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| Series: Signs | Reference: John 2:1-11 | Title: The First | Date: 02.26.23 |
| Website Writeup: | | | |
| <p>Today we start a new series called ‘Signs’, looking at eight moments in the Gospel of John which are signs pointing to Jesus’s identity and saving work for us. Signs in the Gospel of John which show the way to new life in Jesus. Like signs on a roadtrip, these signs of Jesus show us something very important: that God is at work in the world through Jesus for our salvation. We start today with the Wedding at Cana.</p> | | | |

Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

(Play the video clip from The Life of Jesus #4 Wedding at Cana)

In the movie Signs¹ Graham Hess is a former priest who has stepped away from his ministry to raise his children. As the movie progresses, we learn that his wife died in a tragic accident.

As the plot of the movie reaches its conclusion, Graham suddenly realizes that seemingly random things in his life, such as his daughter leaving half-full glasses of water around the house, or the non sequitur things his wife said to him as she died, were all connected to one important moment that was yet to come. That all these things were said or done to prepare him for some event which would happen in the future.

Today we start a new series called ‘Signs’, looking at eight moments in the Gospel of John which are signs pointing to Jesus’s identity and saving work for us. Signs in the Gospel of John which show the way to new life in Jesus.

I’m sure we’ve all taken a road trip someplace. As you travel along a road, you look for various signs to help place coordinates. Mile markers, which tell you how far you’ve gone and have still to go. Signs letting you know of upcoming exits. Signs welcoming you into a new state or informing you that you have just left a state. And when you arrive, there is a sign confirming you have reached your destination.

Signs show you the way. In the Gospel of John, the signs of Jesus show us something very important: that God is at work in the world through Jesus for our salvation. When Jesus turned water into wine, He showed His presence in the ordinary moments of everyday life. Apparently, He’s still at it today, as I stumbled across this in a local store (Image)!

Let’s read that passage ourselves now. Turn with me to p724 in you pew Bibles to John 2:1-11. As you are turning there, let me just say weddings here are different than weddings in other parts of the world. In many of these places the communal worldview, limited incomes, and proximity of village life makes it only natural to open up the doors for anyone to come. Since when you live in a village, the wedding is typically in your

¹ directed by M. Night Shyamalan [Buena Vista Pictures, 2002]

lawn, everyone knows everyone, and in a communal worldview, everyone trumps individual.

For instance, when we lived in Indonesia, if there was a wedding in the village, the whole village was invited without having to be invited. It was simply understood, everyone gets to come. Some of the villages were quite large. Living in a place governed by a communal worldview, you could not fathom inviting neighbor A without inviting neighbor B. And as foreigners, if we were driving through a village during a wedding, our car was stopped and we were ushered into the front row!

Sounds like this was one of those types of weddings, given the amount of water Jesus changes to wine, especially after the other wine had already been finished! And side-note...how amazing would it be to have Jesus at your wedding!

It begins...*On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ²and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."*

⁴"Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come." ⁵His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

⁷Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. ⁸Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, ⁹and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

¹¹What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

If we continue the analogy of a road trip, the sign under consideration today comes upon us so quickly that we aren't ready for it. We thought that exit wasn't for a few more miles and we're in the left lane! This is only the beginning of the second chapter, and right away, we read that Jesus, his mother, and his disciples are guests at a wedding in Cana (John 2:1-3). When they run out of wine, His mother asks Him to do something about it, and we all know, whatever you do, you don't disappoint a Jewish mother! He says, "Why do you involve me, my hour has not yet come." And like any respectable Jewish mother, requests are actually demands. So, she brushes Him off, and turning to others says, "Do whatever He says."

So, Jesus turns the water in the purification jugs into wine (v. 6). But not just any wine - the best most delicious wine! Not Chadds Ford Pennsylvania fruit wine, but the best of

Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon! Wine that tastes so good it catches people by surprise (v. 10).

An we're also caught by surprise as we read verse 11...*"This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him."* Only eleven verses into chapter 2, and the glory of Christ is revealed, prompting the disciples to put their faith in him. It is as though the GPS says, "You have arrived at your destination" before you have even left your neighborhood. What's going on?

The key to understanding this sign is in verse 4. When his mother asks him to do something, he responds *"My hour has not yet come."* In the Gospel of John, when Jesus or the narrator uses that word 'hour', it refers very specifically to one thing: the hour of Jesus death, His crucifixion. The point of which all time and eternity pivot.

As we see in John 13:1 where it says...*It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.* Loving them to the end is to give His own life and all He does leading up to that to give us signs as to who and what He is - shedding His own blood for those who crucify Him!

While sitting at this wedding feast, which according to the Old Testament Prophets was often an image of the restoration and reconciliation of the people of Israel with God, Jesus is thinking about His death; His crucifixion.

This is imaged by the prophet Isaiah in chapter 25, vv 6-9 of the book which bears his name...*On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine - the best of meats and the finest of wines. 7On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; 8he will swallow up death forever.*

The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. 9In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

And also in Isaiah 54:4-8...*"Do not be afraid; you will not be put to shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. 5For your Maker is your husband - the Lord Almighty is his name - the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth.*

6The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit - a wife who married young, only to be rejected," says your God. 7"For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. 8In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the Lord your Redeemer.

If we could climb inside the mind of Jesus at the time of this wedding, we may find Him reciting these verses as well as others. Thinking towards the future of His coming accomplishment of redemption and reconciliation for the nations of earth. His mind & heart always focused on the larger picture of redeeming humankind, and revealing the signs of His glory to all the people groups of the world. This was why He came; He was cognizant of it from the beginning!

But, everyone else is just focused on the moment, the wedding, the lack of wine, the embarrassment that would bring, the here and now, but Jesus contemplates greater and more wonderful things in this moment. Thoughts of redemption and reconciliation of the world, and this is His first sign using those ceremonial jars to create wine from water!

Perhaps He thought of that future moment in John 19:30 when, on the cross, dying for the sin of all peoples that day, He asked for a drink, and it says...*When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.* It is finished because His death would satisfy the great requirements of the Law on all humankind for those who would recognize the signs and accept them!

It is only natural that in contemplating His death which would bring forgiveness to God's people, Jesus turns His attention to the large jars that held water for purification. These jars would have stored water used for an immersion pool to cleanse oneself prior to worship.²

You may or may not know that before a Muslim can perform salat (ritual prayer) 5 times a day, they must perform wudu (purification washing). Wudu is such an important part of the salat that if it's left out due to ignorance, forgetfulness, or negligence their prayer will not be accepted by Allah. Because the Prophet Muhammad said: "No salat (prayer) is accepted without wudu (purification)"³ Before they begin to wash they must say Bismillah (In the Name of Allah) silently to themselves.

The Prophet Muhammad taught to begin with the right side first. So, you wash your right hand from fingertip to the wrist 3 times making sure water touches every part of the hand. Then the same with the left hand 3 times. Then cupping water in the right hand you rinse your mouths 3 times. Then again cupping water in their right hand you inhale water into your nose and blow it out 3 times. Then every part of the face needs to be washed from ear to ear and from the top of the forehead to the bottom of the chin 3 times. Men who have beards have to pass their wet hands through their beards as they wash their face.

² Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014], 254

³ Sahih Muslim, Book 2, Hadith 2

Then you wash your arms starting from the fingertips up to the elbow 3 times making sure no part is left dry. Following the same process with the left arm 3 times. Then you move your wet hands from the top of the forehead to the back of the head, and then from the back of the head to the forehead once, no matter if you are bald or not.

Then using wet hands you use your index fingers to clean the inside of your ears and your thumb to clean the area behind your ears only once. Then you wash your feet 3 times from your toes on your right foot up to and including your ankle. Making sure water touches every area of the right foot, especially between the toes and the back of the ankle. This is done 3 times with the right foot followed by three times with the left.

Then you recite the Shahada and the Dua because when the Prophet would complete his wudu he would say the shahada...“I testify that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His servant and messenger.” After this statement he would say “O Allah, make me among those who seek repentance and make me among those who purify themselves.” And at this point the wudu is complete and you can pray.

This is why, with Afghan Muslims living in my home, every time I go into my bathroom, there is water all over the sink and floor! No prayer accepted without purification! Notice how much work that is 5 times a day just to be able to pray! But Jesus is saying here, I am pouring out my blood for you, my blood cleanses you, makes you able to enter the presence of the Father once and for all! It's why upon Jesus death the curtain in the Temple covering the most holy place was ripped in two signifying that all people can now enter God's presence because we've been washed with the blood of Christ!

That's because, the vessels which once housed water for purifying people from sin are here transformed by Jesus as vessels of house wine for celebrating a marriage. Imagery which may have just been lost on all those present in the moment because this was one of the first signs, they could not see the final destination yet. Many of them would need many more signs to understand where Jesus could take them in the end.

Since this water which bathed and symbolically cleansed people of their sin for worship changed now to wine, takes our thoughts to the last supper with the wine as a symbol of His blood which cleanses people truly of sin. Something we remember monthly at the Lord's Table. Celebrating the blood which covers us taking away the wrath of a holy God against our sin, like the beautiful old song *Covered by the Blood*:

Once in sin's darkest night I was wandering alone; | A stranger to mercy I stood. | But the Savior came nigh | When he heard my faint cry, | And He put my sins under the blood. They are covered by the blood; | My sins are all covered by the blood. | Mine iniquities so vast | Have been blotted out at last, | My sins are all covered by the blood.

Jesus responds to thinking about His death with gratuitous grace. An outpouring of wine in symbolic nature of what He would ultimately accomplish by His blood. The purification jars now hold 120-180 gallons of the best wine! A visual display of God's

grace toward His people, His blood poured out on humanity in abundance. As Rodney Whitacre comments, Jesus “is the good wine that has been kept back until now.”⁴

The passage concludes by saying that the glory of God has been revealed and the disciples believed in Him. God shows up in the mundane, everyday events of our lives - like a wedding - and immediately dispenses grace.

When and where did He show up in the mundane events of your life? Do you remember, can you recall the first time you became aware of the covering of His blood? The gratuitous outpouring of Himself for the sake of your redemption due to His love?

I can remember where I was the first time I felt the pull of Christ's grace on me. My brother had invited me to a church service. I reluctantly went, feeling very out of place clad in black leather and a mohawk. I sat quietly in the back row of the church under a balcony where it was dark, trying to hide from those around me. I did not feel cut from their cloth, I did not fit the part, what they had I didn't, nor did I particularly want it... until...the preacher began to speak.

I cannot remember his words, but they were gospel filled and powerful. Suddenly I was gripped by the love of Christ, His genuine sacrifice for me. It was like someone installed a GPS in my soul, with all the signs in place! I listened intently not wanting anyone to look my way or they may see me crying. My heart was like metal, and the Gospel like a large magnet pulling it out of my chest.

The preacher gave an altar call, and it took all my energy not to walk forward. I wanted to, but didn't, but Jesus had entered my mundane life, there was something greater calling my soul to Himself. Something greater and more profound than I had ever known or experienced - I was no longer concerned with how I looked, girls, money, where I'd go to college, or any of the other thousands of suddenly unimportant things. God had revealed Himself in Jesus, His blood had covered me, it was warm, comforting and joyously convicting - I was soaked to the bone - life would never be the same.

I would later officially bow my knee gladly to King Jesus, His was a calling I could not resist.

This wedding and wine is a picture of the gospel: A mistake is made; perhaps they failed to properly calculate what they would need or maybe someone drank too much wine, but they had run out. Jesus contemplates His death and pours out grace and we see, God is at work in the world through Jesus for our salvation. And the only response is to believe as the disciples did that day!

⁴ Rodney Whitacre, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, John* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999], 80