

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The signs in John's Gospel: Introduction and Signs 1 and 2

Introduction

Good morning. We start a new series of talks today looking at the signs or miracles in the Gospel of John. This morning after a brief introduction we will look at the first two signs, the turning of water into wine (John 2:1-11) and the healing of a seriously ill child (John 4:46-54).

There are four Gospels and each provides a distinct consideration of the Lord Jesus Christ:

- Matthew, the Gospel of the King
- Mark, the Gospel of God's Servant
- Luke, the Gospel of the Son of Man
- John, the Gospel of the Son of God.

It is in the fourth Gospel that we will consider the signs (or miracles) accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ. The signs will teach us about the greatness and wonder of the Son of God. As John states in John 20:30-31, *"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."*

The First Sign: The turning water into wine (John 2:1-11)

In John 2 we are introduced to the first sign that Jesus did. We will read John 2:1-11, *"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.' Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the waterpots with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, 'Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.' 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."*

Before we start considering in detail this first sign there is an interesting parallel between John 2 and the beginning of Genesis. In Genesis 2:24 we have the very first marriage, that between Adam and Eve. Although there are unique circumstances in Genesis, we do have the stamp of God's authority for marriage. Read carefully Genesis 2:18-25 and note the following general principles. Genesis 2:18 states, *"It is not good that man should be alone"*. God was going to remedy this situation. First, all of creation was checked to see if there was a suitable companion available but there was not, Genesis 2:20. In Genesis 2:21 Adam becomes the source of a suitable companion; God takes a rib from his side and forms woman. In Genesis 2:23 Adam recognises in Eve someone like himself, not inferior or superior, someone the same but different.

Now if we are unsure about using the Genesis story as a basis for the need for marriage, then we only need to turn to Matthew 19:4-9. Here we read about the Lord Jesus supporting what had been established right from the beginning and that it was still valid. The Lord was answering the Pharisees who had raised a question about divorce. The Lord Jesus replied, *"Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.' They said to Him, 'Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?' He said to them, 'Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.'"*

Therefore, the event we are going to consider in John 2:1-11 is important for a number of reasons:

- It was important to the couple who were going to be married.
- No doubt it was also important to the parents of both the bride and the groom.
- Family and friends would see the marriage as an important event as they had come together to join in the celebrations.

Mary seems to be very involved as she takes an interest in seeking to resolve a problem that potentially would have marred the occasion and might cause embarrassment for one or both families. Finally, the Lord Jesus would see that the whole occasion was important because of the stand He took as recorded in Matthew 19:1-14, as mentioned earlier.

Back to John and the first sign. We are not given much in the way of background information to this marriage celebration. Mary, Jesus and His disciples are at the wedding and it is possible that there was a family connection in some way. As mentioned earlier, Mary takes the initiative in what was probably a fairly serious problem that had developed at the celebrations. The wedding was in progress but the wine had run out. Who knows what had gone wrong, possibly an under estimation of what was required? No matter what the problem Mary sees the Lord as the solution. In fact, not only at weddings but the Lord Jesus is the solution to all problems in our lives. It is Christians who come to realise this when difficulties arise. The Lord can be relied upon fully to help through all situations. For the non-Christian, the Lord is the solution to life which must start with seeking forgiveness by trusting Him as Saviour. The Lord must first be the Saviour in our lives before He can be the Guide to help us through the problems of life.

Mary brings the problem to the Lord, *"They have no wine"*. This is a simple statement of fact. The Lord's response has caused much discussion among Bible scholars - *"Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come."* Was the Lord Jesus being disrespectful to Mary by referring to her as *"Woman"*. I do not think so. We read in Luke 2:51, *"Then He [that is, Jesus] went down with them [Joseph and Mary] and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them"*. If at the age of twelve the Lord Jesus knew how to respect Joseph and Mary He would not now, at the age of about 30 years, suddenly change. However, as to the matter of wine the Lord Jesus points out that it is not their responsibility as guests to sort out marriage celebration difficulties.

To what was the Lord Jesus referring when He said that *"His hour was not yet come?"* (John 2:4). In John 12:23-28 the Lord states that His hour had come and He was only a short time off before the garden scene when in prayer to the Father (John 17:1-26), He said, *"Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You"* (John 17:1). Therefore, in John 2:4, the Lord reminds Mary, and no doubt those around, that the time of that glory was not yet, as typified by wine bringing joy. But, as the creator God He would not pass by this opportunity to declare the glory of His person and help a needful situation. Psalm 104:15 states, *"And wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man's heart."* So the Lord's answer to a delicate problem not only resolves the difficulty but stamps His mark on the whole process that it is not simply Jesus the Man but God the Creator who was there at the wedding feast. Through this amazing act we have a clear sign of His glory as Creator.

Mary, who appears to be a woman of great faith and who had probably kept secret in her heart many things concerning the Lord Jesus, now turns with utmost confidence to the servants who were standing by and says, *"Whatever He says to you, do it."* The Lord instructs the servants to fill with water the six large stone jars capable of holding 20 to 30 gallons of water each. The jars were for water that was used for cleansing or purification. The water would have already been used up when the guests arrived, hands and feet being washed to take away any defilement before sitting down to the feast. It would take some time to fill those water jars. Certainly over 100 gallons and possibly nearer 200 gallons by the time all were filled! This would test the obedience of the servants, both in terms of filling and then as they receive the next command from the Lord. He instructs them to draw out of the jars and take to the *"Master of the feast"*. The Master of the feast was responsible for all aspects of the feast including the tasting of the wine to ensure its suitability before it was served to the guests. Not realising that it was water turned to wine, but the servants knew, he is compelled to call the bridegroom and states, *"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!"* (John 2:10)

What comes from the hand of the Lord must be good and unrivalled in quality. I would venture to say that it would be the best ever and never equalled even today with all the sophistication that wine growers are able to apply. Whatever the Lord does must be the best ever! This is surely seen in the salvation that is now available to whoever asks the Lord into their hearts - a salvation which fully deals with sin and makes a sinner fit for heaven. Have you, dear hearer, tasted the blessing of salvation? As the Psalmist states in Psalm 34:8, *"Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!"*

A wedding disaster is averted and joy is maintained. We learn nothing of events afterwards but I am sure the servants could not keep the amazing miracle a secret. This first sign showed Christ's glory as John 2:11 indicates, *"This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him."* Do you, dear listener, believe in Him?

The Second Sign: The healing the nobleman's son (John 4:46-54)

We now come to the second sign in the Gospel of John. We will read from John 4:46-54: *"So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the 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.' 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 the 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."*

It is interesting that the first and second signs are both in Cana of Galilee. According to John's Gospel, the Lord Jesus had been very active since the wedding at Cana of Galilee. He had been up to Jerusalem and into the temple (John 2:12-25). He had met with Nicodemus a ruler of the Jews (John 3:1-36). In the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus we gain a lot of teaching including that well known verse, John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."* This verse states the Gospel message very succinctly. Also, in John 4:1-42, particularly John 4:1-26 we have the remarkable dialogue between Jesus and the woman from the city of Samaria. It is after being at Samaria for a little time that the Lord journeys back to Cana of Galilee (John 4:39-46). Immediately the Lord Jesus is confronted by a very distressed father whose son was seriously ill. It is always a distressing time for parents when their children are unwell, even simple things like the common cold. But here it would seem the illness is much more serious (see John 4:46-47).

The Lord had returned to this area at the most opportune moment as far as this nobleman was concerned. He believed that his son was at the point of death and that only the personal presence and intervention of the Lord would be able to heal: *"The nobleman said to Him, 'Sir, come down before my child dies!'"* as John 4:49 states. The Lord Jesus would have preferred that the man had faith, believing that the Lord only needed to say the word. Remember the centurion in Matthew 8:8, *"The centurion answered and said, 'Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed.'"* Sadly, the Lord Jesus often said to the people of Israel, including this nobleman, *"Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe"*, (John 4:48). Now this may seem a hard thing to say especially in this critical situation. But the people of Israel were used to expecting signs from God. It had happened down through the years since this people had become a nation. However, the Lord Jesus was seeking to move them away from demanding, miraculous signs before they would trust Him. The Lord wanted faith, faith that was unquestioning, in Himself as the Son of God from heaven.

The Lord was not going to give in to the man; he would be led to believe and his son would be healed. What the Lord said next was the start of the man's spiritual journey. *"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"* (John 4:50). The Lord told the man to "go" and He told him that his "son lives". Nothing tangible is given to the man; he has to go by faith based solely on what the Lord Jesus said.

This is exactly what Christians have done. They accepted the Gospel message as did the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:31 *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved"*. We read the nobleman believed (John 4:50) but his belief is strengthened as we shall see. As he left Cana high in the mountains to descend to the city of Capernaum on the shore of Lake Galilee, he is met by some household servants who have joyful news, *"Your son lives!"* (John 4:51). The nobleman asks when this happened and they say, *"Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him"* (John 4:52). Now the man's faith is confirmed, strengthened and enlarged, and we have this wonderful statement recorded for our encouragement, *"So the father **knew** that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, 'Your son lives.' And he himself believed, and his whole household"* (John 4:53)

Notice the impact; it is not only the man but everyone in the house, family and possibly servants. He now believed in the Person Who only needed to speak - this is faith. This was *"the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee."* (John 4:54)

There is much connected with the first two signs that Jesus did in Galilee, the wine at the wedding (John 2:1-11) and the healing of the nobleman's son (John 4:46-54). Both demonstrate the power and ability of the Lord Jesus to do these mighty works. In both He spoke, gave direction and demanded faith in Himself.

What lessons do we gain from these?

Joy is ensured at the wedding. In John 15:11 the Lord Jesus said, "*These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.*" To those who believe, the Lord Jesus communicates joy. This joy cannot be contaminated by the world, its people or circumstances. Why? Because this joy is centred in the person of Christ! Do you have a joy like this?

Remember the servants - they obeyed and they knew of the water being changed to wine (John 2:7-9). It is good to be a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, to obey Him throughout our lives and to be in the know! The Lord's servants are also His friends that they might be "in the know", see John 15:15.

The wine that the Lord made in a miraculous way was the best ever tasted. What the Lord Jesus does is the best ever and cannot be eclipsed. His best is for our blessing. The salvation available to us through faith in Christ is indeed the best ever and cannot be superseded. If you ignore God's salvation in Christ then you are a loser. No one likes to be a loser, especially when we can be winners!

The nobleman's son (John 4:46-53) needed healing, his was a physical illness. But everyone in the world has an illness; it is called sin. The only healing available is the cleansing blood of Christ's sacrifice. If you have not been cleansed then your sickness will take you into a lost eternity under God's judgement forever. Be like the nobleman and his household - believe now for today is the day of salvation (see 2 Corinthians 6:2), tomorrow may be too late.

May the Lord bless you today and thank you for listening.

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