

Signs in the Gospel of John (Part 1)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 April 2014

Preacher: Lee Roberts

[0:00] Here's a quick question to start things off.

What's the only gospel that has a purpose statement that says precisely why it was written?! Given that your handout says there were going to finish John, that's a pretty good guess,! and that is the right guess.

Here's what John says in John 20, 30, and 31. He says, And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name. So the major body of John's gospel is contained in a book of signs, and that runs from the first verse of chapter 2 all the way to chapter 12, verse 50. And that includes seven miracles or signs which proclaim Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God.

And when John used the word sign, he used the word sign to refer to significant displays of power that pointed beyond themselves to deeper divine realities that we have to perceive with the eyes of faith.

[1:17] And so by the word signs, John emphasized that miracles were not merely displays of power, but they had significance beyond the mere acts themselves. So over the next two weeks, we're going to do an overview of the seven signs in John.

And next week, we'll also see that an eighth sign exists near the end of the gospel, and we'll cover that too. Let's dive right in and look at the first sign, and that comes in John chapter 2.

And we'll look at verses 1 through 5 first of John chapter 2. Verses 1 through 5 give us the setting for the sign, and here's what they say. They say, On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

Now both Jesus and his disciples were invited to the wedding, and when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to him, They have no wine. Jesus said to her, Woman, what does your concern have to do with me?

My hour has not yet come. His mother said to the servants, Whatever he says to you, do it. So such a wedding celebration in Palestine could last for a week, and financial responsibility for those weddings was with the groom and his family.

[2:32] So to run out of wine for the guest would have been an embarrassment for the groom, and even in that day it could have exposed him to a potential lawsuit from the bride's family. So it's a pretty serious thing if you didn't have the right refreshments at the wedding back then.

And we know that Christ hadn't publicly declared himself to be the Son of God yet and the Messiah, but of course Mary knew his divine position because surely she hadn't forgotten what happened at his birth.

And if you think about it, Mary's friends probably didn't believe her, and she was probably anxious for the day that she could say, I told you so in one form or another. And you notice when she was talking to Jesus there, she technically didn't ask him to do anything.

She only told him about the situation. But do you think when she said they have no wine, she was really just making a statement, or do you think there was something implied there? She was being a mama.

I was going to say she was being a female. There's something behind the line there, yes. Obviously Jesus picked up on that too. And, you know, when he answered her, he answered her with the term woman.

[3:41] And that's not necessarily impolite there, but really it does have the effect of distancing Jesus from Mary a little bit because the time had come for Mary to actually recognize him, not so much as the Son that she raised, but as the promised Messiah and the Son of God.

Notice too that Jesus said his hour had not yet come, and in John, Jesus' hour is the time of his crucifixion. So that's what goes into your blank there.

Jesus' hour is the time of his crucifixion, at which time his saving work is going to be accomplished in his atoning death. But at this point in his ministry, because of people's misconceptions about the Messiah, Jesus chooses not to reveal himself openly to Israel yet.

In verse 5, look at how Mary responded to Jesus' question about what the situation had to do with him. Her response to the servants really revealed her submission to her son, even though she didn't fully understand what he would do, she trusted him to do something there.

So that's a lesson we can learn of itself. Let's see what happens next then by reading verses 6 through 11 of chapter 2. It says, Jesus said to them, Draw some out now and take it to the master of the feast.

[5:15] And they took it. When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from, but the servants who had drawn the water knew, the master of the feast called the bridegroom.

And he said to him, Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now. This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

So we need to think about the setting a little bit more here, because more than likely the water jars were outside, and the master of the banquet would not know that he was drinking from purification jars.

How would a Jew have reacted if he realized he was drinking liquid that came from a purification jar? Yeah, this would be unthinkable for a ritualistic Jew to realize that he's drinking from something that came from a purification jar.

But as the master of the banquet tasted the wine, he found it to be superior to anything that they had served before. And of course, you notice there, that was different from the custom.

[6:29] Normally, you serve the best wine first, and then you save the worst for later. So the significance of this miracle really then shows us that Christianity is an advance over Judaism, because God has kept his best gift, which of course is Jesus, until now.

And in contrast with the ministry of Moses, who turned water into blood as a sign of God's judgment, notice that Jesus' first sign here actually brought joy. So his first miracle was a gracious indication of the joy then that he provides by the Spirit.

So the sign also points to Jesus as the word in the flesh, who's the mighty creator. Because every year, he turns water into wine during the agricultural and fermentation process, but here he simply sped up the process and did it immediately.

So really, the first sign is a transformation, and it pointed to the kind of transforming ministry that Jesus would have. So today, Jesus shows his transforming power by changing sinners into children of God.

So once again, he shows his transforming power by changing sinners into children of God. Just think about 2 Corinthians 5:17. That's the verse that tells us, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

[7:51] Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. So we're going to move to the second sign now, and to do that, we need to turn to John 4, verse 46.

And that second sign covers verses 46 through 54. So again, John 4, 46 through 54. And these verses show Jesus healing the royal official's son.

So as you're following along in the handouts, royal official's son is the next thing that goes in the blank. And we're going to cover the verses in sections, and we'll start with verses 46 through 48. So 46 says this. It says, So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee, where he had made water, wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to him and implored him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

Then Jesus said to him, Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe. We're actually going to take the verses out of order here and look at verse 48 first.

[9:04] Because the you in that verse, when Jesus says, You will by no means believe, that is plural. So he's really addressing the words to the Galileans as a whole, and not just the royal official.

Why do you think Jesus was a little frustrated there? Really, if you look at it, the response of the Galileans was flawed, because it disregarded the person of Christ, and centered on the need for constant display of miraculous signs.

So such an attitude really represented the state of unbelief. And it was a pretty deep state of unbelief that they had. After all, Jesus had only recently performed the miracle at Cana that we saw when he turned the water into wine.

And instead of responding in belief, most of the people just wanted to see more. And the Greek term nobleman there, in verse 46, actually means a royal official.

And so that's where the royal official's son comes from in your handout. And that really most likely designated somebody officially attached to the service of King Herod Anabasis, who was the Tetrarch of Galilee from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39.

[10:18] The key to understanding the significance of Jesus' second sign is geography. The nobleman and his dying son lived in Capernaum, which was the main city of the Galilee region, that Jesus was 20 miles away at Cana.

So that means that the nobleman walked a 40-mile round trip. So that would have been about a two-day trek by foot. And he did that to implore Jesus to heal his son. The language here indicates that he repeatedly begged Jesus to heal his son.

It just wasn't a one-time request. He kept begging him until Jesus responded. So his approach was obviously out of desperation there. So look again at verse 48.

It says, So is this the response that we would have expected Jesus to have?

Sounds a little bit gruff, doesn't it, when we first look at it? And probably his words shocked the nobleman, just like they shock us a little bit today.

[11:24] Because the response, even though it was sharp, was actually necessary. Because keep in mind that Satan is able to perform signs and wonders to deceive. We know that from 2 Thessalonians 2, verses 9 and 10.

So if a person's salvation is based on just feelings, dreams, visions, voices, or any other fleshly evidence, then that person is on dangerous ground. It's faith in God's word alone that gives us the assurance of eternal life, not simply on signs that somebody can do.

So does this mean that the signs and wonders are bad? You have a clue to that answer already, don't you, in the fact that John included all of these signs in his gospel.

We just have to be aware that some may become entranced with the signs and wonders and actually fail to see that they point to Jesus and therefore fail to believe in him. But this doesn't mean that John used the signs themselves negatively.

In contrast, Jesus' miracles are one of the primary means that God used to bring his people to faith in Jesus as the Messiah and God himself as the Father of the Messiah.

[12:34] So they often lead people to follow Jesus or place their faith in him as the Messiah, and that makes them a very good thing. So let's read on then and look at verses 49 through 54.

The nobleman said to him, Sir, come down before my child dies. Jesus said to him, Go your way, your son lives. So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.

And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, Your son lives. Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better, and they said to him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.

So the father knew that it was at that same hour in which Jesus said to him, Your son lives. And he himself believed, and his whole household. This again is the second sign Jesus did when he had come out of Judea into Galilee.

So before we read these verses, we looked at Jesus' words to the nobleman and talked about how harsh they sounded at first. But was the official dissuaded by how Jesus approached him?

[13:42] He kept asking anyway, didn't he, until he got the response that he was looking for. And the official was in no position emotionally to argue his case theologically.

All he could do was plead for mercy, and that's what he did. He just kept pleading to Jesus for mercy. So Jesus' calm reply to the desperate request must have really created a crisis for the nobleman.

And, you know, Jesus announced, Go your way, your son lives. And if the official really believed that Jesus could make a difference in Capernaum, if he went to Capernaum with him, he must also believe then that Jesus could make that same difference in Cana, 20 miles away.

That's significant too, because in the ancient world, miracles and acts of power were linked to the presence of the miracle worker. But here, Jesus refused to be present when the miracle happened. So the story then is an important illustration of the purpose for which John wrote the Gospel, because believing Jesus' word is linked to not immediately seeing the sign.

[14:45] The nobleman had to wait until he got home, or at least in his case, until his servants met him and let him know that his son was okay. So think about the journey back before the servants got there.

The official must have pondered Jesus' promise every step of the way and wondered what he was really going to find once he got home. So look again at verse 52 in the first part of verse 53.

It says, Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better, and they said to him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at that same hour in which Jesus said to him, Your son lives.

The time confirmation there meant that the father, who was the royal official, realized or knew then that healing was directly connected with Jesus. Now look at the lessons of verse 53 again.

It says, And he himself believed in his whole household. So I don't know if you caught it or not, but the nobleman is actually said to have believed twice. The first time happens in verse 50, and then the second time happens in what we've just read again in verse 53.

[15:53] So in verse 50, he believed Jesus' promise that his son would not die. But believing that Jesus can and will heal is not enough to save a person and give that person saving faith.

When the Jewish nobleman realized that his son had been healed, he knew that Jesus was more than a mere mortal then. And that's when the nobleman and his household placed faith in Jesus, and they were truly born from above, and they had true salvation there.

So this story and the entire Cana cycle then conclude with the statement that this event was the second sign that Jesus did.

So before we move on to the third sign, let's compare and contrast the two signs that were done in Cana. Because both signs in Cana, which were of course changing the water into wine and healing the royal official's son, demonstrate that Jesus is the promised one.

But yet both of them had a certain hidden aspect to them, because only the disciples and some servants saw the miracle at the wedding, and the healing we just looked at wasn't in public view either.

[17:01] And also in both stories, there's a statement of need that becomes a longing for help from Jesus, and in both cases, that longing for help is followed by a censure from Jesus, and then he provides the miraculous answer to the need.

So the miraculous answer also is said to lead to believing in both cases, which is a major theme of the cycle. If we think back to the first story, Jesus' mother immediately recognized that Jesus was in charge of his actions.

Therefore, that's why she said, do whatever he tells you. But in this story, the man moved a little more slowly, and in his begging, he stressed the seriousness of his son's condition.

But the next stages of the story then are similar again, because both people heard Jesus' command, and both of them did as Jesus commanded them. Remember, the servants filled and drew the water, which had become wine for the guest, and then the royal official heard the word and responded in faith and acted appropriately to that.

So Jesus' first sign of the wedding revealed his power over time. So if you're filling in the blanks, it revealed his power over time. Like we said before, God is always making water into wine, but he usually takes the season to do that.

[18:19] This time, Jesus made the wine instantly. So in this sense, Jesus was only making an instantaneous copy of what is always happening anyway.

But in the second sign, Jesus showed his power over space. So the second sign is showing Jesus' power over space, because he wasn't limited simply because he was in Cana, and the sick boy was in Capernaum.

The fact that the father believed the word and didn't know the results until the next day is evidence that the father had confident faith. So the lesson of the second sign, then, is that Jesus' power is able to save from death even at a great distance.

His word has the power to work, and people are simply to believe his word. So think about that lesson again. The lesson of the second sign is that Jesus' power is able to save from death even at

a great distance.

His word has the power to work. People are simply to believe his word. So is that significant for us? If he could save people then at a great distance, he could obviously save people now from an even greater distance.

[19 : 35] So we just looked at the last four verses of chapter four. We'll move on now to the third sign in John, and that third sign comes immediately in the first verses of chapter five. So in chapter five, we see Jesus healing the paralytic.

So we'll read about healing the paralytic here in just a little bit. And the story of Jesus' healing at the Pool of Bethesda highlights the beginning of hostility toward Jesus in Jerusalem and the surrounding parts of Palestine.

So we'll get started by reading chapter five, verses one through nine. After this, there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches.

In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the movement of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water.

Then whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was made well of whatever disease he had. Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years.

[20 : 43] When Jesus saw him lying there and knew he had already been in that condition a long time, he said to him, Do you want to be made well? The sick man answered, Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming another steps down before me.

Jesus said to him, Rise, take up your bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath. Those of you who have translations other than the New King James may have noticed that the New King James includes some words that your translations lack.

The statement in the latter half of verse three, waiting for the movement of the water, along with all of verse four, aren't original to the gospel. The earliest and best Greek manuscripts leave those out, and so that's why most of the newer translations don't include those.

When we look at the verses that are there, here's what we can learn from them. We can learn that people with infirmities customarily gathered at the pool, and intermittent springs may have fed the pool and caused the disturbance of the water that's talked about in verse seven.

Some ancient witnesses indicate that the waters of the pool were fed with minerals, and this is thought to have had medicinal value. A great number of disabled people, then, pictures the spiritual blight of the world.

[22 : 07] Most proper people probably would have avoided that place because they would have to pass among the sick people, not only because there was suffering there and it was uncomfortable, but also because the potential for violating the ritual purity rites that Judaism required.

Notice, though, that Jesus went out of his way to visit such a place, and he found a paralytic helpless man there who had experienced the wilderness of abandonment for what must have seemed like an eternity.

He'd been there 38 years in that condition, according to verse five of chapter five. John likely included this figure to emphasize the gravity of the debilitating disease that affected the individual. Because his sickness had been witnessed by many people for almost four decades, when Jesus cured him, everyone knew the genuineness of the healing. So what question did Jesus ask the man when he first approached him?

Do you want to be made whole? Yep. In verse six, depending on your translation, do you want to be made whole? Do you want to get well? Something along those lines. And if you look at the man's response to that question, it really revealed the man's core understanding of God, and also his sense of hopelessness.

[23 : 29] Because instead of answering the question directly, all he did was give his gloomy testimony and his perception of how God works. So what did Jesus say to the man then after the man answered the question without really answering it?

Yep. Basically, he said, get up and get moving, to put it in more modern terms. And notice there that Jesus' word accomplished his will. So this illustrates the conversion process.

Because when people obey his command to believe, God works in and through his word to bring about the salvation. So let's see what happens next. We'll look at verses 10 through 14. The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, It is the Sabbath. It is not lawful for you to carry your bed. He answered them, He who made me well said to me, Take up your bed and walk. Then they asked him, Who is the man who said to you, Take up your bed and walk? But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. [24 : 35] Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you. Nothing in the Old Testament specifically prohibited an innocent activity like carrying one's bedroll on the Sabbath, but the man was violating later ritual Jewish traditions that were developed over the years, and they were hundreds of minutely detailed and burdensome rules about what kind of work was prohibited and one of those actually forbade carrying an object from one domain to another.

So, his bedroll qualified as an object, therefore, they thought he was violating the rule of doing something. Never mind he was healed. Exactly. Never mind he was healed. You would have hoped they would have said, Wow, that's great. Why don't you carry some more just because you can? But, instead, they were getting on to him for doing that. The basic thrust, then, of Jesus' comments in verse 14 indicate that sin has inevitable consequences. And, you know, scripture makes clear that not all disease is a consequence of sin, but sometimes it may be, and Jesus may have specifically chosen this man in order to highlight that point. So, let's finish by looking at verses 15 through 18.

It says, The verb tense there in verse 16 means means that the Jews repeatedly persecuted Jesus. [26 : 22] So, it was continued hostile activity. It wasn't an isolated incident because of their hatred for him or because of his healings on the Sabbath. We know that Jesus didn't break God's law because there's no provision or prohibition of doing good on the Sabbath or any day, but Jesus did disregard the oral law of the Jews that had developed over time.

So, did the leaders understand the significance of Jesus' comments in verse 17 where he said, My father has been working until now and I have been working? How do we know they understood what he was getting at there?

Because they said that that's making himself equal with God. They understood he was making himself equal with God and verse 18 says, Therefore, they sought to kill him all the more.

But look at how Jesus responded to the hostility. That comes in verses 19 through 21. It says, Then Jesus answered and said to them, Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of himself but what he sees the Father do.

For whatever he does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all things that he himself does. And he will show him greater works than these that you may marvel.

[27 : 41] For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom he will. So in the healing of the paralytic, we see a dramatic illustration of verse 21.

Let's read verse 21 again. It says, For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom he will. We're going to look at one more sign tonight, and that's the familiar sign of the feeding of the 5,000.

And John's account of this sign starts in chapter 6. So we'll look at the feeding of the 5,000 first by reading chapter 6, verses 1 through 6.

It says, After these things, Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. Then a great multitude followed him, because they saw his signs, which he performed on those who were diseased.

And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward him, he said to Philip, Where shall we buy bread that these may eat?

[28 : 51] But this he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. It's possible that a large gap of time may have existed between chapters 5 and chapter 6, because if the feast that's mentioned in 5.1 is the Feast of Tabernacles, then at least six months have passed.

If the feast of 5.1 is Passover, then a year passed between chapters 5 and chapter 6. But at any rate, the notice that the Jewish Passover feast was near is theological and only secondarily chronological, because the people were thinking in terms of blood, flesh, lambs, and unleavened

bread and everything else that goes along with the Passover, and they really wanted a new Moses to come along who would deliver them from the Roman bondage, just like Moses delivered them from Egypt.

So the crowds followed Jesus not out of belief, but out of curiosity concerning the miracles that he performed. Notice Jesus' question to Philip. He said, Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?

And that wasn't for information, but it was part of Jesus' plan for educating his disciples. Because Philip was from Bethsaida, which was the closest town, and he would know the local resources there.

So John wrote as he thought back on the incident that Jesus was asking this to test Philip, and God tests people to refine their faith, never to tempt them to do evil. We know that from what we've been looking at in James when the pastor's here.

[30 : 25] You know, back then they didn't have a Walmart super center either where they could go get all of that stuff, and we'll see that as we look at how well Philip does with the test. Verse 7 tells us that.

It says, Philip answered him, 200 denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them that every one of them may have a little. So the amount of money needed to buy food was a large sum of money because one denarius was the wage for a day's worth.

So this would have been about eight months' worth of wages for the people, and even if the bread had been available, the disciples didn't have nearly that much money to go buy the bread.

But if we read on, we find out that Andrew has done some scouting in verses 8 and 9. So let's look at verses 8 and 9. It says, One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?

So all Andrew could come up with from his scouting was a little boy's lunch. So if you think about it, man's inability to do something there set the stage for Jesus' compassion and power to be shown.

[31 : 38] So let's read verse 10. It says, Then Jesus said, Make the people sit down. Now there was much grass in place, so the men sat down and number about 5,000.

So if the men numbered 5,000, when you factor in women and children, it could be as many as 20,000 people there, certainly over 10,000. And we're so familiar with the story that we know what happens next, but as we read verses 11 to 14, try to consider them as if you've never heard them before.

It says, And Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down, and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted.

So when they were filled, he said to his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost. Therefore they gathered them up and filled 12 baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.

Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, Truly, this is the prophet who has come into the world. Because the area was so desolate and the time was Passover, Jesus was like Moses with the people in the wilderness when they needed a miraculous feeding.

[32 : 55] So this sign shows that Jesus fulfills symbolism related to God's provision of manna to Israel in the wilderness. So again, Jesus fulfills symbolism related to God's provision of manna to Israel in the wilderness.

The words, When they had all had enough to eat, show that John intended to stress that a miracle had taken place. Now a lot of those people were probably poor people and in some cases they may have never had a chance where they were able to get as much as they wanted and be completely full.

And the disciples gathering of the 12 baskets of fragments was part of their education and it really showed them that Jesus is more than adequate for their needs. Notice he didn't just give them what they needed, he gave them more than what they needed.

And even though the disciples were closer to Jesus than the crowds, they too were in spiritual blindness. We'll find out as we go along through the other signs next week that the disciples still weren't getting the significance of it either.

So John opened his gospel with these verses about Jesus if you go all the way back to John 1 and look at verses 1 through 3. It says, In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

[34:13] He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him and without him nothing was made that was made. So after John made that statement he set out to make his case that Jesus is both God and Messiah.

So through the first four signs we've seen that Jesus is not limited by time. We've seen that Jesus is not limited by space. We've seen that Jesus has the power to heal and save whomever he wishes. And we've seen that Jesus fulfills the symbolism of when God provided the manna in the wilderness. So as we stop tonight we stop at the high point of Jesus' popularity with the crowds but always keep in mind the opposition that's brewing to Jesus.

Remember what we read in John 5.18 that's the verse that said therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill him because he not only broke the Sabbath but also said that God was his father making himself equal with God.

So here are some questions to ponder tonight. First question is are we going to be like the crowds who failed to grasp the deeper significance of the signs or will we be like the leaders who grasped some of the significance but really failed to believe and wanted to get rid of Jesus despite all of the evidence?

[35:25] Or instead are we going to be like the nobleman in John 4.53 Remember the last sentence of John 4.53 it says and he himself believed and his whole household.

So John's already built a strong case with the signs that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God and we're only halfway through those signs too. So as John 20.31 says these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that believing you may have life in his name.

Thank you.