. And they no longer followed anymore. We're not like the men and people of Hebrews, not to be those who turn back, but who entrust ourselves to him.

And please remember many people also that we know and love are blind. Just like the Jews who said it's taken 40 days, 6 years to rebuild the temple, you're going to raise it in 3 days?

They didn't understand what he was saying. Please pray for our friends. Pray for your 3 friends. Pray that they will know and understand and see the Saviour whom we love.

[32 : 27] Who's transformed our lives, who has turned us upside down for good and who has redeemed us. And let's think about him at the Lord's table.