

Introduction

Well if you're new to Christ Church then you're very welcome – we're really pleased you've come.

What we're going to do now for the next 30mins or so is have another look at that passage we read and work out together what it means and how it applies to us.

If you're new to church that might be a bit of a surprise. It might not be the kind of thing you thought we'd do – or it might be the kind of thing you'd hoped we didn't do.

But as a church family we are convinced that the Bible is true, it's about God and that its message is good news for anyone who'll give the time to listen. And hopefully in 30mins time you'll agree with me – if not they'll be an opportunity to ask your questions and raise any objections!

It will help if you have the passage open and where we read from earlier.

In my final year at university I shared a house with 4 other guys. Joe, Chris, Aaron and Al.

We basically got on great and had a lot of fun. But one of our housemates wasn't so good with the whole keeping clean thing.

It wasn't that he didn't shower or didn't at least attempt to clean up after himself. Rather the problem was that he didn't know how to work the washing machine.

He knew that you had to put your clothes in the front and then washing powder in the drawer before switching it on.

But the thing that stumped him was the two slots in the detergent drawer on the washing machine.

So for a whole year he put his washing powder in the pre-wash slot, then set the machine on a quick wash and took his clothes out 45mins later.

The next person to open the detergent drawer would find his washing powder in the wrong slot and tip it out in the bin before putting their own clothes in – which meant by the next time he came to the machine he presumed everything had gone fine and repeated his pattern.

In other words for a whole year he only ever rinsed his clothes.

No washing detergent ever saw his clothes for a whole year.

Which is why he was a bit smelly.

So bad was the problem that when one of my housemate's sisters visited and borrowed his sleeping bag she woke up with a strange rash!

Well if you're just starting as a student in Liverpool – it's worth noting that to really remove those nasty stains and smells from your clothes you really do have to do more than rinse them in lukewarm water.

But if we're honest. Most of us have got the clothes washing thing nailed okay. Most of you are bright enough to know which tray to put the soap in and some of us are fortunate to have married someone who puts the washing on!

So our problem is not often physical dirt sticking to our clothes or body rashes from borrowed sleeping bags.

But that doesn't mean we don't have a dirt problem.

We do.

And our dirt problem is the problem of moral dirt sticking to our hearts.

It's not so much that we get morally dirty from the bad stuff that people around us do – that would be bad enough – it's rather that inside we're morally dirty.

None of us feel clean.

Lust, pride, greed, malice, hatred. If we're honest none of these are very far away from any of us.

And they're not outside problems that wash off easily. They're heart problems. It's dirt from the inside and try as we may we can't do away with the moral filth they leave.

Ponder for a moment, think of the things you've done this week. The things you've thought about, the things you've said. Any of us not finding reasons to feel guilty? I think not.

But we're not the first to feel the guilt and to want to be clean.

The Jews of Jesus' time had invented a system of ceremonial washing far above and beyond that prescribed by the OT law and used it to try and get clean.

That's what the big jars were for in v6 - over 1000 pints of water to try and get clean.

Like a first century jet wash people rolled up and washed themselves and their crockery. In a vain attempt to be pure in front of a perfect God.

But the problem was, no matter how many times they washed things or how much water they used they still left stinking! Morally they were untouched.

Which is why the revelation of Jesus glory in John 2 was such great news for them and for us.

Great news because as Jesus reveals his glory he shows himself to be the great cleaner of hearts.

And more than that he's the great host of an amazing banquet.

You see when Jesus provides cleansing – it comes with great celebrating.

And what's on offer here, to anyone who will believe in the Jesus of the Bible – the Jesus that John is writing about here – is guilt free life and a future flowing with wine.

Well both of those truths leap out of the story of the wedding feast we read earlier. So let's take a look at that now...

Wine for the wedding party...

v1 tells us that this is the 3rd day – which if you add it to the 4 days we looked at last Sunday makes this the 7th day so far in John's account.

7 being quite an important number for John as you'll find when you read his whole book.

7 is the number of perfection – and in John's books he records 7 signs and 7 I am statements.

Then in both v1 and v11 John tells us where Jesus is – Cana in Galilee.

In other words this is a real wedding with real guests and quite probably a family wedding with Jesus there with his mother in v1 – but a real wedding with significant beyond itself – it was the culmination of Jesus' first week on the job.

The grand finale of week 1.

It's useful to know that first century weddings were a big deal. Bigger than even today. The party could last all week and there was an open bar with the tab being picked up by the groom.

So if the wine ran out then it was bad form from the groom – he was being a bad host.

But that's exactly what happened here.

Imagine the scene.

The party's in full swing. Everyone's listened to the father of the bride witer on about how long the bride used to take in the bathroom when she was a teenager and how she wet her pants on her first day at school. They cringed when the groom cried saying how beautiful his wife is. They've even sat through the slight risky speech from the best man where his references to the grooms ex-girlfriends really didn't go down well and probably ruined his relationship with his in-laws.

And now it's the party.

People are sat around drinking and chatting while the kids and the bridesmaids are doing the YMCA dance for the 50th time since the party started last Tuesday.

You're with Jesus chatting and drinking when his ashen faced mother walks up to him and says v3

"They have no more wine"

And that sets the scene for what happens next – which John tells us reveals the glory of Jesus so much that the disciples put their trust in him v11.

Jesus' initial response is to tell his mother that his "time has not yet come" v4.

A phrase which refers to the cross – and which is enough to tell us that whatever happens next is not nearly as amazing as some of the other things which are about to happen in John's book.

His Mum doesn't pay much attention to Jesus' comment and just tells the servants to "Do whatever he tells you" v5.

Jesus sends them off to the well to fill these big stone jars then in v8 he tells them to draw some more to take it to the wedding's MC to give a try.

This water is now wine – and really good wine. Far better than anything that they'd had at the wedding so far – and so good that the MC hints it might be wasted on people who've been drinking for a week already.

Look at v10 READ

I have to say, and I know there are people here who will disagree with me, but I really don't understand what the big deal with wine is.

I don't mind drinking wine – it's just that I don't really understand the whole wine drinking anorak thing.

Radio 4 has a weekly programme called the Wine Programme when Oz Clarke and Andrew Jefford talk about – and it seems drink – wine for 30mins. I listened to it this week and they were discussing a range of vital topics from... the relationship between the bulge of a bottle and its price and an a fascinating(?) interview with Ingrid Lena from the wine education society!

Maybe it's me but it does seem a little pretentious! After all it is only a drink!

Well in Jesus' day wine was a big deal.

Not because they had people like Oz Clarke pontificating about it on national radio.

Rather because wine was an OT symbol of the prosperity of God's people.

It was said that when God's people were restored wine would flow from the hills.

Listen to how the prophet Amos talks about it in Amos 9:11-15 READ

11 "In that day I will restore
David's fallen tent.
I will repair its broken places,
restore its ruins,
and build it as it used to be,

12 so that they may possess the remnant of Edom
and all the nations that bear my name, ^[a] "
declares the LORD, who will do these things.

13 "The days are coming," declares the LORD,
"when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman
and the planter by the one treading grapes.
New wine will drip from the mountains
and flow from all the hills.

14 I will bring back my exiled ^(b) people Israel;
they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them.
They will plant vineyards and drink their wine;
they will make gardens and eat their fruit.

15 I will plant Israel in their own land,
never again to be uprooted
from the land I have given them,"
says the LORD your God.

Amos was a prophet speaking to Israel shortly before they were destroyed by the Assyrians. Generally his message what one of doom – Israel have got what's coming to them for rejecting God. But then in his final chapter he has this wonderful picture of the return of Israel following their exile. When the streets and hills would run with wine – celebration – gladness – joy.

The problem was that when in fact they did return in Ezra and Nehemiah's day it was as dirt poor farmers and there was little wine in sight – added to that the people from the northern Kingdom who wandered back were unable to prove their heritage and no-one knew who Israel was and who had been mixed with the other nations.

So here when Jesus goes to a well and produces wine the symbolism as far as John is concerned is massive.

Not only is this guy amazing because it is within his creative power to speak and make wine from water – which according to chapter 1 is a God like ability – but also he's bringing in the end of the exile, the restoration of God's people.

In Jesus will be the fulfilment of the OT promises. Here with Jesus the people will be the people of God living in relationship with God as their father. In him they will be planted and never be uprooted. In him they will live and enjoy the fruit of their labours.

So Jesus in filling the purification jars says come to me and you're completely clean.

And in drawing out the wine from the well Jesus starts the beginning of the celebrations for the people of God.

John says that believing in Jesus gives us life – life that's destined for the place where the wine of celebration runs from the hills.

Where all the longings of your heart for rest, satisfaction and pain free perfection are met.

The problem is that it's difficult to believe him at times isn't it.

John says we have life and we have life to the full.

But at times it feels like we're short changed on life.

I spoke to a friend this week who was telling me just how easier his non-Christian friends lives seemed to be.

They had better jobs, their kids weren't as naughty, their car was shinier and they had a lot less to think about.

And maybe you feel like that too.

That all this week you've been resisting the lure of freshers week but really you've felt that God's a bit of a kill joy to make you do that.

That for a whole year you've not joined in with the gratuitous flirting in the office – even though people seem to really enjoy doing it. And now they're all dating and you're still single.

Whatever happened to life to the full?

Well don't forget v4.

Water into wine is not the end. This is just the beginning.

And belief in Jesus is a call to shift our desires.

To believe by faith that it's better by far to live now with a clean conscience and a certain hope of eternity in this world remade by Jesus than it is to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of now while all the time never dealing with your moral dirt.

Belief that in Jesus we have all we need to enjoy life now – because enjoyment far from being indulgence in the habits of a fallen nature – is living in God's world with Jesus as Lord.

Seek your pleasure HERE says Jesus.

All our pleasure is to be found in knowing Christ.

So the pleasure of drinking wine is not simply its aroma or its taste it's not even that it dulls the senses or make you temporarily forget the pain of living in a fallen world but the pleasure of drinking wine is that we drink knowing that it's the God who holds together the universe who sends the rain to water the vine and the sun to ripen the grape and that really it's only because Jesus is on the throne of heaven that you have the time, life, taste to enjoy it at all.

That's something you'll never learn from Oz Clarke on The Wine Programme!

But lest you think that Jesus is a push over – an unlimited off-licence for anyone who pays him lip service – then John in his book puts the story of the water into wine next to another story.

And that's my second heading this morning.

A whip for the temple

From v12 to the end he tells how Jesus cleared the temple.

Jesus, now in Jerusalem for the Passover. Goes into the temple and finds it full of people buying and selling stuff for the sacrifice.

In some ways their presence there is understandable. People would have travelled a long way and it was certainly more convenient to buy their sacrifice animals than drag them all the way from Galilee. And the temple tax had to be paid in the temple currency so money changing needed to happen.

Jesus isn't angry that it's happening it's where it's happening. Inside the temple courts v14.

When the original temple was built they wouldn't even cut the stone on the sight it was too holy and now 2 temples later they've set up a market in the very place that represents God's presence with his people.

So John tells us that Jesus consumed with zeal for the house of God clears the temple with a homemade whip.

Scattering the animals and driving away the money changes.

Imagine it.

Here is Jesus in the outer courts of the finest building in the whole city and region. A country boy from out of town. Driving out animals and traders.

Don't miss the shock of this! This would be like a farm labourer from Ingelton clearing the shops at Lime Street station.

It's outrageous!
Who is Jesus to drive these people out?

And why for goodness sake didn't they over power him? Why didn't they stop him by force and throw him out instead.

Well I think the point is that they couldn't.

Just like as John tells us later when they came to arrest Jesus in chapter 18 the soldiers fell down to the ground when he identified himself.

Jesus carried authority in the temple.

Why?

Well look at v18-22 READ

Jesus carried authority in the temple because he himself was its fulfilment.

All these years the temple sacrifices and temple building itself had been point to one man – Jesus. And instinctively when the God man Jesus told these people to go – they left – they had to leave – the temple belonged to Jesus and everything it was pointed to him.

Well those themes get picked up in chapter 4 and we'll return to them then.

But just as we finish let's put these two stories together and see what they show us about Jesus.

That the one who brings cleansing and celebration comes also as judge.

That Jesus is not to be messed with or ignored because he's the judge.

So as we finish I want to ask you this question from the passage.

How will you respond to Jesus?

You see there are 2 responses to Jesus in the passage and both on the surface look the same but the outcome is very different.

In v11 the disciples put their faith and receive the life he promised where as in v23-25 people pretend and they we find later on the receiving end of Jesus' judgement.

One of the things we're very keen on as a church is being friendly to everybody.

It doesn't matter where you've come from, what you've done, what you believe you're very welcome to come and join in with us and be part of what goes on.

It doesn't matter if you don't support Liverpool or Everton and can't stand the Beatles – we'll still be your friends!

And if you stick around afterwards we'll feed you and give you some of the finest free coffee you've ever drunk.

But we want to be clear with you from the outset – be clear because Jesus is clear here – that being a follower of Jesus is more than simply hanging out with his friends.

Being a genuine party destined believer in Jesus is about more than having a Christian family at home who are desperate for you to go to church when you arrive in Liverpool.

In v24-25 Jesus looks these so called believers straight in the heart and he wouldn't trust them.

He knew what was going on. He knew that their hearts were still rotten and rebellious and that no amount of good company or right words was going to sort them out.

In chapter 8 he calls these guys children of the devil.

And he sees straight into your heart too.

So for all of us we need to take a moment to examine our response to this Jesus.

We need to ask ourselves if we've come to the point yet where this Jesus is your saviour, that you know he's cleaned your heart up and changed you from the inside out.

If not then you have to come to him on your knees in repentance and he will.

Wine at a wedding and a whip at the temple – Jesus is the cleanser, the source of celebration but also the judge.

PRAY.