

Lesson Two: THE MIRACULOUS SIGNS OF JESUS

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They don't have any wine." Jesus replied, "Woman, what does that have to do with me? My time hasn't come yet." His mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." (John 2:1-5)

You've probably learned from your English teachers (and possibly from teachers of other subjects as well) the value of supporting your claims and arguments with evidence. Even if your teacher agrees with your views on health care, for example, you won't get a good grade on your health care essay if you don't back up your viewpoint with examples and research.

The author of the Gospel of John would make any English teacher happy (even though he wrote his book in Greek). He has an argument: Jesus is the Christ. And he has evidence to back up his claim: Jesus performed several remarkable feats that prove who he is. We usually refer to these feats as miracles. John calls them miraculous signs.

I Need a Sign

Take a moment to reflect on times you've wanted a sign from God or times when you've seen evidence of God's presence. Think/Discuss:

- When have you wanted a sign from God?
- What signs have you seen of God's presence in your life?
- Are signs from God important for faith? Why or why not?

See the Signs

The Gospel of John refers to Jesus' works as miraculous signs. There are seven such miraculous signs in John. Look up and read each one of these seven signs:

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| •John 2:1-11 | •John 5:1-18 | •John 9:1-7 |
| •John 4:46-54 | •John 6:5-14 | •John 11:1-4 |
| | •John 6:16-24 | |

- What miraculous sign does Jesus perform in these verses?
- What does this miraculous sign tell us about Jesus?
- Is there anything symbolic about this miraculous sign? Does the miracle represent something or tell us some greater truth about Jesus?

Boom! Wine!

Jesus' first miraculous sign in John's Gospel happens at a wedding in a town called Cana. Weddings today usually are followed by a meal or reception. The same was true of first-century

Jewish weddings, with one major difference: ancient Jewish wedding feasts are believed to have lasted seven days. That's quite a catering gig.

At some point during this weeklong celebration, the wine ran out. After his mother informed him there was no more wine, Jesus had the servants fill some jars with water. When the waiter drew water from one of the jars, it had become wine. According to John, turning water to wine was Jesus' first miraculous sign. After witnessing this miracle, the disciples believed he was the Messiah.

Changing water to wine didn't confirm that Jesus was the Messiah just because it was miraculous; it was also a symbolic act. The jars that Jesus used were "jars used for the Jewish cleansing ritual" (John 2:6). People who had become ritually unclean would perform rituals that would restore them to the community and make them whole.

John also tells us that, when the servants at the wedding filled the jars, they filled them to the brim, almost overflowing. After the water became wine, the headwaiter tasted it and found that it was even better than the "good wine" from earlier in the festivities.

Each aspect of this story symbolizes what Jesus does for us:

- The jars used for cleansing represent how Jesus cleanses and restores us. He died to atone for our sins and offers us forgiveness, making us new and whole.
- The way the servants filled the jars to the brim represents how Jesus fills us with love and grace and the power of the Holy Spirit.
- The quality of the new wine represents how Jesus perfects us and makes us new. The significance of this first miraculous sign was not lost on Jesus' disciples. John 2:11 says, "[Jesus] revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him."

Seeing the Light

John tells us of seven miraculous signs that Jesus performed. Four of these seven involved miraculous healings. The Bible shows us that God can and does heal all manner of human ailments and injuries. While these healings are evidence of God's love and power, they also raise some uncomfortable questions: Why are some people healed but not others? If God has power over disease, why do people become ill in the first place?

Jesus' disciples seem to have wrestled with some of these questions and come to a conclusion. When they approached a man born blind in John 9, they asked Jesus, "[Who] sinned so that he was born blind, this man or his parents?" (v. 2). They assumed that the man's blindness was a punishment—that God wouldn't allow a good person to have such a severe impairment.

But Jesus wasn't interested in placing the blame on anyone. Jesus had a different take on the situation. He told his disciples that neither the man nor his parents sinned. The man's blindness "happened so that God's mighty works might be displayed in him" (v. 3). Jesus then "spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and smeared the mud on the man's eyes" (v. 6).

It may sound gross, but it worked. Jesus told the man to wash in a pool outside the city. The man did so and was able to see. Some religious leaders in the area took issue with this healing. They weren't convinced that the man had actually been blind (vv. 8-9). They didn't understand how someone they considered a sinner—Jesus—could muster the power to give a blind man

sight (vv. 17, 24-34). And they were upset that Jesus had healed the man on the sabbath, a day set aside for rest according to the Ten Commandments. For John, these religious leaders missed the mark. They were so caught up in their understanding of the law and how things should work that they failed to appreciate the miracle. The blind man, by contrast, was too excited to let the religious leaders get him down. He was convinced that Jesus came from God and, for that reason, was able to give him sight.

Just as the miraculous sign in Cana was about more than wine, this miraculous sign was about more than just giving a blind man sight. In the closing verses of John 9, Jesus explained that he hadn't come just to heal those who are physically blind; he was more concerned with those who are spiritually blind.

When we enter into a relationship with Christ, we see everything in a new way. Our eyes are opened to all that God is doing around us.

See the Sign, Be the Sign

Most of us probably haven't experienced something as incredible as water transforming to wine or a blind person suddenly receiving sight. But we nonetheless may have seen signs of God's love, presence, and work. God may be revealed to us in the form of encouragement from a teacher or coach, of an opportunity to serve by volunteering at an assisted-living facility or tutoring grade school children, or of an emotional moment during worship. These signs bring us hope, joy, and relief in the moment but also point toward greater truths about God: God loves us, guides us, provides for us, and has high expectations for us. These signs are evidence that we can cite in support of our faith and trust in God.

Sometimes we are the signs. God might work through you to lift the spirits of a friend or peer. God might use your gifts and talents to inspire others in your congregation or community. God may take a small act of kindness and turn it into something greater than you could ever imagine. We know what God has done in the person of Christ, and we know that God can do equally amazing things through each of us. We can be the evidence that others point to in support of their faith and trust in God.

As Jesus' followers, we should embrace God's gift of sight—spiritual sight. We must keep our eyes open so we will witness and learn from God's signs and wonders. And we must keep our hearts open so that God can do signs and wonders through us.

Discussion Questions:

- What have you learned from this session about how John sees Jesus and particularly how John sees Jesus' miracles?
- Do you see any events in your life as signs of God's love and presence?
- In what ways might you be a sign of God's love, grace, and healing? What might others learn from your example and experiences?

Video Accompaniments

Adam Hamilton (COPY LINK):

<https://my.amplifymedia.com/amplify/video/unitedmethodistpublishinghouse/13883-john/13886-study-sessions/60914-john-session-2-the-miraculous-signs-of-jesus>

The Bible Project (geared towards youth): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-2e9mMf7E8>

Discussion Questions:

Adam Hamilton:

1. Adam describes the author of John as a “painter with words” to point to a deeper meaning. A sign, of which there are 7 in this Gospel, is pointing to a deeper meaning. What is the deeper meaning? Why would the author use stories/signs to depict this meaning?
2. Hamilton, describing the miracle at the wedding at Cana, asks a lot of questions about this story. He allows his mind to ‘wonder’ about the story, about why things were written and described in a certain way. Have you ever read the Bible this way? How does reading Scripture change if we allow ourselves to ‘wonder’?
3. How does your reading of the signs/miracles of Jesus in the Gospel of John compare to when you read the Synoptic Gospels? Is there a ‘version’ of Jesus that you prefer or relate to more?

The Bible Project:

1. John makes a great claim about Jesus of Nazareth—that he is the Messiah. How does he prove this claim?
2. The first half of the Gospel of John consists of seven sign, or miracles that allow people to struggle with his identity. They have to make a choice at the end of each sign story. Generally, what is that choice?
3. What was Jesus’ first sign in John’s Gospel?
4. In the Feast stories, Jesus performs miracles (healing a man, feeding the 5,000, etc.), but he makes some bold claims about himself. What do people then start to understand about him?
5. Jesus’ greatest, most controversial miracle was the raising of Lazarus. Why was it so controversial? What consequences does this miracle have for Jesus?

Lesson 2 Activities

Transform It and Make It Whole (visual art)

Supplies: paper (either individual sheets or one large sheet), black ink pens or markers, colored markers or pencils

You can do this activity individually or as a team.

Start by taking a sheet of paper (a standard 8 1/2-by-11 sheet of paper for individuals, a sheet of poster paper for a team) and scribble on it in a black ink pen or marker. Don't scribble too densely; you want to leave spaces in between the scribble lines.

Your paper at this point should be a mess of scribbles. You will take this mess and turn it into art by coloring the spaces between the scribbles with markers or colored pencils. You can fill in the spaces to make an abstract design or look for pictures and patterns to create something more concrete. While you're working, discuss:

- Think about some of Jesus' signs, especially turning water into wine and giving the blind man sight. How did Jesus take something messy or broken and turn it into something beautiful?
- How has God given you gifts and opportunities to bring beauty to an ugly situation?
- What is something small that you could do in the next two weeks that would bring beauty to brokenness? (This could involve mending a relationship with someone or helping someone in your community in need of assistance.)
- Do you know someone who has shown signs of God's love and healing power? What can you learn from this person's example?

Be prepared to show your artwork and summarize your discussion.

Mir-egg-ulous (science)

Supplies: hard-boiled egg, glass bottle, lighter or match, strip of paper; a little bit of oil is optional

For this activity you will need a hard-boiled egg, a glass bottle whose mouth is slightly smaller than the diameter of the egg (such as a 16-ounce bottle of juice or a fruit drink), a lighter or match, and a strip of paper.

Peel the shell from the egg and set it atop the bottle to make sure that it is larger than the bottle and won't slide through the opening.

Then remove the egg from the top of the bottle. Use the match or lighter to light the strip of paper. Drop the burning strip of paper into bottle. While the paper is still burning, place the egg on the opening of the bottle. After a few seconds, the bottle should suck the egg through the opening. It's a miracle!

(You might place some oil on around the mouth of the bottle to help the egg go through smoothly, without breaking.)

Why does this work? The fire from the burning strip of paper causes the air to expand. When you place the egg on top of the bottle and the fire goes out, the air starts to cool and contract. When the air contracts, the pressure on the inside of the bottle becomes less than the pressure on the outside. The greater outside air pressure pushes the egg through the mouth of the bottle.

Most of the miracles in John have some greater significance. Changing water in stone jars into wine may represent how God, through Christ, transforms our hearts of stone. The blind man receiving sight is similar to each person “seeing the light” when he or she accepts a relationship with Christ. With this in mind, come up with a meaning or metaphor for your egg-in-the-bottle metaphor. What might the egg represent? What might the bottle represent? Why might the large egg falling through the smaller mouth of the bottle be significant? Could the fire have some meaning?

Be prepared to explain your metaphor.