

The First Sign Of Jesus

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[0 : 00] John's Gospel, and I'm going to make particular use of a few verses from that chapter. So I'll give you the page number in the few Bibles you might like to follow me.

Page 88 in the New Testament section of the few Bibles. I'm reading from the very well-known account in the second chapter of the marriage at Cana of Galilee and the first miracle, the first sign that Jesus did in his public ministry.

On the third day, there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the marriage with his disciples.

When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, they have no wine. And Jesus said to her, oh woman, what have you to do with me?

My hour has not yet come. His mother said to the servants, do whatever he tells you. Now six stone jars were standing there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

[1 : 08] Jesus said to them, fill the jars with water, and they filled them with the brim. And he said to them, now draw some out and take it to the steward of the feast. So they took it.

When the steward of the feast tasted the water, now become wine, and did not know where it came from, that the servants who had drawn the water knew, the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, every man serves the good wine first.

And when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now. And this, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana and Galilee, and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed.

Well, this is an interesting account in John's gospel, a very significant account. It's the account which begins the public ministry of Jesus. And its significance is underscored by the eleventh verse of the account, of the second chapter.

This is the first of his signs that Jesus did at Cana and Galilee, and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him. The beginning of the gospel, the introduction to John's gospel, has told us that the real point that comes out from the first eighteen verses is that there was a community who received Jesus.

[2 : 32] But to as many as received him, we're told in verse twelve, he came unto his own, verse eleven, and his own people received him not, but to as many as received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become the children of God.

And the account goes on to speak about the fact that those who believed in him saw the glory which was made flesh. And so here in the eleventh chapter, the eleventh verse of the second chapter, we have the account of the disciples who believed in him.

So as many as received him, who believed in him, may the power become the sons of God. So clearly it's a very important episode that the eleventh verse ends. And then again, the purpose of St. John's gospel, we're told at the end of the gospel, the thirtieth verse of the, rather the thirtieth verse of the twentieth chapter of St. John's gospel, we're told that these things are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing you may have life in his name.

So somehow or other, the disciples, as a result of this experience at Cana of Galilee, have probed the mystery of the person of Jesus. And they've discovered as a word, the secret of Jesus. We're told that it was on the third day that Jesus was at a marriage at Cana in Galilee.

We might ask ourselves, the third day after what? And if we start from the nineteenth verse of the first chapter, we get a succession of days, which is completed by the first verse of the second chapter.

[4 : 19] We might just trace them through. The nineteenth verse of the first chapter begins the ministry of John the Baptist, the first day. The twenty-ninth verse tells us, moves us forward to another day, the next day, which is day two.

And then the thirty-fifth verse moves us to day three, the next day again, John the Stanleyman, two of his disciples. Then, the forty-third verse moves us to day four.

The next day, Jesus decided to go to Galilee. And then, and we have on the third day, in chapter two, verse one. It would be very nice to think that we've got a complete week here.

Very nice indeed, because then we would have, as it were, a sort of Sabbath day, which is celebrated by this miracle of Jesus in Cana of Galilee. But the notation in the, on the first verse of the second chapter, that means really two days later.

So it's really the sixth day, on the sixth day, after the ministry of the kingdom had begun by John the Baptist. On the sixth day, this occurs. And it occurs at a marriage.

[5 : 30] That's interesting as well. And, but, even the notation on the third day would have to retain us from a moment or two, because any Christian who read that, his mind immediately would move to another third day.

he would think in terms of the great third day when the stone had been rolled away. And anybody who reads this account here, I think, with some ability to think about the significance of Jesus, but would inevitably, encountering the phrase, on the third day, would think in terms of the day when the stone had rolled away.

And somehow or other, we might get the suspicion that what Jesus will do here, on this third day here, will in some sense be anticipatory of what Jesus is going to do on the third day, when the whole ministry of Jesus is consummated by his resurrection.

So, our minds rove, I think, from this notation here at the beginning of the miracle to the actual significance of what happened on the third day itself. And somehow or other, there might be a connection between those two.

Well, there was a marriage, and that's a very happy event always, isn't it? A very happy event is a marriage. And, typically again, for the early Christians who read this account, on the third day, the resurrection, a marriage.

[6 : 44] And that would remind them as they read it through the eyes of the Old Testament to which they would inevitably turn as they compared Scripture with Scripture. They compared the account of John's Gospel as they searched the Scripture.

Again, the marriage, I think, it was a very happy one with which, traditionally, the blessings of heaven were associated by the Jews.

The marriage symbolism was one to which Judaism looked forward as an anticipation, shall we say, as a prefiguring of what it would be like to enjoy the blessing of God forever.

And that was always conjured up, conveyed by the image of the marriage. The marriage is a great anticipation of the feast in the world to come. Those who are the big guests will sit down at the king's table in heaven.

And marriage, again, the marriage symbolism of the Old Testament, again, conveyed to us the notion of covenant, a covenant concluded. The prophets in the Old Testament were very, made very customary use of the marriage synonym, the marriage symbolism to convey the idea of covenant, a covenant concluded between God and his people.

[7 : 56] So again, for the early Christian readers, on the third day, that would convey something, the marriage would certainly convey something, the marriage would convey an anticipation of the end, and it would convey the joyous note of the relationship concluded between God and Israel, which spoke of a new covenant, a new relationship to be concluded between God and Israel.

Well, Jesus is there at the marriage. And then the wine runs out. Interesting again, the wine runs out at the marriage. As we move our way through this text here, and then there are the strange words of Jesus to his mother here, as his mother moves to him, to ask him to, as she conveys to him the problem, and apparently asked him to do something about the problem here.

There was a strange sort of verbal confrontation that he had here between Jesus and his mother. Well, Jesus says almost sharply, it would seem as we read the words of the translation here, O woman, that in itself sharp enough, O woman, we would expect rather, mother, something gentle, but we don't get that, really.

It's something of a rebuke. O woman, what have I to do with you? That sounds as though there's some distance being important here between Jesus and his mother. Not the sort of thing that we would expect.

And certainly, we wouldn't expect it in a marriage. And certainly, probably a marriage where relatives were present as well, but it seems a very sharp, public rebuke administered by Jesus to his mother.

[9 : 28] O woman, what have you to do with me? That probably means no more than what business is this of mine?

As she comes to him with a problem, the wine has run out. He says, almost offhand, well, all right, the wine's run out, but what business is this of mine?

How am I to get involved in all this? And then he says a sort of explanation of what he has said. He says, well, what has this got to do with me?

Because my hour has not yet come. My hour has not yet come. And so, nothing can happen before the hour actually comes. And then we learn as we come our way through the gospel that the hour which is coming will be the hour of his death and his resurrection.

The hour is a sort of shorthand term in St. John's gospel for what will happen as a result of the great victory to be wrought by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Again and again throughout the gospel we see this.

[10 : 29] In chapter 7, verse 20, sorry, verse 30 of chapter 7, for they sought to arrest Jesus but no one laid hands on him because his hour had not yet come.

In chapter 8, verse 20, there are many references that these two will do, I think, chapter 8, verse 20, these words Jesus spoke in the treasury as he taught in the temple but no one arrested him because his hour had not yet come.

And so, it does seem in this first miracle here that for Jesus to raise this reservation means that the sort of work that Mary commissions him to do here implicitly cannot really be done until his hour has come.

He'll do something now, it would seem, of course, the account goes on to detail what he will do but the real work of his ministry will not happen until his hour has come. But somehow or other, we are, I think, led to believe that what he does here will anticipate what he'll do as a result of the hour coming.

The death and resurrection will unfold the real significance of his ministry and what he'll do at this time here will in some sense anticipate perhaps a veiled sense, perhaps a somewhat hidden sense, perhaps a sense will demand probing faith to understand what is there but in some sense, perhaps what he'll do here will anticipate what he'll do at a later stage.

[11 : 58] Well, he says, my hour has not yet come. But then he goes on to ask them to an extraordinary demonstration here of not so much concern but empathy with the whole proceedings of the six water jars are filled with wine with water with the very brim and even as the steward draws off some of the wine and takes it to the host of the feet, there the great transformation has been brought.

So it's a miracle about a transformation that's clear. It's a miracle about a replacement of one factor for another because the early chapters of John's gospel are full of replacement factors. Jesus replaces the old temple.

It's a new temple in chapter 2 at the end of chapter 2. In chapter 4, Jesus is the person to whom worship will be addressed in chapter 4, verse 24.

No longer to Jerusalem, no longer to Samaria, but now to Jesus. Jesus is the new light in chapter 8 as the replacement factors go on. So here it's generally agreed that the emphasis in this miracle is on the replacement factor, the water which is now replaced by wine.

The jars which belong to purification rites. These rites and all that they stood for and the law that stood behind these rites are now all replaced by the significance of what is happening through this new ministry, the ministry which is happening on the sixth day as we come back to the day.

[13 : 31] The sixth day in a sense I suppose concludes the week really. We might be able to say it that way, to think of it that way. And certainly our minds have moved on. That on the sixth day we've moved on as a word to the day which will really bind the whole of the creation week into significance, this new creation that will happen on the third day when Jesus will rise again from the dead.

Well, that's what happens at the feast itself. The marriage, the day, the demand, the use of the term hour, the very great excess of wine here, of water which has turned into wine, the great replacement factor that's now operating through this new ministry of Jesus.

And it's all summed up in the last verse of the account, the 11th verse. This is the first of his signs Jesus did at Cana of Galilee and manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him.

his disciples saw the meaning of it, even if they saw it only tentatively, only hesitantly, only as it were a somewhat sign.

But nevertheless, they saw the meaning of it, and they saw it to be a sign. Now, John doesn't use the word miracle in his gospel, but that's what these signs are. They are miracles, but they're miracles invested with an unusual significance.

[14 : 59] John prefers the word sign. What has happened here is a sign of something else, looks forward beyond what's happened to something else which is involved in the sign itself.

The word sign is an interesting word, and I suppose basically there are two types of signs. If we see something as we see here in the church, if we see a red maple leaf on a white insect, which is flanked by two red fields, we know that to be the Canadian flag.

But we only know it to be the Canadian flag because it's an agreed conventional sign. We know that what's standing on the right-hand side as I look at them is the American flag, and what's standing on the left-hand side is the flag of Great Britain.

But we know that only because we understand, we've agreed conventionally that we'll accept that sort of symbolism. In short, we wouldn't know what the flag stood for unless we had agreed beforehand that a red maple leaf on a white background flanked by two red fields will be the flag of Canada.

But on the other hand, there are different sorts of signs. There are signs which we make a natural connection between what is signified and what that which is signified points to.

[16 : 24] For instance, I recall when we were living in Europe, traveling on the autobahn to Germany from Europe for a year, and there on the autobahn were large red, large blue signs.

They were very graphic signs, and on the very large blue sign, there would be from time to time different things figured. that if on the blue sign, there would be a saucer, and a cup, and a knife, and a fork, it would be very clear what the sign signified.

And when we saw these signs, while I was driving with my family, they would always give me the ribbon and say, look, it's time to turn off. They didn't know very much German, but they could see that from the sign, that what was signified was something to which the sign pointed.

There would be a benefit if we took the next exit, to your side. And that's a natural sign. That is a sign, which, shall we say, conveys by its own right what it's signified. And that's the sort of sign, I think, that St. John is giving it here.

The disciples saw Jesus at work. They saw, and naturally their minds were led to put the facts together. Now, of course, the facts that we have here have been written after the resurrection.

[17 : 45] They have been, as it were, slanted. But when Jesus was at work and the disciples saw that, they recognized that there was the greatness in the person of Jesus. There was the majesty of all that it was, all that he conveyed, by being himself.

There was his glory. There was his beard shining through. And they made the natural connection. They didn't have to, as it were, sit down and agree upon conventions.

But they saw that, really, as you saw what was happening there, and you thought about what you saw, and you reflected upon, about what had happened. As you thought about the water that had been in those six pots, and the immense quantity of wine that had been drawn off as a result of Jesus intervening.

They saw that, really, this couldn't be naturally explained. And the real explanation of it was that Jesus was what he had been confessed to be in the first chapter.

That Jesus was the king of Israel. That Jesus was the Messiah. That Jesus was the son of God. And that's what they saw, and they believed.

[19 : 03] And I suppose that what I want to say to you tonight is that as we read this together, as we hear it together, as we share this meditation together, as we think about the character of that life that moved among men, as we think about the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, really, as we reflect upon that and we read it and we ask God to bless it to our hearts, if we do read it, if we come before the Word of God silently and devoutly, and seeking a blessing from the Word itself.

As we read it quietly and carefully and thoughtfully, think about the third day, think about the hour, and think about the marriage, think about the relationship that Jesus had there in Cana of Galilee, and we can see it so clearly now as we, as it were, close our eyes and think back through the centuries as soon as it was.

And let our minds rave on the possibility here. And as the Lord Jesus Christ represents himself through that word, tonight to us, we're invited to see him and to look from what is signified to the meaning of the sign itself.

But somehow in the ministry of Jesus, God had made contact with us. He was God to come to earth. On his hour, when his hour came, he will be lifted up, and he will draw all men to him when he lifted up.

And he will be crucified outside a city wall, and the stone will be rolled away. On his hour. So as we read this account tonight, we open our hearts.

[20 : 50] We see him in all of his significance. And we ask for benefits of that hour, the wonder of that word. he made out. This was the first sign that Jesus did in the kingdom of devil.

And his disciples relieved on him, and saw him in the eye. God use these words tonight to represent the majesty of that ministry to us.

And may we remove what has been signified to the reality of the sign itself. Shall we pray? God bless you. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the word. We thank you for the word which is made flesh. We ask that the Lord Jesus Christ might be so personally real to each one of us, but we might know him as the living word, the one that quickens us, that makes us to believe, to believe, to have hope, and to have peace.

Make it so in our experience, we pray for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.