

Follow the Signs

Water to Wine

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The Gospel of John describes how God brings new creation into existence through faith in His Son. The prologue of the book opens, “In the beginning...” (John 1:1-5). John introduces Jesus as the physical manifestation of the Creator. He will tabernacle/dwell with man. Sadly, Jesus would be rejected by the very people He came to save. However, the Creator would use the death of Jesus to bring new life.

In the first chapter, the baptism of Jesus is noted. John tells us how Jesus would bring new creation by dying a sacrificial death for the sins of the world and give the Spirit to believers (John 1:29-34). John lets readers know how the story ends. In the meantime, he highlights signs pointing to new creation.

The First Sign

John 2:1-11

The signs of John’s gospel give important information about the meaning of God’s new creation. Drawing on what Jesus told Nathaniel at the end of the first chapter, the signs are brief moments in time when Heaven and earth connected (John 1:43-51). They show us what a newly formed relationship with our Creator would look like when we have faith in Jesus. The signs are glimpses at something greater God is accomplishing for the world through Jesus.

John was a clever writer. He is quite cryptic in how he explains the Messiah. For example, in his prologue, John uses the symbols of word, light, and darkness to explain this most consequential time in history. If we approach John with the perspective that his writing has a deeper meaning than just a chronology of people, places, and events, we will begin to see the Messiah more clearly.

This first sign is about transformation. Jesus miraculously changes water into wine. A new reality comes to being when the Messiah is present and when people do whatever Jesus tells them. Had Jesus not been present or had the wedding coordinator refused to listen to Jesus, the wedding reception would have run out of wine to drink. The wedding party would have been left humiliated. Of course, this does not happen. Jesus is present, people listen to Him, and transformation occurs. Think about it: water cannot turn into wine, but it does. A new reality is birthed because Jesus was present and people did as He instructed.

So, consider some features of Jesus turning water to wine. First, this is one of only two occasions where John mentions the presence of Mary, the mother of Jesus. We will not hear about her again until the cross. She has a puzzling interaction with her Son. Mary tries pushing Jesus into the limelight, but Jesus tells her that His hour has not yet come. The time when His glory would be most fully revealed would come when He died. It would be at this time that

recognizing the Messiah's glory through such a shameful process would require the greatest of faith. This time had not yet come; however, He would give a sign, pointing to this transformative moment of glory.

Next, the occasion of this miracle is significant: a wedding reception. First, the Bible uses marriage customs as a symbol of God joining Himself with humanity. Wedding feasts symbolize the heavenly reception which awaits God's people (Rev. 21:1-3). Second, the water jars are symbolic. They were used for Jewish purification rites. This shows us God is doing new things through the Old Jewish system. God is going to bring purification to Israel through Jesus, but also for the whole world. Third, given the symbolism of John's writing, we would be wise to consider the timing of this sign: the third day.

In summary, the wedding itself was held in Cana, the hometown of Nathaniel. As was customary, the whole town and neighboring towns likely would have been invited. This is why Jesus, His mother, and the disciples were present. Running out of wine would have been a social disaster. The problem would have been considered a bad omen on the marriage; however, John shows us how the Messiah can provide the needs of people in surprising ways.

Certainly, John is hoping to convey in writing that Jesus can still provide for the needs of people in surprising ways. Later, Jesus will state He came to give life in all its fullness to people (John 10:10). However, for Jesus to deal with our problems, give us fullness, and transform us, we must seriously consider the words of His mother: do whatever He tells you.

Conclusion

1. Being in Jesus' presence is joyous. Nothing about Jesus' ministry was random or coincidental. Therefore, the first sign of Jesus being performed at a celebration is significant. The first sign was done at a wedding reception, not a funeral. Jesus wants to bless our lives and give us hope. The abundant life He later describes is gained when He becomes the center of our lives (John 10:10).

2. Jesus can do the impossible. This point is made through each of the signs. This is impressive in the physical realm. Water cannot be turned into wine unless Jesus calls for such a transformation. Of course, Jesus did not come to the world to change water into wine. But, He did come to transform and recreate us as people.

Such a proposition may seem impossible to us. We may consider ourselves beyond hope. Our sin is too great. The change required to transform us is too great. Not so for Jesus. The power of His signs increases throughout John's writing. They culminate in Jesus giving life to the dead. Therefore, Jesus has the power to overcome our sins, weaknesses, and or inabilities. No project is too big for Him to accomplish.

3. To share in Jesus' new creation, we must do whatever He says. The words of Jesus' mother are striking: "...Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). These are words of faith. She knew Jesus possessed unnatural abilities, unearthly power. The servants did what Mary said and

obeyed Jesus. If we share in Mary's faith in her Son and do what He says, we too will be blessed by all the goodness He wants us to experience.