

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The First Sign – Water Into Wine

by Dan Trygg

“This first of the signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.” John 2:11

John prefers to use the word “sign” to describe the miraculous works of Jesus. As in English, a sign is that which points to, or indicates, something else. It is a *mark*, or *signal*. Sometimes it refers to that by which something is known or distinguished. In John’s writing, it is part of the evidence which he assembles that is meant to point to, or signify to us, that Jesus is the Christ of God. This is how these miraculous works were understood by the early church. John lists seven such miracle accounts as “signs” pointing to Jesus’ identity.

There are three Greek words for miracles: (1.) sign (*sēmeion*); (2.) wonder (*teras*); and, (3.) powerful-act (*dunamis*). (Of the 77 times the Greek word *sēmeion* occurs in the NT, 57 times it is used of miraculous signs, 17 times in John. -- Matt. 12:38,39 (3x); 16:1,4 (3x); 24:24; Mk 8:11, 2(2x); 13:22; Lk. 11:16, 29 (3x); 23:8; Jn 2:11,18,23; 3:2; 4:48,54; 6:2,14,26,30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47; 12:18,37; 20:30; Act 2:19, 22,43; 4:16,22,30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 8:6,13; 14:3; 15:12; Rom. 15:19; I Cor. 12:12; II Cor. 12:12; II Thess. 2:9; Heb. 2:4; Rev. 13:13,14; 16:14; 19:20. The Greek word for “wonder” [*teras*] occurs 16 times, every time in conjunction with *sēmeion*, i.e., “signs and wonders” – Matt 24:24; Mk. 13:23; Jn. 4:48; Acts 2:19,22,43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3; 15:12; Rom. 15:19; II Cor. 12:12; II Thess. 2:9; Heb. 2:4. The Greek word for “miracle” or “powerful-act” (*dunamis*) occurs 119 times in the NT, but only 25 times is it used of a miracle – Matt. 7:22; 11:20,21,23; 13:54,58; 14:2; Mk. 6:2,5,14; 9:39; Lk. 10:13; 19:37; Acts 2:22; 8:13; 19:11 Rom. 15:19; I Cor. 12:10,28,29; II Cor. 12:12; Gal.3:5; II Thess. 2:9; Heb. 2:4.) **In Acts 2:22, in Peter’s message explaining the coming of the Holy Spirit, all three of these words occur in one verse to indicate how we could know that Jesus was sent by God:** “Men, Israelites, hear these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man having been clearly attested from God unto y’all by miracles (*dunamis*) and by wonders (*teras*) and by signs (*sēmeion*) which God did through Him in your midst...” All three words occur in II Cor. 12:12, II Thess. 2:9 and Hebrews 2:4, as well.

The word “miracle” has come to be so overused that it has become almost meaningless. It is helpful to make some distinctions when talking about the miraculous, and attempting to convey what John meant by the word “sign”. (1.) **Providence** -- *This is the normal way in which God has ordered the world to operate.* There is no definite evidence of supernatural intervention. There are regular principles observed in nature and everyday life which all people experience. (2.) **Special Providence** -- *God uses natural means to provide for special needs.* His intervention is seen with the eye of faith by the timing involved, the unusual or unexpected avenue of provision, or the uncanny way in which exactly what was needed was provided. The unbeliever would say that it was “coincidence”. (3.) **Supernatural Intervention or Miracle** – *God’s intervention to meet a need, or to make a provision, which goes above, beyond, or outside of natural means.* In such a case, there are definite physical results produced that cannot honestly be explained by natural causes. Here God’s intervention is seen not only by the *timing*, but also by the *means* used to provide. The unbeliever *cannot deny* that *something* has happened. It either is without explanation, or they see that God must have intervened miraculously. It cannot honestly be explained away as a coincidence.

Let’s take a look at the account. **There was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. The name “Cana” means “reedy”.** (Our English word, “cane” is from this root.) The site has been located about 8 miles due north of Nazareth. There are still reeds in the area. **The fact that John mentions that “the mother of Jesus was there” seems to indicate that she was somehow connected to the family hosting the wedding. She may have been related.** If Nazareth was where she grew up, it would not be surprising if a family member, maybe a sister, was living in nearby Cana. (Note that the text does not indicate that she was *invited*, ...just that she was “*being there*”.) **This would explain also why Jesus was invited.** He would have been a nephew, maybe a cousin to the bride or groom. As I mentioned last week, the new friends Jesus met in His trip to the south, probably travelled together northward with Jesus’ family in a caravan. **It would have been natural for the family to extend an invitation to Jesus’ fellow travelers as well.** It was on the way home, and it allowed them to spend more time with Jesus, so they stopped in for the festivities. We find out later that Nathanael was from Cana (21:2), as well, so there was more than just this one connection to this town. **Weddings usually took place on Wednesday afternoons, and were usually large celebrations where many were invited.** Feasting would not uncommonly last for up to a week. There was a strong sense of obligation to “pull out the red carpet” and provide abundantly in regards to the hospitality at such an occasion. **To run out of wine was a great embarrassment to the host. Mary’s knowledge of this development probably indicates that she was involved in the preparations and serving of the food.** It was not public knowledge yet, for the steward of the feast did not even know of this fact (vs. 9).

When the wine ran out, “the mother of Jesus said to Him, ‘They have no wine.’” Again, this seems to support that she was more than just a guest. She must have been either a close friend or relative, to be in the inner

circle, and to take initiative to find a solution. This is an interesting interchange between Mary and Jesus. **Mary obviously expects that Jesus can and will do something about the problem.**

“Woman, what do I have to do with you? My hour has not yet come.” -- This almost sounds disrespectful in our English translations. It is not meant to be so. It is merely a Jewish idiomatic expression, literally: “What to Me and to you, woman?” **Note that Jesus did not refer to her as His mother.** He simply calls her “woman” (cf. 19:25-27). **It was important to make the point that He was no longer under her authority.** His baptism and consecration to His ministry precluded past relationships. Later, He would teach that lesson to others, as well (Lk. 9:57-62; Matt. 10:37-39; 12:46-50). **The thrust of what Jesus was saying is that it was not His responsibility, nor did it seem time to get involved in alleviating this problem by a miracle.**

“Whatever He says to you, do it.” -- **Two observations: first, Mary was evidently expecting Him to do something miraculous,** preparing the servants to respond to what may appear to be a strange request from Him; and second, **Mary would not take “no” for an answer.** I believe that *she* was being led by God to ask this of Jesus, ... and that Jesus Himself did not really know that He was to do this, until Mary came to Him with her request. This seems to me to be the significance of the recording of this incident. Incidents like this challenge our perception of the incarnation. What does it mean that Jesus was both fully-God and fully-man (Phil. 2:7; Col. 1:19; Heb. 2:17), ...or that He “emptied Himself” to become human? (We need to *observe*.) Note Mary’s confidence. **She did not pressure or argue with Jesus.** She knew His heart. **She confidently expected an answer, and prepared to receive it.**

There are numerous times in the New Testament where God goes out of His way to spotlight the involvement of women in Jesus’ life and ministry, and in the early church. In a culture that was as patriarchal as was first century Judaism, there was absolutely nothing to be gained by this. In fact, some would have been scandalized by, or would have ridiculed, the way in which Jesus and the early church lifted up women as equals. **The rivalry that began as the curse of sin resulted in the oppression and degradation of women in society. God clearly honored womankind so as to correct this evil mindset.** Yes, Woman “helped” to introduce sin into the world (Genesis 3:1-7; I Timothy 2:14), but clearly Man was held responsible in God’s sight for the fall that resulted from *his* action, not that of the Woman (Romans 5:12-19; I Timothy 2:14). Men have blamed womankind (Wrongfully so! The man was responsible for his *own* choices.) throughout the eons for the fall (Genesis 3:11,12). **God, in His infinite love and wisdom chose to lift women up by including them in all aspects of the unfolding of the plan of salvation and its spread throughout the world.** The mention of four women in Jesus’ genealogy (Matthew 1:3,5,6); His choice to bring the Savior into the world as the “seed of the woman” (Gen. 3:15; Gal. 4:4), i.e., birth from a virgin apart from the agency of any male human parentage was not only a Divine miracle, but also a representative participation of womankind in the unfolding of the events surrounding redemption. **When Paul wrote that women will be saved through “the childbearing” in I Timothy 2:15** (This is the literal translation of the Greek, not “the bearing of children”, as some translations have rendered it.), he was not saying that women needed to bear children to be saved (Woe to those who are barren, or unmarried!), but **he was referring to the representative participation of womankind in the redemptive plan to bring the “Child”, ...the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent..., into the world.** They will be saved through faith *in Him!* The women who followed Jesus and supported His ministry (Lk. 8:1-3); the woman, Mary of Bethany, who sat at His feet to listen to Him teach (Lk. 10:38-39 -- This was the relationship of a disciple to his rabbi -- unheard of for a woman in Jewish society!); the women who were the first eyewitnesses of Jesus after His resurrection (Matthew 28:1-10); Mary and other women who were among the first recipients of the Holy Spirit in the upper room at Pentecost (Acts 1:14; 2:17,18); and many other examples show how **God chose to specifically and visibly include women in the events having to do with the life, death, resurrection and proclamation of Jesus Christ.** This interchange in John 2 between Mary and Jesus is, I believe, another example in which God used a woman in this way. I believe **God was using Mary to set up and initiate the first of Jesus’ miraculous signs.**

As to the magnitude of the miracle, there were six stone waterpots, each containing 20 or 30 gallons (vs. 6). What Jesus did was not some little dribble in a test tube, **it was between 120 to 180 gallons of water!**

The response of the overseeing steward of the catering, demonstrates that **this was no cheap parlor trick** (vss. 8-10). **This was genuine wine, and of an excellent flavor and quality** (a headwaiter would know good wine).

Verse 11 says, “This beginning/first of the signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee...” is a bit curious. **It does not definitively state that this is the first sign that Jesus ever did anywhere, ...or merely the first one John records.** It does seem, however, that by the introduction of the events in 1:35 and 43 by the phrase, “on the next day”, and by the introduction of this incident by “on the third day” (vs. 1), John is stating that this is the first sign that Jesus did that His disciples witnessed. In fact, they were almost the *only ones* who knew what happened! Through it, He manifested His glory *to them*. **This seems to be the essence of the sign, a glimpse of the supernatural power of God.** Changing the water into wine clearly demonstrated *that*. **As a result, His disciples believed in Him. They got the message.**