

John 2 Water to Wine, and More

One of the best lines in the 2003 movie 'Pirates of the Caribbean' is when Jonny Depp says to Orlando Bloom, 'If you were looking for the opportune moment, that was it!' If we have something important to do, timing is important.

In John ch2, Jesus Christ, Son of God has become flesh and made His dwelling among us. He has come to save the world from sin and its consequences. He will do this 'when His time has fully come' at the Passover Feast in Jerusalem in John ch 19. He will do it by offering Himself as a once for all sacrifice for our sin on the cross at Golgotha. He will be 'glorified' as He is 'lifted up' first in crucifixion but then in triumphant resurrection.

All that lies ahead, but we're still in ch 2 near the start of His ministry, which may explain His apparent reluctance at first to be in the spotlight. 'My time has not yet come' he tells His mother when she asks His help. Nevertheless, what appears to be a concession miracle, done almost as a favour, gives us a strong flavour of what He is all about.

1st Century Jewish wedding celebrations could last up to a week. How embarrassing for the hosts if they began to run low on supplies! In an act reminiscent of the miraculous OT provision stories involving Elijah and Elisha, Jesus provides more than enough of the best quality wine. Life and love and marriage, these are good things. Let nothing curb legitimate celebration!

This occasion also serves to illustrate the 'Kingdom of God' He talks about so often. It's something to celebrate, that God so loves the world that he generously gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Here is light and life and love. The King has come among us. The heavenly Bridegroom has come for His 'bride' the Church. We are loved. Grace that is more than sufficient, that knows no bounds is made freely available. Let's rejoice!

But let's also note what happens next in John ch2. This same Jesus goes to a major festival in the nation's capital Jerusalem and creates a very public scene in the courts of the temple, their national shrine. While the other Gospel writers describe something like this near the end of His ministry just a week before His execution, John puts this near the start. Perhaps it happened more than once. Perhaps it needed to!

I think John mentions it here to give His readers an important balance.

At the wedding in Cana we're given a picture of Jesus quite relaxed, modest, generous, one of the guests, the Creator at home in the flesh among His creation. At the Temple we see this same person, our Lord and Master Jesus, passionately indignant, refusing to tolerate corruption and abuse, physically ejecting those who were turning worship into a business, and a crooked one at that! He cracked a whip and loudly denounced people for their lack of reverence and their exploitation of foreign visitors, literally chasing them from this consecrated location.

Now this is the same person, we cannot choose one over the other. The Son of God is kind and loving and generous, He operates with freedom and joy. We are frequently moved as we read of Him gently touching the leper, taking the hand of Jairus' daughter, speaking to Mary Magdalene by name.

And yet he is also passionate about worship, holiness, integrity and is steadfastly opposed to all sin and evil. He welcomes, heals, liberates, feeds sinners who repent and come to Him, but He warns with prophetic ferocity those who think they can use God for a 'soft touch'.

OT prophet Malachi predicted this day almost 400 years before. Listen to these words from the last couple of pages of the OT: 'Suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple; the messenger of the covenant whom you desire will come...but who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap.' (Malachi 3 v 1-2)

Those who think they can sin all they please and make it all better by paying with a wee offering in God's house are in for a sharp shock!

The limitations of this OT system of sacrifice were becoming clear. It hadn't largely created a spiritual people who loved the Lord and were ready to welcome and follow Christ. Repeatedly in this Gospel we'll witness highly religious people obsessed with outward performance and control who reject Jesus and in the end plot to have Him killed!

On this occasion they challenge Him regarding authority. Who does this country preacher think He is to disrupt their traditional way of doing things?

Jesus' answer is brilliant as it is short, 'Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.'

The days of the Jerusalem temple and its limited worship were numbered, within a generation it would be demolished by the Romans. But that isn't what Jesus is talking of here. Long before that He would be executed and rise again from the dead.

Tear down this temple of my body, he says, go ahead and kill me, but I'll be back. And my death and resurrection will give the divine authority for the sin of the whole world to be cleansed and forgiven.

What kind of person makes such a claim - a crazy, deluded dreamer with some kind of death wish?

Not in this case. In a few short years Jesus would prove the truth of His words and thus His divine authority by giving Himself to die as a once for all, sufficient sin offering on our behalf and presenting himself alive again on the third day. He is Lord, God's Son, with all authority in heaven and on earth, the Saviour we all need.

Not just a name to cite in a glib formula so we can go on living as we please but a living, winsome and inspiring Master to know and trust and follow and serve. Who provides for the celebration, defends the vulnerable and drives out evil. Who loves us enough to die for us and lives to answer our prayers today.

Which brings me back to that question of timing. The NT later says, 'Now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.' If you were thinking of engaging seriously with the Son of God, today would be fine. If you've been waiting for 'the opportune moment', now would be just perfect.