

The First of the Signs

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[0 : 0 0] passage of scripture that we read. Gospel according to John chapter 2. And we may read again at verse 11.

This, the first of the signs, Jesus did at Canaan Gallery and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

Amen. The prologue of John's Gospel, or the opening section of John's Gospel, explains to us and sets before us the eternal identity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And then he goes on to tell us how the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glorious of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John also gives us the testimony of John the Baptist, drawing attention to the significance of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 2 2] Behold, says the Baptist, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. And John also tells us in that opening first chapter of the calling of the first disciples.

In our text today, we are informed that this is the first of his signs, Jesus did at Canaan Galilee.

And what follows on from here to the end of chapter 4 is a clearly marked stage in the picture that John gives us of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He tells us in this context that we read together how Jesus attended a wedding at Cana of Galilee. Then he went to Capernaum, to Jerusalem, to Judea, through Samaria.

And if you read in John chapter 4, verse 46, you will find that he returns again to Cana in Galilee. Now I believe that is significant.

[2 : 3 4] He came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine, John says. And there John records for us the second sign in the healing of the official son.

Now although Jesus performed other miracles that John does not draw our attention to, he draws our attention to the events that occurred between this first sign and the second sign in Cana of Galilee.

Which begs the question, why is John telling us this? And the answer that gives me personally most satisfaction is this, that in these chapters 2, 3, and 4, in which John records for us key incidents from the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, there is one great central theme.

And you find it highlighted in that very first chapter of his gospel. For from his fullness, John says, we all have received grace upon grace.

For the law, and this is what I believe is significant, the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

[4 : 0 0] In other words, John is demonstrating for us in these events that he records in chapters 2, 3, and 4, how blessing after blessing comes through the one who has brought grace and truth.

The old order, in other words, has passed away. And the new order is ushered in through Christ. And I think that is symbolically placed before us in the usage of new, or the implication of new, in these chapters.

New wine, new temple. In the third chapter, he speaks of new birth. In the fourth chapter, in speaking to the, in that engaging conversation with the woman of Samaria, he speaks of a new way of worshipping, being constituted through the coming and person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. For the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.

In other words, the ceremonial laws that prevailed are swept away and fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 28] And you remember how Paul, in writing to Corinthians, speaks of the new life with reference to conversing. He has grasped the concept of new.

You remember how he writes, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold, the new has come.

Again, at the beginning of this gospel, John tells us how the word, the word of course is Christ, was involved in the first creation.

All things were made by him, were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. And John is anxious that we understand that the one who is involved in the first creation is also the person involved in making things new, or in making people new, in bringing new blessings into the lives of men and women and boys and girls.

And one other factor of interest, by way of introduction to our text, is how John speaks of specific days in the first and second chapter.

[6 : 48] And he doesn't do that throughout his gospel. On the third day, he tells us, in the part that we read, there was a wedding at Canaan, Galilee. What day was it?

Why does he give us this information? Is there something that we ought to conclude from this piece of information? It is kind of remarkable that this is the only place where John shows an interest in the days of the week.

And there must surely be a reason for this. And if you look back into chapter 1, you note that one day is the day on which John is approached, and where he is baptizing at the River Jordan.

The next day, at verse 29, he saw Jesus coming towards him and said, Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. That's the second day. The third day, at verse 35, the next day again, John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, Behold the Lamb of God.

And we are told, how to follow the Lord. They stayed with him that day, says John, for it was about the tenth hour. Now there is some dubiety about the meaning of the tenth hour, and why it is written.

[8 : 11] One commentator makes the observation that John himself was one of these two disciples. This meeting with Christ changed the whole course of his life, and made such a deep impression on him that he never forgot the exact hour when he received the invitation.

Now that is merely a view, but it is a view that you could accept, although I would not be dogmatic about it. But at any rate, they stayed with him that day, and we are told as a consequence that Andrew, with missionary fervor, brought his brother Peter to Christ with the exciting, vibrant message, we have found the Messiah.

And you can almost hear the excitement in the communication of the message that Andrew gives to Peter, we have found the Messiah.

Then we are told on the following day that Jesus called Philip. The next day, Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, Follow me. That is four days.

And so on the third day after the calling of Philip, there is the marriage in Cana, Galilee. Now when you add that up, you have seven days.

[9 : 34] And the number seven in the Bible is frequently used of completion. However, I am not entirely convinced in my own mind that that is why John records the number of days.

But what does occur to me is this, that the original creation, we are told in the book of Genesis on the seventh day, God finished his work that he had done.

And now here he is creating anew. But it is not the glory of the original creation that he is showing, but the glory of the new creation.

Things that are made new through the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. He makes things new. Well, that by introduction to our text.

Let us look now a little more closely at our text under just two headings. This we are told the first of the signs Jesus did at Cana in Galilee manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him.

[10 : 45] First, the way in which he changed the situation. And secondly, the way in which he displayed his glory. Firstly, the way in which he changed the situation.

The older people say about my own age and older, present here will remember how in our own island, culture, wedding receptions were initially held at home or within the community.

Family, relatives, friends and neighbors, all participated in the preparations, the catering, the waiting on tables.

It was a festive occasion. It was a happy event. It was a community effort. And every person tried to help in some way.

Before my time, hens were killed and plucked. There were probably different cultural practices in the cultural area of which John speaks and sets before us here in the gospel.

[11 : 56] But the practice was to hold the reception in the community. It is possible that the reception was prolonged like even here too.

Think of the burden of responsibility on those who are involved with the catering. Would there be enough food? Would there be enough drink? Would the food be well prepared and cooked? You couldn't blame the hotel management if things went wrong. It would be cause for huge embarrassment or even shame if there were shortages of any kind.

And here in Cana, had Jesus not intervened, it would have been remarked on long enough. Do you remember? That's the two who got married on such and such a day when the wine ran out.

How to overcome this deeply embarrassing situation? And it seems to me that Christ displays his great and wonderful compassion as a consequence of the information that is conveyed to him by his mother Mary.

[13 : 16] They have no wine. And I would suggest that if his compassion was wonderful, it was equally strange the way in which he addressed his mother Mary.

Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come. And just as in passing at this early stage in his public ministry, Jesus is aware, very aware, that he has come into the world for a particular hour.

An hour from which he cannot avoid. An hour in which he must stand up and be counted. An hour in which he, as the great sin-bearer, must face the powers of darkness.

An hour in which he must endure the wrath of God being outpoured in his soul. So that later in this gospel you find him saying, Father, the hour has come.

Woman, he says, How many sons would address their mother in this way? And yet, despite the peculiar form of address, you have to say that she derives some encouragement from what he says.

[14 : 53] Do, she says, whatever he tells you. Does not awake any memories in your mind. If you know your Bible, I would suggest that it should awaken memories in your mind.

Do you remember an occasion in the Old Testament that is recorded for us? When it was not a lack of wine that was the problem, but a lack of food.

There was an acute shortage of bread because of a time of famine. And we are told in the book of Genesis, when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread.

And do you remember the advice that was given by government decree? Go to Joseph. What he says to you, do.

And here we have the Joseph of the New Testament. And his mother is using very similar language.

[15 : 58] Do whatever he tells you. You know, it was not sufficient for those who were hungry and deprived to know that the storehouses under Joseph's control were full to bursting.

They had to come to the storehouses with their empty sacks. But more than that, they had to obey the instruction of Joseph, what he says to you, do.

There had to be obedience. Otherwise, the empty sacks that they had brought would never be filled. So for you and me, it's not enough for us to know and to believe that Jesus has a sufficiency of grace to meet our need.

We have to obey the Christ who is set before us in the gospel. And here at the wedding reception, they had to obey Christ or the wedding reception would come to an abrupt end for lack of wine.

There would be no joy. Do, can I ask you to this day, have you come, have you gone to the Joseph of the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ?

[17 : 18] Are you conscious of a spiritual famine in your soul? Are you conscious of your spiritual impoverishment and your own total inability to alleviate that impoverishment?

Have you too not been counseled many times to go to Christ? Many times, urge to go. He is here today.

Are you willing to render obedience to him? He is just as generous today as then. In the Old Testament, they approached Joseph empty-handed.

They had nothing. They came as they were, desperate, in their hunger for new supplies. They came as those who were in the very depth of need.

They obeyed and discovered that the supplies in the storehouses were sufficient to meet every need. There is a fullness in Christ that is sufficient for your emptiness and mine.

[18 : 27] someone once put it like this, the gospel table is full to those who seek. There is food and drink in abundance. Crumbs fall off for those who are so weak who feel unworthy to receive it.

Well, the instruction is given to the servants to fill the water jars with water. And then they are instructed to take a sample to the master of the feast.

Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast. And oh, how superior was the taste of this wine to what had been served before.

You have kept the good or the best wine until now, says the master of the feast to the bridegroom, whoever he might have been, because we're not told.

And it seems to me that this is symbolic of spiritual feasting when Christ himself is present. A time of rejoicing. In the Old Testament, the church speaks of the presence of the king at the feast while the king was on his couch.

[19 : 36] Maynard give forth its fragrance. And it's easy to believe that there was rejoicing at this wedding and immeasurable relief on the part of the bridegroom.

And, says John, this, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Canaan Gallery. And you know that John doesn't call it a miracle or a work of divine power, but a sign.

And the emphasis is placed on the word sign. It's as if he wishes to draw attention from the narrative of proceedings to the sign.

and that surely prompts the question, what is it a sign of? A sign. And the response that is given to us is that it is a sign to those who have eyes to see the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ so that you are drawn to believe in him.

Some saw the sign, but sadly they did not see the glory. His disciples saw the glory that lay behind the sign and the first of signs.

[20 : 55] In other words, this is primary because it points to the new dispensation of grace and fulfillment that Jesus is inaugurating.

And that brings me to my second main heading, how does this display his glory? and it seems to me that John explains the significance of what he is saying by setting before us certain parts of the story and including in the story perhaps things that we might not consider initially are relevant to the story.

Not essential, but they are placed there, I believe, to help us understand the inner meaning of the story. And there are three points that I'd like to highlight under the second main heading in the display of his glory.

And the first is this in verse four. the language that Jesus and I've referred it already uses to speak to Mary. It is very similar to the language that he uses when he was on the cross.

Woman, behold your son. And his form of address gives a clue to his true identity.

[22 : 20] Yes, he speaks in a non-characteristic way. he does not call her mother or my mother, but woman. And as I have already said, it's not the way in which sons or daughters usually address their mothers.

Woman, what does this have to do with me? Now, why is John giving us this piece of information? Could it be that John is maintaining his close tie with the book of Genesis?

Because remember how he began his prologue? In the beginning was the word. Compare it with the opening statement in the book of Genesis. Certainly John was aware of the promise that is contained in the book of Genesis given to the woman about her offspring.

Remember the promise that is given to Eve? how the Bible tells us of the conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent and how the seed of the woman would have the victory. I will put enmity says God between you and the woman and speaking to the serpent between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.

[23 : 40] And the rest of scripture goes on to explain to us the truth of that promise. That is what Jesus comes into the world to do.

He confronts the pearls of darkness which through the fall of man have brought confusion and tragedy into our world. He comes to gain the victory over the serpent and smash his power.

He has come to take people from the dominion of death into the new life in which there is peace. and he comes as the seed of the woman.

So that he does not address her here as mother or as a son might address his mother but as the one who fulfills the promise that was given away back in the garden as the seed of the woman. It is as if he was reminding her and us of the teaching of God's word. you understood Mary that there was something special about me when I was born and even before I was born and even before I was conceived in your womb because of the message that you received from the spirit of God.

[25 : 08] So now Mary you are the woman whose seed will bruise the head of the serpent. I am the seed who will bring deliverance but my hour has not yet come.

Now is it too much to suggest that somehow Mary grasps even if dimly something of the significance of what Jesus implies.

Although the time has not yet come for him to die and rise again from the dead the time had come to display some of the power and glory that he would after this demonstrate in his death and resurrection.

And it's as if Mary seizes on his identity. If this then indeed is the deliverer God has promised can he not provide help in this dire situation of need.

So the picture that is given to us here is that it reveals his identity as the great deliverer. And the second thing that I would highlight in displaying his glory is in verse 6 because John provides extensive detail with regard to the water jars.

[26 : 38] There were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification holding 20 or 30 gallons. Did he have to provide the readership with this detailed description?

Well in my view yes he did. Why? Because the contents of these huge water jars were used for ritual cleansing.

From these jars they would draw water to wash hands and utensil but also the water particularly was used for personal purification according to the ceremonial law.

Water symbolizes in the Bible the need for cleansing particularly if going to sit at table in the presence of God for the Pharisees and all the Jews to not eat unless they wash their hands properly holding to the traditions of the elders.

They placed huge emphasis on the need for this type of cleansing and you remember how the Lord ridiculed their ritual.

[27 : 59] Remember in that scathing and withering denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees war to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites you are like whitewashed tombs which outwardly appear beautiful but within are full of dead people's bones and all unclean so you also outwardly appear righteous to others but you within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness and you see he is demonstrating the total inadequacy of the ceremonial law to provide the purification that is required internal purification and so it seems to me that is why he highlights for us this detail here why he tells us this but why does he tell us it's six water jars it's not four or five but six and I said already that seven is the number of completion but it is six water jars that are set before us here if seven the number for completion then six would suggest incompleteness wouldn't it if seven is completion six would suggest incompleteness and you see the water jars that symbolized the need for ceremonial cleansing but there is a suggestion and an implication of the incompleteness of ceremonial cleansing they fell far short of the aim a banquet symbolic of in the old testament of fellowship with God and John here is showing us how Christ displays his glory the law was given through

Moses the ritual the ritual for ceremonial purification was given by Moses he gave them what was required to do but nothing that Moses provided could deliver the cleansing that was desired irrespective of how much water was used for ceremonial purification couldn't remove the deeply ingrained stain of sin from the heart of man you could be like like Lady Macbeth washing in Shakespeare's play washing your hands constantly trying to deny the fact that she was an accessory to the crime you could be doing that you could be doing that using the water from the jars but it would never purify the human heart you see

Moses gave the sign Moses gave the symbol but it couldn't it couldn't bring the joy of cleansing into the lives of those who used water for cleansing so you see in addressing the fastidious scribes and Pharisees as I said already in his withering denunciation Jesus is teaching the need for inner purity how then can we be cleansed it's impossible for the water in the water jars to effect his cleansing Paul tells us how we can be cleansed remember in writing to the Romans what God has done what

the law weakened by the flesh could not do by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin he condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the spirit the law demands the law requires that we must be clean how can we clean ourselves there is no power in the law to bring about cleansing there is no way in which we ourselves can effect it no matter how often we use the symbol of water we can only be cleansed by coming under the power of the shed blood of the lamb of god which alone is able to cleanse from all unrighteousness in other words by trusting in the finished work of christ that alone is sufficient to cleanse from the power of indwelling sin and the third factor that I would highlight in which he displays his glory comes across it seems to me in the comment of the master of the feast he speaks in glowing terms of the richness and the fullness of christ's provision everyone serves the good wine first he says and when people have drunk freely then the poor wine but you have kept the good or the best wine until now he not only confirms the reality of the change that took place water becoming wine

I would suggest more than that that he confirms the significance of what took place without perhaps he himself realizing what he was saying but you have kept the best wine until now everyone serves the good wine first and so on that's the practice of men but the practice of God is so different God keeps the best until now is that not what he does the law was given through Moses grace and truth came through Jesus Christ from his fullness we all have received grace upon grace blessing after blessing the good wine is Christ himself it is in him and through faith in him that we come to possess true and lasting joy that is symbolized by wine you filled says the psalmist my heart with greater joy than others may have found as they rejoiced at harvest time when grain and wine abound oh has that effusive joy has it touched upon your life and your heart today can you testify to that filling that comes in and through

Christ alone they drew from the jars that had been filled and it's surely symbolic of how we draw from Christ blessing after blessing being bestowed upon us symbolic of the rich and full provision of the gospel who indeed is this person at the wedding at Cana and Galilee not just one who is able to turn water into wine but one who makes new one who is able to deliver us from everything that binds us and keeps us in the bondage to darkness one who delivers from the guilt that condemns us one who delivers from the deceitful power that promises you the world but in truth is seeking your destruction only he can make of us what you and I can never make of ourselves this the first of his signs

[36 : 58] Jesus did at Cana and Galilee and manifest his disciples believed in him his disciples believed in him what about us today have we believed in him have we they believed because they saw who he was they glimpsed the identity of this person who was in their midst they saw his divinity shining through his humanity they saw and understood the inadequacy of the law to cleanse and to purify only Christ alone can do this the way in which he changed the situation he turned potential disaster into joy by changing the water into wine the way in which he displayed his glory he revealed his identity as the seed of the woman he revealed the inadequacy of the law and the perfect adequacy of Christ he is the good wine who brings eternal joy to joyless lives oh may

God grant that none of us today be strangers to the effusive joy that comes in and through faith in Jesus Christ let us pray in to God who visit the new pardon to love disruptive ch