

## Home Group notes on John 2:1-11 (Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2022)

**BACKGROUND TO THE GOSPEL OF JOHN** (*this info is for Home Group leaders' reference if it's helpful as you prepare for Home Group this term. Questions begin on Page 3!*)

### Authorship

Although it has traditionally been ascribed to the Apostle John, the authorship has been a source of much contention among New Testament scholars. The gospel itself is anonymous, with no mention of the name of its author. However, there is frequent mention of 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' and of the testimony of 'eye-witnesses' throughout the text. For example, in 1:14 after describing the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us, the author writes: 'We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth'. And in 19:35 after Jesus had been crucified, it says 'The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true'. Finally, at the end of the book in 21:24 when Jesus is recommissioning Peter, we see the disciple whom Jesus loved walking behind them, and we read 'This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.'

Although we are not told the identity of this 'Beloved disciple' who bears witness to the events of Jesus' life nor is the author of the Fourth Gospel named in the text, we can be sure that they were very close to Jesus. In the words of commentator Bruce Milne: 'the traditional view, that John the son of Zebedee was the author, certainly continues to be defensible. While no limits should be set to the activity of the sovereign Spirit of God, he commonly works through appropriate human vehicles, and it is reassuring to be able to affirm that in the composition of this great gospel he used one who stood in the closest historical relationship to the events described'.

Interestingly, the words John 13:23 when the beloved disciple is *residing next to Jesus* at the last supper, resonates with the words of 1:18 which talks of Jesus as 'the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.' This suggests that as Jesus was in closest fellowship with the Father and was able to 'make him known' with special authority, so the Beloved Disciple was in closest fellowship with Jesus and therefore able to make him known with special authority. The commentator Yu Ibuki puts it beautifully: 'The revelation of one loved by the Father takes place through the one loved by the Son. Hence the gospel of John can be described as the gospel of the Beloved according to the Beloved'.

### Date of writing

The dating of the gospel is also uncertain, but it is generally agreed that it is the last of the four gospels to be written. This is partly because of the developed theology in John, but also because it contains events that are not in the three other gospels. Some scholars believe that John was aware of the other gospels and writes his to complement their accounts. Since at many points John seems to answer the questions which they synoptics leave

unanswered. For example, the synoptic gospels describe the first disciples suddenly leaving everything to follow Jesus. This leaves us wondering if they had ever met him before? Or was the sheer impact of his person on them. But John explains that they had already met Jesus, through an introduction from John the Baptist. Therefore, their decision to follow him when they were already starting getting to know him.

Bruce Milne speaks of the differences between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptic Gospels, saying: 'the distinctions, even where real, need not diminish our appreciation of the historical trustworthiness of John's account. In the presence of the Word made flesh no single approach can ever be sufficient, not any four for that matter. But God has purposed in his gracious providence the existence of the four gospels, each special and each important. Each is a witness to Jesus in a way which truly enables us to meet with Christ and set our lives under his leadership. Within the chosen team of witnesses John and his 'spiritual gospel' take an honoured place'.

Although most scholars agree that John was the last of the four gospels to be written, there are different views on how late it was written. Most had dated it in the second century, until Egerton Papyrus 2 was found with parts of John's gospel which date back to the beginning of the second century, indicating that the original text must have been written earlier. Another reason for the earlier date of writing is that the gospel alludes to the temple and other buildings still standing, for example 5:2 'Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool'. This indicates that it was written before AD 70 when the temple was destroyed.

### **Structure**

After the introductory prologue, the Gospel is structured in two main sections, the 'Book of Signs' from Ch 2-12 and the 'Passion Narrative' from Ch13-20. Over the next term we'll be spending time in the 'Book of Signs' looking at the seven miraculous signs Jesus performed and the seven statements He made about Himself. The word 'sign' is familiar in the Old Testament as it was used especially of events – both normal and supranormal – that demonstrate the truth of God's word through his prophet and so authenticate the prophet himself. They also denote events that herald things to come. These works of Jesus are manifestations of the kingdom that is now, they are also anticipations of the 'greater things' of the kingdom that comes in the death and resurrection of Christ, the sending of the Spirit and the final judgment and resurrection. As we come to the end of the 'Book of Signs' we'll enter Holy Week and explore some of the 'Passion narrative' as we prepare to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus.

## QUESTIONS

- 1. *Have you ever been in an Escape Room or a Treasure Hunt? Did you manage to work out all the clues to escape or find the treasure?***

The Gospel of John is also full of clues, but the author is very clear that he wants his readers to reach the end! The book contains 7 'miraculous signs' that Jesus performed and 7 'I am statements' that He declared about Himself. Each of these are clues about who Jesus is and what He does for us. Towards the end of the gospel the author explains clearly the fulfilment of these clues. He writes 'Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name' (John 20:30,31).

- 2. *As we look at the Gospel of John this term, what are your hopes/fears/questions?***

Read John 2:1-11

- 3. *As Mary brings to Jesus the dilemma of the depleted wine, what does this show us about her approach to Jesus?***

Mary sharing her dilemma with Jesus was possibly just a request of mother to her eldest son – a habit of long years of family dependence in the apparent absence of Joseph. But after Jesus responds about it not being His time yet, Mary tells the servants to do whatever He tells them. This moment marks a changing of Mary's approach to Jesus. She begins by addressing him as a mother addressing her son, and we then see her stepping out in faith as a disciple addressing her Lord, as she says to the servants 'Do whatever he tells you'. Bruce Milne puts it this way: 'Mary approaches Jesus as his mother, and is reproached; she responds as a believer; and her faith is honoured'.

- 4. *What can Mary's approach teach us about prayer?***

- 5. *What does Jesus mean in his response that his 'hour has not yet come'?***

Throughout the Gospel the 'time' or 'hour' of Jesus usually refers to his death and glorification. The fact that it is mentioned here just before his public ministry begins, is because he knows where this journey he is about to embark on will lead. These miraculous signs that he will perform will culminate in his being 'lifted up' on the cross. It is the beginning of his redemptive ministry.

- 6. *How do you respond to times of waiting or when your prayers seem unanswered?***

- 7. *The servants listen to Mary's request: 'Do whatever He tells you?' and they follow Jesus' instructions. How does this challenge us in the way we follow Jesus?***

- 8. *The master of ceremonies exclaims that the 'new wine' is far better than what was served earlier. This takes us to the heart of the sign – what does it mean?***

The 'new wine' of the kingdom brought by Jesus contrasts with the old wine of the law. The fact that the jars were used for ceremonial washing points to the purification rituals in the law of Moses. The law could point the way, but it couldn't offer a permanent cleansing. By contrast, Jesus through his one sacrifice makes perfect and is able to save completely those who come to God through Him. As John 1:17 says 'For the law was given through Moses: grace and truth came through Jesus Christ'. Wine is also significant, as it points to the new covenant where it represents Jesus' blood shed for the forgiveness of sins.

***9. John's gospel is about finding 'life' in Jesus, as He explains in 20:31. What clue is given in the very first verse of this passage?***

The wedding took place 'on the third day' which points us towards the Resurrection of Jesus which took place 'on the third day'. The resurrection was Jesus' ultimate victory over death, securing eternal life for those who put their trust in Him.

***10. Like the servants at the wedding, as we begin this New Year, how can we be available and ready to be used by Jesus in bringing the 'new wine' of His Kingdom to our world?***