

What makes you happy?

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[0 : 0 0] What makes you happy? Think about that. What makes you happy? I may have asked this before, probably, got you to think about that in a previous sermon.

I think I did, but it's an important question to ask over and over again. What actually makes you happy in life? Because what makes you happiest will be what your life naturally will orient around and focus on, without you knowing it.

But you will pursue and focus your life around what makes you the happiest. And so it's a really important question to ask. What makes you happy? What gives you joy in life?

Something does. Maybe it's your children. Maybe your spouse. Maybe your pet. Maybe your hobby. Maybe it's good food. Or fine wine. Maybe it's a bit too much fine wine.

What is it that makes you happy? What helps you escape? What helps you to feel joyful and get you away from the sadness of life?

[1 : 1 1] Well, for most people, I think you'd probably agree with me, what gives us the deepest joy has got a lot to do with the relationships we have with other people. I think the times, and I've said this before as well, the times in our lives that we look back on with most affection are the times that we spent with other people, those special moments we had with people in our lives.

It's why most of the songs you hear on the radio are about relationships. And it's typically why we don't tend to enjoy something quite as much alone, do we?

No matter what it is, no matter how much, how enjoyable it is, the enjoyment of something is only truly experienced when we can share it with someone else. True lasting happiness in this life is very much centered around relationships because we are relational beings, and our full fulfillment is meant to be found in relationship.

Which is why one of the happiest occasions of life tends to be a wedding, doesn't it? I've never been to a sad wedding. Have you ever been to a sad wedding? I don't think so.

Because a wedding is a celebration of relationship. A wedding is a celebration of the joy that relationship brings. One particular relationship of the couple entering into a new level of intimacy and commitment.

[2 : 3 5] But also, a wedding is more than that. A wedding is a celebration of the relationships of everyone there, with the couple and with one another. And so, in many ways, if relationship is where it's at in terms of joy and happiness, a wedding, which is a celebration of relationship, is really the ultimate party.

It's the ultimate party. I mean, the best parties that I've been to have been weddings. They're just so happy. They're so full of joy. And there's a reason, as we turn to chapter 2 of John, that we find Jesus at just such a party.

Now, weddings are big deals today, as you know, if you've been involved in one. Lots of money involved, lots of planning involved, months of planning. But if you think weddings are big today, they were even bigger in the culture, the Jewish culture of Jesus' day.

Now, the ceremony itself was a big thing. But that was over in a day. What was really the biggest thing of a wedding was the after party of the ceremony, which could last up until a week.

They could have a week-long party after a Jewish wedding. And there would be feasting and music and dancing and drinking and more feasting and more music and more dancing.

[3 : 54] And it would just have over and over again. It would be like this endless party. It was the ultimate Jewish party. And Jesus was there, partying along with the rest of them.

And that's what John wants us to remember. As he begins this account of Jesus' time on earth, his ministry to human beings, he begins with Jesus at a party.

And not only Jesus at a party, but Jesus providing the alcohol for the party. It's quite a shocking first account of Jesus in John.

It's something we don't expect. It's something that challenges our kind of sanitized view of this over sort of holy religious figure that we think. In fact, we need to change our view of what holiness really is.

And one thing we don't tend to focus on much when we read through the accounts of Jesus' life is that he was actually quite a party animal, Jesus was.

[4 : 55] I mean, we tend to picture him as this very kind of doer, serious guy, don't we? If you think of Jesus in your mind. We kind of think that spending time with him would have been like one long Bible study.

But actually, when we read the Bible, we realize that he enjoyed a party just as much as the next guy. He was very sociable. He was often eating and drinking, going out, having people over.

Even after he died and rose again, we read later in John, you know what he did? He found his friends one morning just so he could have a bri with them on the beach. Because he just wanted, he loved having good times with people.

And in fact, that was one of the major criticisms that he got from his opponents. That he just liked partying so much. Listen to what he says to his opponents in Luke 7.

He says, The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. That's what Jesus was accused of because of his sociable lifestyle.

[5 : 53] He came eating and drinking. Not in excess, of course. He didn't abuse alcohol, or he wasn't a glutton and a drunkard like he was accused of.

We know that. He never sinned, and yet he still enjoyed a good party. There's no denying that. And here he is, at the beginning of John, at a party, the ultimate party, a wedding.

No doubt having a good time. Not necessarily sitting in the corner and having a Bible study with his disciples. Having a good time partying with the rest of them, as you would do as a Jew at a wedding.

And so here he is at this party. Everything's going well, and yet, not three verses in, we discover that this particular party was actually a disaster waiting to happen.

Look at verse 3. It says, When the wine was gone. Now, that is not supposed to happen at a Jewish wedding, let me tell you.

[6 : 52] And I don't think we can truly appreciate just what a problem this is. Wine, to a Jew, was more than just a nice drink.

You see, wine was one of the main agricultural products of Israel. It was part of the fulfillment of God's covenant promise to the people of Israel to come and have a fruitful land.

Wine was a sign of not only God's blessing, but it was a sign of celebration and joy. It was deeply symbolic to a Jew.

And it was absolutely essential at a Jewish wedding. In fact, history shows us that it wasn't uncommon for lawsuits to be filed by the bride's family against the groom if he ran out of wine at the wedding.

Seriously, it happened. They would take the groom to court. That's not a good way to start your relationship with your in-laws. And so, when the wine was gone, verse 3, Jesus' mother said to him, They have no more wine.

[7 : 59] Now, it's likely she was involved in catering, as extended family often were, at weddings. And this crisis started behind the scenes. And so, not quite knowing what to do, Mary approaches her eldest son, who she probably has relied on for most things.

Joseph is probably dead by this time. He's probably passed away. And so, the eldest son is the head of the home. In fact, the other Gospels say Jesus was a carpenter. Not the carpenter's son anymore by this stage.

So, he was probably heading up the home. He was probably the breadwinner. Mary relied on him for everything. She doesn't know what to do at this crisis. So, she comes to Jesus. She shares her concern with him about this disaster that's about to happen.

And of course, as you know, with mothers everywhere, she's not just sharing her concern, is she? She's wanting his help, which he knows full well. It's like when my mom, bless her, comes to me with her phone and says, it's not working.

She's not expecting me just to say, oh, that's too bad. No, she's expecting me to take it and fix the problem. And Jesus knows this, which is why his reply seems just plain rude, doesn't it?

[9 : 18] His reply to his dear mother, woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come. Wow, Jesus.

I mean, she needs, she just needs your help. There's no need to get antsy about it. I mean, imagine my mom came, asked me to fix her phone, and I said, woman, my hour has not yet come.

Why do you involve me? I mean, I'd probably get a clap on the head if I said that to my mom. And so why did Jesus say this? Was he just having a really bad day?

That's what it seems like, doesn't it? When he answers this very surprising response to his mom. But that's not really what's going on. And I think, as I was studying this passage, I think a key to understanding this passage is to understand just why Jesus replied to his mom the way he did here.

And that it's not actually him trying to be rude at all. Because what he says here is not just for his mother to hear, but for his disciples who are around him and for us today to hear.

[10 : 26] You see, because what he wants us to realize in this Jewish wedding feast that had run out of wine and in what he was about to do to fix it, he wants us to realize that there is something going on on a deeper level here.

And John, who records this, gives us clues throughout the passage that there's something more going on. That there's a deeper meaning.

There's a real meaning behind this miracle. We see later, verse 11, John says, this is the first of the signs through which Jesus revealed his glory. So what happens at this wedding is actually called a sign.

Something pointing to something else, like a sign in a road telling you, what's ahead, even though you can't see it yet. That's what a sign does. It signifies something that you can't see.

Well, this is a sign. This, what happens here, like all of Jesus' miracles recorded in John, John very carefully selects which of Jesus' miracles he records in his gospel because all the ones he selects are actually signs, pointing to something deeper, pointing to something we can't yet see.

[11 : 36] and to work out these hidden meanings of these signs is to find out what God is saying to us in these miracles. That's what we've got to do this morning.

And the hidden meaning of the sign is more than just, you know, Jesus can do cool stuff like make wine out of water and he's powerful. No, I mean, that's true, but there's a deeper meaning to it.

And so what is the deeper meaning here? What is the real significance of this wedding running out of wine? Well, to understand that, we need to realize that in the Old Testament, God's ideal relationship with his people is time and time again described as a marriage ceremony, a marriage relationship.

You'll see that over and over again if you read the Old Testament. And the Jews realized that their individual marriages, which is a relationship that God invented, what they realized is their individual marriages were foreshadowing the true marriage of God and his people that the prophets had promised, that God had promised through the prophets.

This relationship of bliss and joy and happiness and commitment and commitment and so whenever they had a wedding, they would think forward to what God had promised between him and his people.

[13 : 07] But the truth is, at this point in the history of God's relationship with human beings, there was a problem in their relationship with God. See, the Jewish religion had effectively drained their relationship with God of all its joy.

and all its celebration. And they did this by making it a relationship of works. That they had to earn God's love.

That's what the Jewish religion at this time taught, as many religions, as most religions, as I could argue all religions teach today, wrongly.

and it's wrong because it can't be joyful if it's a relationship of works. Like a human marriage. Think of a human marriage. It can never be a truly happy marriage if you constantly have to earn the other's love.

If you're constantly thinking, you know, have I done enough today for my spouse to love me? How can you have a happy marriage? And sadly, that's how many marriages are today. It's not a happy marriage.

[14 : 12] But that's what a religion of works tends to make of our relationship with God. And most people think that that's the way we are meant to relate with God.

We're meant to somehow earn his love by doing good deeds and ticking boxes and keeping rules. And so it's at this wedding, running out of wine, that Jesus actually wants to point out what the Jewish religion has done to these people's relationship with God, the ultimate marriage.

What it's done is it's drained it of all its joy joy. They've run out of wine. They've run out of true joy with God. They couldn't enjoy God because they never knew if they had right standing with him.

Their relationship with God wasn't the joyful wedding the prophets had foretold. And that's why Jesus says what he says to his mom when she asks him for his help.

Woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come. What does he mean? Well, his hour, by the way, whenever he refers to his hour, he's talking about his impending death on the cross. And he's telling his mom he can't solve the problem because that hour has not yet come.

[15 : 27] Of course, he's not talking about the immediate problem of the wedding running out of wine, which he does go on to solve. So that's not what he's actually talking to his mom here about. And he does go on to solve the immediate problem miraculously, but what he's talking about actually, the deeper meaning, is the real problem in people's relationship with God that this shortage of wine is a perfect symbol of.

So he's taking this opportunity of this wedding running out of wine to draw our attention to a deeper problem in our relationship with God. That's what's going on here. And that's why he makes sure that his disciples hear this and record it for us to read.

And we go on to see that Jesus, this means therefore, that Jesus miraculously providing this wine to the party, which he goes on to do, is actually a sign of what his death will achieve in bringing us the joy, finally, of being able to have a real relationship with our God that religion fails to do.

And when I, just to be clear, when I refer to religion, I mean this idea that in order to be right with God you've got to do something.

That's the, I think, the kind of most boiled down definition of religion that I can find. In order to be right with God you've got to do something. Jesus comes and all of a sudden says religion isn't doing it.

[17 : 01] Religion doesn't work. I've come, my hour, my death has come to do something that religion can never do. And so how will it do that? How will Jesus' death achieve that joyful, open, unconditional relationship with God?

Well, by doing something for you that religion can't do. And we pick this up in the passage in verse 6. It's a little detail that John includes, which it's very easy to skip over if you're reading through the story quickly.

And yet it's very significant. Verse 6, nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by Jews for ceremonial washing.

And so before any kind of meal, the Jews would perform ceremonial washing using these giant water jars, which was more than just hygienic.

It wasn't like Jewish kids were particularly dirty and they needed to be dunked before every meal. No, these jars served to remind people that they were by nature unclean before God.

[18 : 05] They couldn't approach God to have table fellowship because they were dirty because of their sin. And to wash with these ceremonial jars was expressing a desire for that uncleanness to go away so that they can have fellowship with God, that they can have this relationship with God.

You know, you'll find similar cleansing rituals in most religions. You go, for example, to the local mosque. You walk in to the... Have you been to a mosque?

Put up your hand if anyone's been to a mosque. You walk in, you find ablutions. You find these places you can wash before you go and pray. Now, it's not because Muslim people are dirty physically.

It's because it expresses a desire to be pure before God. But of course, it doesn't work. Sorry, if you're a Muslim this morning, to burst your bubble, but water doesn't wash away sin.

It's just an expression of a desire to wash away sin. So you're close. Sorry, if you're a Muslim, you're close. You want your sin to go, but the water at the mosque is not going to do it.

[19 : 21] And so these ceremonial jars, and of course Jewish and any other religion, it's the same. These ceremonial jars are symbols of religion's inability to bring us into real relationship with God.

If anything, they're reminders of why we can't have real relationship with God through what we do. And so what Jesus does here, it's beautiful. If you get the significance of this miracle, he takes these ceremonial jars, these symbols that religion can't actually clean you deep down inside.

And he says, you know what? We don't need them anymore for that. I'm going to fill them with some awesome wine for you to enjoy. You see, it's a symbolic act that he's giving these jars a new purpose to be symbols of the new kind of relationship of joy that his death is going to achieve for us that we can now have with God.

Because his death can purify us like religion never can. And we don't need these purification rituals anymore. We don't need this religious stuff anymore. Because his death, his hour can actually wash away our sins, our real sins.

Because when he died, he took the punishment for those sins. He took all the penalty for those sins. That those sins can be washed away. The price is paid. And not for his sins because he never sinned, but for the sins of those who trust in him.

[20 : 44] So we can know if we trust in him and his death that our sins are literally washed away. So that we can for the first time experience the joy of a relationship with God, not based on what we do, but based on what Jesus has done for us already.

It's not a religion based on anything we do, but on what Jesus did 2,000 years ago. Now that is the real meaning behind the sign, but if you're not convinced yet that that's the real meaning, let me read to you a prophecy from Isaiah, describing the relationship God is going to establish with his people through the promised Messiah that he's going to send.

Listen to this. Just listen to the details in this prophecy describing the type of relationship that we can have with God. It says, on this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all the people, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats and the finest of wines.

You see, this is describing using the prophet Isaiah is using all of the most pleasurable things that he can think of in this earth, fine wine, best of meats, richest foods, and using them to describe what real relationship with God is like.

This is describing what God's people will experience with God in the new creation one day, real, tangible, physical pleasures beyond what we could ever experience on this earth.

[22 : 24] not sitting on clouds and playing hops like people often think eternity will be for God's people.

No, it's not, and it's not going to be like one big, long, boring church service. No, the Bible describes it as a party, an amazing party, better than any party you could experience on earth.

But what's really interesting is almost every time the Bible, the prophets describe this eternal feast, festival with God, this new relationship with God that people experience in eternity, almost every time it's mentioned, it's characterized by fine wine.

Fine wine is symbolic of this relationship with God that his people experience. And not just cheap box wine, mind you, but the finest of wines.

You see how it mentions it in the prophecy, aged wine. You know, this really like, like matured stuff, the finest of wines. This is kind of the stuff you get a Constantia for 900 round a bottle type of wine.

[23 : 39] And that's what characterizes, that is what the Bible encourages us to see what real relationship with God is going to be like. Pleasure, an amazing experience of joy.

Well, look at another detail of this miracle account in John 2, from verse 9. 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. And 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. So Jesus deliberately, he didn't just make okay wine, he made the best awesome wine that you could have.

And he did that deliberately and the passage emphasizes this was good stuff. To show that he is starting to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy of this party by bringing people into right relationship with God.

[24 : 41] so that we can live with God one day in a restored creation, fully enjoying the good pleasures that we tried in vain to chase after in this life.

And Jesus came to earth and John wrote all this down to invite you to that party, to be part of that wedding.

And yes, just like any good party that you get invited to, you know what you've got to do. You've got to take your invitation and stick it to the fridge so you can remember it's coming.

So you can live in anticipation of the great party while you wait and you keep looking at the invitation in anticipation. Well, here's the invitation. Okay? Here's the invitation to God's eternal party.

Are you going to... Okay, you can't stick it to your fridge exactly. But are you going to... You get the point. Are you going to keep looking towards it as you struggle through this unsatisfying life?

[25 : 48] And oh, by the way, have you RSVP'd yet to this party invitation? Have you told God, thank you, yes, I'll be coming? Oh, and have you got the dress code right for this wedding?

You can't just rock up at a wedding in any old clothes. You know what the dress code for God's ultimate party is? Is Jesus Christ. Only if you're clothed in Jesus, the Bible says.

Through faith can you qualify. And so are you in him? Are you bound to Jesus in faith and obedience? If you're not, if you're not yet, if you...

If maybe this is the first time that you've actually realized God is inviting you into real relationship with him and you have to respond in some way, you have to RSVP and you haven't done that in any way, you haven't actually sat down and told God, I believe what you've done for me.

I believe in Jesus. I know he's taken my sins and yes, I accept the gift you've given me. If you haven't done that, do it. Please come speak to me. Speak to a Christian you know who has done that.

[26 : 55] They can tell you what to do. It's really not difficult to RSVP, to God's invitation. But you must do it. And if you have done it, then all I want to tell you is just keep looking at your invitation while you wait in anticipation of the party to come.

Don't be distracted by these unsatisfying pleasures of earth, which are only just little poor shadows of the pleasures of eternity.

So keep looking at the invite and anticipate and look forward to what's to come. But you know, even in the meantime, while we do wait, we can start to experience the joy of real relationship with our Creator today.

We can start to experience the delight of what it means to have a real relationship with God today. But do we, really, day by day?

So I must ask you again, what makes you happy? Really, what gives you joy in this life? Because you were made to find your joy in relationship with God, the ultimate relationship that you were designed for.

[28 : 09] You won't find any joy in satisfaction until you find it in relationship with your Creator. And I don't think we really get this. I don't think we get how joyful and thrilling and pleasurable a relationship with God really is.

You see, if anything, this miracle in John 2 teaches us that relationship with God opens up real tangible joy. It gives us pleasure with which this world fails to give.

And if only we believed that and pursued our pleasure in God. God, but we don't. You see, for far too many Christians, their relationship with God is more of a duty than a joy, isn't it?

Does that characterize maybe how you relate with God? You feel it's more of a schlep to read your Bible, to pray, to come to church.

It's more of a duty, something that you have to do, something that you're expected to do. You see, by thinking it like in those terms, we are robbing ourselves of the joy that God wants to give us.

[29 : 23] Often because we are still trying like these Jews were to purify ourselves. We're still trying to perform. And therefore, the moment we try to perform for God, we can't experience the joy of real relationship with Him.

It's like a marriage, again, like a human marriage. You know what makes a good marriage good? You know what makes, if you've experienced, if God has gifted you with a marriage that works, you know what makes it really joyful?

Is that once you get that ring on the finger, your spouse has promised to love and cherish you, come what may, even when you're out of shape and grumpy. And they have to love you.

They have to keep committed to you. You see, a marriage is a commitment of unconditional love. And it's in the security of that, that you find the true joy of a marriage relationship. Well, the same is true of our relationship with God through Christ.

And that's why it's described as a marriage. Because God has, in Jesus and what He did on earth, God is unconditionally committed to loving His people, even when we mess up.

[30 : 30] And it's in the security of that, day by day. And it's in the anticipation of the wedding feast that that is pointing towards, that you'll find joy in this life.

And that's the only place you'll find true joy in this life. Have you found it? Have you found that joy? Are you experiencing that joy day by day? So come.

If you want that, come and taste the fine wine of real relationship with God through Jesus Christ, His Son. Let's pray. Lord, we do thank You that it's through these signs that John recorded for us that we really get to fill out and understand what Jesus' death is all about and what it achieved for us and how it is the way to have true, joyful relationship with You.

Lord, I pray for anyone here this morning who has not experienced that or is not currently experiencing joyful relationship with You. Lord, would You come into their life, would You help them to see that Jesus is the means by which they can experience the pleasure of knowing You fully and coming to You in open relationship, forgiven, cleansed through His blood on the cross.

Would You help them to put their faith in Jesus? Maybe they need to do it again. And would You help us all as we go into a new week to pursue our happiness in You.

[32 : 01] We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.