

Signs and Wonders

John 2

“You will see greater things than these...”

At the end of John chapter 1, Jesus having initially been “revealed to Israel” by John the Baptist, He began gathering His disciples. Two, who had been disciples of John, when they heard their teacher say, “Behold the Lamb of God,” immediately turned from John, and began following Jesus. One of the two was Andrew, and having learned where Jesus was staying, he went,

⁴¹ ...found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). ^{John 1:41 (ESV) i}

⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter). ^{John 1:42 (ESV)}

⁴³ The next day Jesus...found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” ^{John 1:43 (ESV)}

Philip did, but first he found Nathanael, which means “God has given,” and told him,

⁴⁵ ...“We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” ^{John 1:45 (ESV)}

Nathanael immediately questioned Philip,

⁴⁶ ...“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” ^{John 1:46 (ESV)}

So, not an auspicious beginning, but he followed, leading us this morning to John chapter 1, verses 47 – 51, which reads:

⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” ⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”

Then,

⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

Compare this to Philip’s introduction, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael’s reaction to Jesus’ statement may feel a little over the top, but all this is is the recognition that Philip was correct in his evaluation. Jesus of Nazareth is the one “of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote...” that is, the Son of God, and the King of Israel. Nathanael was ready to believe—he was looking for the Redeemer who was to come—and when Jesus spoke, Nathanael knew that his search was finished, and he confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

You may remember from a couple of weeks back, that this is the purpose for which the Gospel of John was written. Chapter 20, verse 31,

³¹ ...these [signs] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. ^{John 20:31 (ESV)}

So, having heard Jesus speak, Nathanael believed, at least to some extent, but back in chapter 1, verse 50,

⁵⁰ Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe?”

And this is the part that I really want to call to your attention this morning. Jesus went on,

“You will see greater things than these.” ⁵¹ And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” ^{John 1:47–51 (ESV)}

Which is a pretty huge statement if you stop to think about it.

“...you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” John 1:47–51 (ESV)

A curious reader might ask, “When did this happen?” and immediately begin turning pages, looking for the event, but I don’t think Jesus was referring to one specific time or event. Rather, as we walk through this Gospel of John, we are going to see Jesus revealed as the Christ, the Son of God. In every word that He spoke and every sign that He performed, John’s words from chapter 1, verse 14 are expanded for us,

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, **and we have seen his glory...** John 1:14 (ESV)

Jesus said,

“You will see greater things than these,”

and it all began on one of the most ordinary of occasions. Chapter 2, verse 1,

There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee

¹ On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee...

Later on, in John 21, we will discover that Nathanael was actually from Cana in Galilee. It was a relatively small town, so maybe this wedding involved people from his own family. Regardless, Mary,

...the mother of Jesus was there.

And

² Jesus also was invited to the wedding **with his disciples.**

So, not exactly an every day event, but as ordinary as life in other ways., and whether through Nathanael’s connections, or Mary’s, Jesus and his disciples were invited to the party, and they chose to attend. Presumably all was well, and people were enjoying themselves. Even today, people make much of a wedding, but in those days, they were often multi-day events and apparently, Jesus did not hesitate to attend. One commentator has written,

I think this point is important, for this is the first of many stories suggesting that Jesus was always welcome among those who were having a good time.ⁱⁱ

I don’t know if this says more about Jesus, or about what constituted a “good time” in those days, but it’s probably worth remembering. In any case, on this occasion they were happy to have invited Jesus to the party, because they were about to experience a domestic crisis. Verse 3:

When the wine ran out.

³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.”

Jesus’ answer may seem more than a little harsh to us. He replies to Mary,

⁴ ...“Woman,

(not “Mother”)

what does this have to do with me?”

And the solution is in His next words:

“My hour has not yet come.”

Of course, we don’t know what was in Mary’s mind when she approached her son. It seems unlikely that she in any way expected something along the lines of what eventually happened. Jesus had not yet done any miracles, and I doubt she would have asked for one—not for this. It’s more probable that having seen Jesus

arrive at the feast as a Rabbi with several disciples in tow, she was simply looking to Him for wisdom. “What are we to do? They have run out of wine.” Even so, “My hour has not come...”

This idea will occur several times throughout John’s Gospel, variations on “the hour is coming” crop up several times, and then in John 17, verse 1:

¹ ...Jesus...lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, **the hour has come; glorify your Son** that the Son may glorify you,” John 17:1 (ESV)

I think maybe what we’re seeing here is a simple shift in the family dynamics. In Luke chapter 2, when Mary’s then 12 year old son frightened the daylights out of His parents by remaining at the temple for three days after everyone else had headed for home, she asked Him:

⁴⁸ ...“Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.” Luke 2:48 (ESV)

And Jesus replied,

⁴⁹ ...“Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” Luke 2:49 (ESV)

which may have seemed a peculiar reply, but after,

⁵¹ ...He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. Luke 2:51 (ESV)

And maybe Mary’s approach, in John 2 was as simple as that of a relative of the bride and groom who was hoping against hope that *her son*, now the Rabbi, would have some simple solution to offer for an embarrassing social situation. It seems to me that on some level she thought to command Him, but after hearing His answer, and maybe remembering those things that she had previously “treasured up...in her heart”, Mary realizes that He is not hers to command any more (quite the other way around, really), so, in verse 5,

⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever **He** tells you.”

He’s in charge now. Listen to Him.

The first of His signs.

But because His hour had not yet come, Jesus worked behind the scenes. Verses 6 and following:

⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And He said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. ⁹ When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.”

No doubt there’s more that could be said about this, but look particularly at verse 11:

¹¹ This, the first of his **signs**, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, **and manifested His glory**.

Now, as I mentioned a couple of weeks back, some might take this to be pretty trivial as signs go, and it may leave us wondering, why this as the first sign? Why now? Why at a poor wedding in a tiny little town?

Well, for one thing, this is not trivial. Changing pure water into wine involves altering a substance at the molecular level. Changing pure water into wine means that Jesus is not only the Creator of all things, as John explained in chapter 1, Jesus is Lord over His creation. The late R.C. Sproul used to say something like, “if there is one single molecule in this universe running around loose, totally free of God’s sovereignty, then we have no guarantee that a single promise of God will ever be fulfilled.” He was right too. Jesus Christ, the Sovereign Creator of all things, is the Sovereign Lord over His creation.

¹ The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world **and those** who dwell therein, ² **for he has founded it** upon the seas and established it upon the rivers. Psalms 24:1-2 (ESV)

When Jesus changed the water into wine, He definitively demonstrated what Abraham Kuyper once declared,

“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!”

Not a single square inch, from the swirling galaxies above, to the water in six stone jars at Cana of Galilee. This is why John recorded it as he did. And just look at what happened next.

Signs, signs, everywhere a sign.

¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. **And His disciples believed in him.**

Why specifically “His disciples”? Well, they’re the ones who knew what had happened. John records that the Master of the feast, and the bridegroom, had no idea where this wine came from, only the servants, and Jesus’ disciples. It leaves me wondering if there was maybe a day when some of the people who were at that wedding heard this gospel read, and realized why it was not only good wine; it was the best.

But in the end, it wasn’t about the woman, or the wedding, or the wine; in the end it was about the sign, and the faith that began to grow in the hearts of Jesus’ disciples when they saw what had happened. And we will see this throughout the book, as in verse 23,

²³ Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, **many believed in his name when they saw the signs** that he was doing.

And even in the cleansing of the temple, something that we just don’t have time to consider this morning, when Jesus asserted His authority, this time, not over His mother, but over the Priests, and teachers of the Law who asked,

“What sign do you show us for doing these things?”

¹⁹ Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

They were, of course, confused, and said:

“It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?”

But John, looking back under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, went on to write,

²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

²² When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this,

They remembered that the greatest of all the signs that Jesus ever gave was not changing water to wine, or even raising the dead to life. The greatest of all signs was His own death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of His Father’s throne.

When therefore He was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered the sign,
and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

And again, this is the point. It was the point then, and it is the point now.

³¹ ...these are written **so that you may believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20:31 (ESV)

This is so important that later, John would write a letter to the churches, and in that letter He would point again to Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, writing:

⁹ If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. ¹⁰ Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. ¹¹ And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³ I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, **that you may know that you have eternal life.** ¹

John 5:9–13 (ESV)

This is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God graciously give us ears that hear, hearts that believe, and the certainty that in Christ alone, we have life, and peace, and hope.

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- i All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).
ii James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 164.