

Jesus: The king of the feast!

John 2:1-12

Well, we're not only at the second Sunday of advent, but across the country, Kids have started opening their advent calendars as well, it's now December!

Today should have been your 4th chocolate, or picture, or bible verse – depending on which kind of calendar you have!

They're quite different aren't they. Chocolate? Or spiritual? Or both?

I've been trying to think about what Christmas means to most people, what's going on for people at this time, and I think at the moment I have 2 big thoughts.

1- is that it's a time for family, hopefully a happy time, with presents, time together, time to catch up and hear how the year has gone, and what plans are for next year.

2- But the other is, not unrelated, but tinged with sadness. A time that's not like that, but where people wish it was.

Whether because of distance, or bereavement, health or other reasons. Life is full of suffering and struggle, and many people will find Christmas hard, or lonely.

But Christmas is actually and ultimately about God. A time when we remember God coming to earth. But what does that mean to most people?

How do they think about God?

Our passage today gives us a wonderful insight into what God is really like. So I want to just start with some misconceptions.



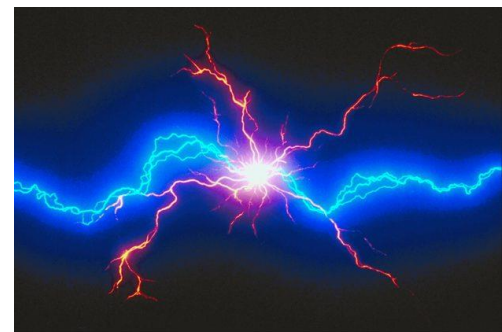
1. A grandfather in an armchair

Some people really think of God like this. As soft, he doesn't have much influence, doesn't do anything about what's done wrong on earth, just smiles and gives out presents – very Santa like, do you think or know people who think that?

2. An impersonal force who keeps all the rules of the universe maintained

God looks after the world, but probably just the big things. You can't have a "relationship with God", he's not a person but a force. This view of God at best sees him as the keeper of right and wrong, and at worst, the one who makes gravity and so on keep working.

Of course, that leaves no sense of joy or enjoyment of God, and sadly, no sense of compassion or care from God towards us.





3. Lastly: A cosmic killjoy?

A little more personal this time, except some people just see God as someone who doesn't like fun, he doesn't want **us** to have fun and enjoy his world. It's like he watches us and if he sees it, says "look! Fun is going on, I better put a stop to it!"

Now, of course, Christmas time is a reminder that God is a person, Jesus is God entered into our world – and his very existence shouts to us God is personal, he can be known!

But right at the start of his gospel, John shows us more of what God is actually like, as Jesus starts to walk about and do things, we get an idea of what God is like.

And the first thing we see today is:

1. God is not a party pooper

I'm sure some of you have heard this before, but just *think about* what he does.

Jesus is at a wedding, and he turns water into wine.

He doesn't say, "tut tut tut, you shouldn't be drinking dancing and having fun"

He does a miracle to provide these people with loads of extra wine as they celebrate!

And two details John tells us, really make the point that Jesus is being exactly the opposite of a party-pooper here.

The first is the **quantity** of wine.

Did you notice, 6 water jars, each would hold 20-30 gallons.

That's an estimate of 150 gallons of wine, 682 litres!!

909 bottles of wine, or 76 cases of wine.

I think it's just hard to say God doesn't want us to have fun, when you imagine Jesus doing a miracle and providing that much wine!

But more than that, the second detail is the **quality**.

And John is really fun, he doesn't just say, oh by the way it was the best wine ever!

v8 "Jesus told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." [see how he's doing it on purpose!]

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine.

He did not realize where it had come from though the servants who had drawn the water knew.

Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

You see, actually what Jesus has to offer is the best.

He isn't a cosmic kill-joy, he's the true joy giver.
What *he* has to offer is better than what we can get elsewhere.

Of course the couple getting married had put out the best wine they had first – but what Jesus made and gave them was much better.

Not a kill joy, but a joy giver.

And what a great reminder at Christmas time, that God comes to us, and comes to us as the joy giver. Don't seek our joy in worldly things, but seek it in him!

But there is an additional element to what Jesus did here.

And it is about **covering shame**.

I don't know if you've heard anyone explain before, that one way of viewing different cultures across the world is that some are primarily truth cultures – usually western cultures (so us) are seen this way.

And some are shame or honour cultures. Usually eastern cultures are seen that way.

So, you know those articles you read in the papers about parents helping their kids to cheat in their exams. I think in both India and China I read this summer about parents even scaling 2 or 3 floors on the outside of a building to get to a window and help their kids cheat in an exam. <https://youtu.be/dpX3hWCHm5I>

Why? How could they do that – because the honour of a good grade, or the shame of a bad one, is more important than truth and honesty!

And there is a serious issue at this wedding in Cana of galilee, which Jesus is, regarding honour. The culture of their day did value honour, and it was hugely serious to bring shame on your family or your village.

And running out of wine at your wedding is a really big deal – this is really shameful stuff. I think to our ears, we just can't quite grasp the situation right, because for most of us, shame isn't such a huge thing.

But for the groom, running out of wine is a disaster. In front of so many people, to get it wrong, to be a bad host, would have brought great shame on him, his new wife, his family.

And Jesus, is in the business of taking away our shame.

John of course will show us more about that as the gospel goes on.

But for us to know, that Jesus is in the business of taking away shame. That he removes the shame from this man, by providing the wine...

And he will remove our shame, for all the wrong things we do, if we are his followers – well that's great news.

And if you've never thought about that before, well good news for you this Christmas, God came (not as a party pooper, but as the true joy giver) and as one who would take away your shame.

That's the first big thing.

The second big thing, and the last thing for us to notice in this passage, that we learn about God, that he is not simply rigid and mechanically stuck to a way of doing things, like a machine, so that he doesn't care for, love and deal with struggling people – **but he is filled with compassion** and moved to act in love.

That is what God is like, that's what Jesus is like.

Look at v3 “**When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, “They have no more wine.” “Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied.** [that's not rude by the way] **“My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”**

I want us to be clear in our minds – this was not the plan. Jesus had not intended to do a miracle here and show that he's God, not yet, it's too soon.

But, not that God's plans aren't completely perfect, and right, and always take place – because they do.

Not that Mary forces Jesus into it – because she doesn't.

(interesting that *she* obviously knows he can do a miracle here)

But because Jesus is moved with compassion.

He understands the situation, he knows the groom is going to be shamed, and he cares.

There are if you like competing voices

“Don't' do it, it's not yet your time, you need to wait”

“but he's in trouble, I can help him, I can sort it all out”

Do you see – not the plan, yet loving and compassionate!

And the compassion of God is so great, his care for individual people is so strong, that that's the voice which won.

If you ever think God doesn't care about you because you're just one little person, why would he care about you?

Think about this – Jesus doesn't really know this guy, he's only there because his mother is invited (v1-2 make that clear)

Yet his care and compassion for him is strong enough to move him, so that he fixes it before his time has come.

God cares about people, their struggles, their shame. He is moved with compassion.

So if you're struggling and suffering, enjoy what Christmas means for you – we know what God is like, he cares, he has compassion for you, Jesus came, and he shows us that.

And the message is not – God will take away all the struggles and hardship you face at the moment. But rather, as you face struggles and hardship, know what God is truly like! Call

out to him, and pray that he would change you, and give you the joy, the strength, the peace which he loves to give.

That's our snapshot of what God is like, right at the start of John's gospel, as John introduces us to Jesus and we start to see what he's like.

He's not a kill joy – but the giver of true joy, the one who takes away our shame. And he's full of care and compassion – he's a person – Jesus shows that, and he cares for you.

v11 “What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of his miraculous signs, through it he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”

Prayer:

Father, thank you that Jesus shows us what you're like, that we see your compassion and kindness, your loving and joy-giving nature.

You are and he is indeed glorious! Please draw us closer to you this Christmas, we ask it in his name. Amen