

No dashboard Jesus

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Date: 17 September 2023

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[0 : 00] With this passage open in front of us, John chapter 2 shows us that he is not a plastic Jesus.! He is not dashboard Jesus.

Why don't we ever come across dashboard Jesus.! Dashboard Jesus is a 4.5 inch vinyl figure sitting on a metal spring.

And you buy dashboard Jesus for \$11.99 off Amazon, because I looked this week, and you stick him on your car dashboard. Would you like to see him? This is dashboard Jesus.

I didn't actually realise he was bouncing up and down, but there he is. Here's the quote. Put dashboard Jesus in your car, and he'll be your co-pilot. If you don't have a car, stick him up somewhere that you could use a little peace, serenity or forgiveness.

Have you come across dashboard Jesus before? He comes originally from a 1957 American folk song called Plastic Jesus. I want to try and sing it, but I'm not going to.

[1 : 02] I don't care if it rains or freezes, as long as I've got my plastic Jesus riding on the dashboard of my car. Two, three, four. Through my trials and tribulations and my travels through the nations, with my plastic Jesus, I'll go far.

And so the song goes on. Dashboard Jesus has been around since 1957. It's a bit of a jokey gag for you to stick on your car. Dashboard Jesus is a kind of grinning good luck charm, maybe.

You could lose a little bit of peace or serenity or forgiveness in your life. There, Jesus is for you. Dashboard Jesus makes no demands on your life at all, obviously.

Dashboard Jesus, for sure, will do absolutely nothing to help our real life fears and guilt and tears. He's just 11.99. And he'll just sit there bobbing and grinning away at you, a car accessory.

He's a cheap religious life accessory to make you feel uplifted. Take him or leave him. We won't do a show of hands for who owns a dashboard Jesus.

[2 : 10] Maybe no one does. Do you know, within a... He's still bouncing. I'm just going to put him back. Within a wider culture that by and large has finished with and done away with Jesus Christ, because that is true, isn't it?

That's what our culture has done. It is possible to have religious links, to have church links, church sympathies. It's possible to have a Christian backstory.

It's possible to be on the edges of church. It's even possible to be at the heart of a church community. And actually, in reality, in your life, you have him as a dashboard Jesus.

Just bobbing away on the edges of my life. Undemanding. Maybe making me feel a little bit better or more peaceful from time to time. But that's it.

And we've just read from John chapter 2. And two eyewitnessed events from the very early days of Jesus' public ministry. I want to say this morning, this is the real Jesus Christ.

[3 : 11] The Jesus Christ of history. And as we see here in these verses, what Jesus comes to do. What he offers. What he demands. One thing is for absolutely sure.

He is not and he cannot be dashboard Jesus to us. Look at it with me. Come first to verses 1 to 11. And the wedding at Cana in Galilee.

I'd love us to see here. Jesus does not come to provide a little peace or serenity or forgiveness for stressed and anxious drivers. Rather, he comes to usher in a new restored world.

Look at what happens with me. We're at a first century wedding, verse 1, do you see. And Jesus' disciples have been invited along, verse 2.

Lots of us will have been to a good wedding at some point. A happy feast with eating and drinking and music playing and kids being spun around on the dance floor. 1st or 2nd of August 2013 or 14, the Laphrois got married.

[4 : 16] Here in Cana, everything is going fantastically at this wedding. It's so brilliant to see this couple married until in the middle of the feast, without warning, the wine runs out. The music grinds to a halt.

There's empty glasses. There's nothing to offer. The bar is dry. Back then, that is a social disaster. And a shameful, shameful. The bridegroom is the host.

He's responsible. He's looking after people, but he's failed. So all these people at this wedding feast are nothing for them. The party's suspended. Look, verse 3. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, they have no more wine.

She's saying, in the middle of this half-ruined feast, you can do something about this, Jesus, can't you? And he replies strangely, woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come.

I will show my power and change the world when I want. His mother, who I guess knows him very well, said to the servants, do whatever he tells you. Quietly, there is no drum roll.

[5 : 20] Jesus instructs the servants to fill six stone jars with water and then draw some water out. And very simply and utterly miraculously, Jesus turns the water into wine.

I don't know whether this kind of miracle recorded in the Bible is new to you and unbelievable or kind of obvious. Of course he can do that.

Some people say that these miracles didn't happen because they just can't happen. Which seems to me to be screwing up your eyes and only believing what you want to believe.

Now here at the wedding, in public, a display of breathtaking divine power as water is turned into wine.

Only the Son of God can do this. Just notice a couple of things emphasised here in the storytelling. First, the sheer quantity of wine he creates.

[6 : 24] Six stone jars of 80 to 120 litres is about 800 bottles of wine. I love that in the text. Jesus is not a dour, stingy man of God.

He's lavish and generous. Second, notice the quality of the wine. In verse 9, the master of the banquet, the hired wine professional, he tasted the water turned into wine.

He's bowled over. He calls the bridegroom over. In verse 10, he says, Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper stuff after the guests have had too much to drink. But you have saved the best till now.

And then I guess the music starts again and the wine flows and the feast continues. Here's the facts of what happened. Jesus Christ, full of kindness, bends creation to his wishes, creating litres and litres of the finest wine.

Now here's the key thing. This is no random miracle. Like, hey, check out the kind of things that I can do. Because as a first century Jew, seeing Jesus at this wedding producing this wine, you know that this moment is life-changing.

[7 : 38] Why? Because you remember what God promised years and years ago. On the screen here are some famous words from the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament, written well over 500 years before the coming of Jesus.

This is Isaiah chapter 25 and a promise from the God who made us of a new restored world. On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples.

A banquet of aged wine. The best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain, he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples.

The sheet that covers all nations. He will swallow up death forever. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces.

He will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. This is big. It's very big. We live in a world where people are isolated and alone.

[8 : 52] We live in an orchard park where families, let alone nations, are divided and broken. And we live in a world covered with the sheet of death in Libya and Morocco and Ukraine and here.

And many people, even us, will have cried and cried this week for all sorts of reasons. But the Lord who made our world has spoken.

Promising us a glorious future. A banquet and rich food and the finest of wines as all people celebrate together.

A time when celebrations won't be cut short by death. Because death will be destroyed forever. A time when all your tears are wiped away tenderly by your God.

In his prophecy, Isaiah goes on to speak of a world of security. And deep peace. And life beyond the grave. And a whole new creation untouched by dreariness and failure and sin and futility.
[10:03] A wedding feast. A kingly banquet. And the prophets say on that day the mountains will drip with sweet wine. And at the heart of this promised future will be God's bridegroom, the Messiah, under whom the world will be restored for good.

Now here's the question. Is that Old Testament promise, is it just wishful thinking? Is it just religious chatter-chatter? Is it empty la-la-la dreaming? It's not.

Come back to the wedding at Cana in Galilee now, John 2. And you see Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And he is at the feast. And he is acting as the perfect bridegroom.

And he is creating new wine. He's creating fine wine. Enough to make the mountains drip. What are you meant to conclude about him at this feast as you see him?

Verse 11 says, What Jesus did here at Cana in Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory. That's what happens at the wedding in Cana.

[11:16] A revelation of the sheer glory of Jesus Christ. That is, Jesus is the one through whom all God's promises are fulfilled.

And this witnessed public miracle is like the first bud of spring, pointing to the full glories of the summer to come.

What happens here at the wedding is the first drop of wine. It's a sign and a taster of the banquet and the defeat of death and the wiping away of tears that our world longs for.

The Lord Jesus Christ comes to usher in a new restored world. And let me ask simply this morning, did you know this?

You might be really new to Christian things. You might be coming back to church after a while away. Did you know that this is what Jesus Christ came to do?

[12:20] He really isn't little dashboard Jesus. It's not like a good luck charm. It's not like a Buddha statue in the edge of your garden.

Offering you a little piece of personal peace and serenity. Nor spiritual uplift. And nor is the Lord Jesus Christ useless and plastic in the face of real reality.

The relational fights you've been in. Long term guilt or terrible grief. And the big things of life and death in our world.

He's not useless in the face of that. Jesus came into the world to live and then die for the sins of the world. And then rise from death and swallow up death forever.

And he is making and he will make this whole world of ours new forever. Some of us have been Christian believers for years.

[13:20] I wonder, it struck me this week, if we can sometimes lose sight of just how massive and total the salvation that Jesus brings is. Possible to lose sight of that?

In a regular week. When you're paddling so hard to make it from one thing to the next. And tough things happen, unexpected things happen. And you're tired.

And you cry. And you think, is there anything to look forward to? The wedding at Cana, seems to me, says, look up from yourself for a moment.

See the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. The miraculous fine wine. The feast for all peoples. This new world. And your tears wiped away.

That is your certain future as a Christian believer. He is no dashboard Jesus. He ushers in a new restored world.

[14:21] A world, secondly this morning, with Jesus Christ at the centre as Lord. And that's verses 12 to 22.

This second section. As Jesus quite remarkably, quite brutally, I don't know if you agree, he bashes up the Jerusalem temple and says, destroy this place. And I'll raise it in three days.

And here's the background to what's going on. The temple in Jerusalem in the first century, it's an artist's impression if you can see it, was to the people of Israel the very centre of the world.

There on the Temple Mount. An enormous, beautiful structure at the heart of Jerusalem. With every eye turned towards it. The temple was the centre of the world.

Because, for Jewish people, the temple is the place where you meet God. Temple's the place where heaven and earth meet. The place where God dwells.

[15:25] The temple is the place from which God rules as Lord. It's where you go to make sacrifices to get right with him. All of the life of Israel revolves around the temple.

It's the focal point of everything and utterly sacred. Now then, in these verses, do you feel the shock of what Jesus does?

Look down at verse 13 with me. When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts, he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves and others sitting at tables exchanging money.

So he made a whip out of cords and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle. He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.

And to those who sold doves, he said, get these out of here. Stop turning my father's house into a market. And his disciples remembered that it is written, zeal for your house will consume me.

[16:27] Can you imagine that? And publicly, with total authority, he strides into the heart of everything and he clears out this holy place. Stop what you're doing and get out.

There's a verse in the plastic Jesus song that I've just got to know this week that goes, I'm in the back seat sinning, Jesus up there grinning, sitting on the dashboard of my car.

I just get on with my life. I sin, I do what I want. And Jesus is just up the front sitting, grinning on the dashboard. The real Lord Jesus Christ is no dashboard Jesus.

Just grinning at us or affirming us in our desires and our lifestyle choices. He's not. Coming into the world, he strides into the temple as king.

In verse 17, his disciples remembered how it will be when God's king comes. Zeal for your house will consume me, King David had said.

[17:32] He enters the temple as king and lord as though he owns the place and owns us because he does. And he says to religious people, stop what you're doing and do as I say.

In verse 18, the Jews then responded to him, what sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this? What gives you the right, Jesus, to rule us?

And he answers, destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days. They replied, it's taken 46 years to build this temple and you are going to raise it in three days.

But the temple he'd spoken of was his body. Here's the point. In God's new restored world, in God's kingdom, the stone temple is past its sell-by date.

It's done. Now there is a new centre of the world. Now there is a new temple. If you want to meet God now, if you want to experience his rule as Lord, if you want to get right with God, this now is where you go.

[18:42] Not the temple. You go to the person of Jesus Christ himself. To the person, to the body of Jesus Christ himself. Jesus, raised from the dead on the third day, who rules as Lord.

That temple is done. Jesus is the new temple. Jesus is now the centre of the universe. And all of life now revolves around him.

Like the bridegroom at a wedding. Like the temple in Israel, as the king of the kingdom. God's new restored world has Jesus right at the centre, with every eye fixed on him as Lord of all.

John chapter 2. We've wooed through it. Now we're just talking this morning about the real Jesus. Who he is, what he comes to do, what he offers, what he demands. In part, I guess, you can imagine the attraction, can't you, of a little dashboard Jesus.

[19:54] Just bobbing away on the edges of your life. Your grinning co-pilot. Not getting in the way. Demanding nothing of you. And lifting your spirits with a little bit of God from time to time.

Except that there is no real dashboard Jesus. Like if that's your religion, if that's how you think of Christianity, it's just silly make-believe.

It's just make you feel better spiritual nonsense. Here in history, the real Jesus began his public ministry. He turned water into wine miraculously.

He strode into the temple authoritatively. He rose from the dead victoriously. He revealed his glory, lived, died and rose. This Lord Jesus Christ, who is alive today, has begun and is bringing in a new restored world.

Death swallowed up, every tear wiped away, a feast and a banquet for all people. And in the kingdom of God, Jesus is right at the centre as a risen, ruling Lord.

[21:10] Last thing this morning, what should we do, finally? How should you respond to the coming of Jesus into the world? Well, for sure, don't mess around with him.

Don't tinker with Jesus. And for sure, don't try to have him as dashboard Jesus. On the edges of your life, grinning at you, affirming you, giving you gentle spiritual uplift.

Instead, believe in him. In John chapter 2, last time looking down at these verses, in chapter 2, verse 11, at the end of the first incident, notice what happened.

What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him. That's what we're meant to do.

In chapter 2, verse 22, end of the second little moment, after he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

[22 : 19] Believe that Jesus Christ is the risen Lord of all, because he is. And then believe in him. Right at the end of John's Gospel, the risen Lord Jesus says to Thomas, stop doubting and believe.

And Thomas said to him, John 20, verse 28, my Lord and my God. That's belief. And there was a guy called Matthew Letizia, who was a footballer in the early 90s.

He was a one-club man. He spent his whole career playing for Southampton. And Matt Letizia, for people who might remember, was a complete genius on the football pitch. They nicknamed him Le God.

It's very simple, Letizia, Le God. Because he created chances out of nothing, he produced miraculous pieces of skill and subtlety. He scored sublime goals.

There was no one like him. And on Saturday afternoon at three o'clock at the Dell in Southampton's Ground, 15,000 pairs of eyes would be fixed on him. Round the outsides of the stadium, all fixed on him and transfixed by him as he played, as though the stadium and the crowd were there for him.

[23 : 39] And when Matt Letizia would take a corner, behind this one man in the stands, reaching up to the heights, every supporter, every man and woman would bow down.

Believing in Jesus Christ means you bow before him. Jesus, you are my Lord and my God. And if you like, along with millions around the world and through history, you take your place in the stands and you bow before him and you fix your eyes on him and you follow him.

And as this Lord Jesus receives your total submission to him, he welcomes you into the kingdom of God. And as members of the kingdom of God, you can know that all things will be well for you.

Because this Lord Jesus will shepherd you and he will lead you and he will rule you and he will keep you and he will do all of that until the day when this world of his is restored in full forever.

I wonder if you can imagine yourself there in the kingdom, finally, fully realised. Can you imagine that? The wine on your lips and friends around you and a banquet and a feast and death swallowed up forever and a deeper joy than you've ever experienced as our Lord wipes away our tears once and for all and we fix our eyes on him.

[25 : 26] And some imaginary dashboard Jesus won't do that for you. But the Lord Jesus Christ will. He truly will. So believe in him.

Let me lead us in a prayer together before we sing. What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of his signs through which he revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him.

Our Father, we praise and thank you for this true recounting of the miracle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you that he came into the world and through him all your promises are fulfilled.

He turned water into wine. He's the son of God. He strode into the temple with all authority. He rose from the dead for all to see. Help us, we pray, to consider and see Jesus rightly and to know his true glory and make us those who find real eternal life as we submit to him as our Lord and our God.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.