

8 Signs of John's Gospel

One of the features of the Gospel record that comes through John, is that there are 8 miracles recorded, referred to in the Greek as "signs." For the basis of our considerations today, we shall consider each in order:

1. Water into Wine (John 2:1-11).

The miracle of Messiah turning the water into wine is explained to be "the beginning of signs" (Jno. 2:11). It is the first miracle recorded by the Spirit through John, and is particularly relevant to consider at the Memorial meeting, where we break bread and drink wine as tokens of Messiah's offering. It speaks of how Messiah, being the "true vine" is the provider of that which gladdens the heart of men (cp. Psa. 104:15).

The circumstances as described by John, is that Jesus and his disciples were in attendance at a wedding, with his mother. However, through whatever circumstance, they had no wine. They did, however, have water, and the Lord instructed them to fill up the waterpots with the water, and when they did so, and drew it out, it had turned into the finest wine. Being a "sign", this, and subsequent miracles had representative significations: which we suggest as follows:

Luke 11 shows that the water was ordinarily used for washing, rather than drinking. The Lord rebuked his Pharisee host when he took him to task for not washing in the traditional manner before eating: " ... he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner. And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness" (Lu. 11:39). The water then, is suggestive of an outward purity, the traditions of the Pharisees. But Jesus replaced the traditions of men with wine, and invited men to drink thereof. The wine that he provides represents the blood of the everlasting covenant: "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many" (Mrk. 14:24). He replaced the wine in stone waterpots, with that which speaks of his blood – and it interesting that this blood was also shed for the purpose of cleansing, hence Jesus is described as "him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Rev. 1:5, 7:14). In this miracle then, the Lord replaced the traditions of men with the purifying doctrine of the True Vine.

2. Healing the Ruler's Son

This "sign" is recorded in John chapter 4, the New Testament portion of our readings for today. Here, a certain nobleman had a sick son, and he besought the Master to "come down" to his house, to use his healing powers to cure him. However, such a journey was not necessary: "Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth", and when the believing nobleman made enquiry, he found that the fever had left his son at the time when Jesus spoke to him.

This miracle demonstrates the power of the Lord over the malady of the human condition. Yahweh Himself had a Son, which he "called out" of "Egypt" (Hos. 11:1, Exo. 4:22), and that son was spiritually sick: "... the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the soul of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and

bruises, and putrefying sores ..." (Isa. 1:6). But the Lord is able to heal those who seek after him: "... with his stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). Or as Peter spoke of the Lord: "who in his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). But the Jewish Son, however, rejected the great Healer: they closed their eyes and ears "lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (Acts 28:27).

3. The impotent man made to walk

This man was crippled for 38 years: the length of time when Israel were wandering in the wilderness (see Deut. 2:14). Abraham also spend most of his days walking, but in his case, it was an act of faith, as he walked through the promised land, in the faith it would be given to him and his seed: "Arise, walk through the land in the length of it, and in the breadth of it for I will give it unto thee" (Gen. 13:17). And those who share his faith are said to "also walk in the steps of that faith, of our Father Abraham ..." (Rom. 4:12).

The Lord Jesus Christ also walked in faith, and left us an example to do likewise – interestingly recorded in the same chapter where Peter spoke of our healing (see above): "... Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). This healing of the cripple man then, teaches us that the Lord is able to make us to walk in faith, and bring us to the promised destination. It is also a taste of the blessings of the coming kingdom, when "then shall the lame man leap as an hart ..." (Isa. 35:6).

4. Feeding the Five Thousand

Being one of the most well known of Messiah's miracles, the feeding of the five thousand demonstrates the power of the Lord to provide for those who follow him. John chapter 6 recounts this sign, and draws out many points of exhortation from it. The central teaching is expressed in the Master's words: "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the father sealed" (Jno. 6:27). This echoes the sentiments of Isaiah 55:

"Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread?
And your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness" (Isa. 55:1-2).

The spiritual food that Messiah provides constituted the bread of life. When tempted, he replied: "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Mat. 4:4). In our day, there is a spiritual famine, like that described by the prophet Amos: "behold, the days come, saith the Lord Yahweh, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of Yahweh" (Amos 8:11). But in the Age to come, there will be an abundance of spiritual delights for the nations to partake of: "... and in this mountain shall Yahweh of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined" (Isa 25:6). Those are the days to look forward to, when

the Bread of Life shall feed the nations in righteousness. In the meantime, we must “labour not to be rich” (Prov. 23:4), but eat and drink in the food which is freely given to those who delight in spiritual things.

5. Christ Calming the Sea

John chapter six also contains the fifth sign of his narrative. Here, we find that the disciples went over the sea toward Capernaum, and during their journey, a storm came about and “the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew”. The Lord walked over the turbulent waters, and stilled the waves, and provided them safe passage to their destination.

In Scripture, the nations are likened to a troubled sea: “the wicked are like a troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt ...” (Isa. 57:20). This certainly is an appropriate description of the nations of our day, raging waves casting up mire and dirt, unable to bring peace or tranquillity. The Master, however, is able to calm the troubled peoples - hence we read of a future day: “before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal ...” (Rev. 4:6). And again: “and I saw as it were a sea of glass having been mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God” (Rev. 15:2). Whilst in our day men’s hearts are failing them for fear, in that day, there will be quietness and tranquillity, with the sea of nations beign clear as crystal, having no ripple of violence or unrest.

6. Curing the Blind man

In John chapter 9, we read of the healing of a man who was born blind. The Master specifically tells us of the significance of this healing: it was “that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (Jno. 9:3). It is easy to see how this was a sign to Israel as a nation: they and their leaders were spiritually blind. As Messiah spoke of the Pharisees: “Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Mat. 15:14). In our day, it is common for those who disagree with the principles of the Gospel to have “a different perspective”, or “an alternative point of view”. But the Bible nowhere speaks in this way! According to Jesus, they are “blind” to the light of the Truth – and a blind man has no point of view at all: he can see nothing! The ecclesia at Laodicea were like this: assuming that gain is godliness, they considered themselves to be of good sanning: “Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing: and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich: and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thy eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see” (Rev. 3:17-18).

The only “eyesalve” available is that which proceeds from the mouth of the Son of Man – as illustrated in this 6th healing miracle, where a combination of his spittle and clay was used to provide the gift of sight to this blind man.

7. Raising Lazarus from the dead

Again, in the raising of Lazarus from the dead, we see the glorification of God. Hence when the messenger had delivered the news, “when Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby” (Jno. 11:4). And after resurrecting him, Jesus said to Martha: “Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?” (Jno. 11:40).

This is a fundamental point to recognise in connection with all of the healing miracles performed by the Master. His ministry was not merely a humanitarian mission to heal sick people; it was for the glory of God. Hence the Psalmist speaks of salvation thus: “Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; **that glory may dwell in our land**” (Psa. 85:9). Mary had the faith that “he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day”, but Jesus responded to this faith thus: “Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (Jno. 11:25). Belief in Messiah’s own resurrection is essential, because it is written: “if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom. 8:11).

But notice that Jesus speaks of making the dead alive again in terms of two aspects: 1) I am the Resurrection, and 2) and the life. John 5:29 demonstrates that the dead will not be raised immortal, but will be brought back from the grave to judgment: “the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that hath done evil unto the resurrection of damnation”. The resurrection to life is the “better resurrection” (Heb. 11:35), as it leads to incorruptibility and eternal life. And the Lord Jesus is the bestower of that life, even as he is the one who shall raise the dead. So it is written that he “shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom” (2 Tim 4:1).

8. The Great Harvest of Fish

The final “sign” performed by the Lord in John’s Gospel, is the miraculous draught of fish, and this is recorded in John chapter 21:1-4. The Master’s mortal ministry began with the great abundance of fish caught by Simon (Lu. 5:6), and it is significant that his immortal ministry also began in the same way. The lesson from first catch was: “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men” (Luk. 5:10), it was after his resurrection that the Lord commanded them: “go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark. 16:16) – which they duly did (Col. 1:23). Their responsibility was to cast the Gospel-net upon the sea of nations, to gather in a great harvest of those who would enter into it.

In each of these 8 signs, we behold the glory of God being displayed. But there is another sign which we have not mentioned – the resurrection of the Lord himself. His resurrection after the pattern of the Sign of the Prophet Jonas (Lu. 11:29) is the basis upon which all of the other aspects we have considered will take place. The Lord performed many miracles, but these 8 (or 9) have been selected for a purpose: “many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through his name” (Jno. 20:30-31). Let us then take the lessons to heart, believe in the Son of God, and follow him into the glory of the Age to Come!

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