

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Authenticating Signs

by Dan Trygg

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

“The Jews therefore answered and said to Him, ‘What sign do You show to us, seeing that You do these things?’” 19

Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ 20 The Jews therefore said, ‘It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’ 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken. 23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, beholding His signs which He was doing.”

John 2:18-23

“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know...”

Acts 2:22

“...grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, 30 while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”

Acts 4:29-30

As we read chapter two of John, we encounter his account of the first “sign” that Jesus did in public. We don’t know if He had ever done any miraculous things before, or if this was an entirely new experience for Him. There is no record of any process of learning or discovering such things. **It appears that He was not expecting to do anything like this in this particular circumstance.** He was simply there to attend a wedding celebration of what we may surmise was a relative or family friend. His new disciples were with him, as well. His mother, who apparently was helping in the background, brought the need to his attention. “They have no wine,” she said. Jesus’ response indicates that He was not expecting to be involved in this. “What to you and to me, woman?” **Mary apparently was the one who was receiving a prompting from God.** She told the servants, “Do whatever He tells you.” That set the stage for the miracle. **God was going to do something through Jesus, and it was somehow going to involve the servants.**

There is currently a church built over the traditional site of where this miracle occurred in Cana. I did see, however, examples of the stone waterpots used for cleansing, when I visited the synagogue at Capernaum. I had always imagined that they were ceramic, “stoneware” vases of some kind. No. They are actually large pots carved out of native limestone. They are almost mid-thigh in height, and are over two feet across at the top. The sides are four to five inches thick. They definitely would be capable of holding 20-30 gallons of liquid. They were sitting outside of the ancient synagogue for the purpose of supplying water to people to wash hands when entering the synagogue. The stone waterpots at Cana must have been similar. (A lot of things were made right out of the native stone. For example, the manger that Jesus would have been placed in as a child was probably carved out of stone, not made of wood.)

Jesus told the servants to refill the waterpots, which probably had been emptied as the guests had arrived and washed their hands, and maybe their feet. **The servants did as Jesus told them.** This was no small task. It would take multiple trips to whatever water source there was, in order to bring 120-180 gallons of water! **Then He told them to draw some water out and bring it to the headwaiter. When he tasted it, he exclaimed that it was “good wine”, ...the best, saved for last. The miracle was unseen by the people in the room. Only Jesus, Mary, His disciples, and the servants knew what happened.** It was a miracle, nonetheless. **It manifested His glory, or made His glory visible and evident, to His disciples, and they believed in Him.** (Undoubtedly, the servants did, too.)

“Signs”, or miracles, were an important indication that God was at work. They were a notable part of the ministry of Jesus, the apostles, and the ministry of the early church. The word for “sign” occurs 57 times in reference to a miracle, and the word for “miracle” (‘powerful act’) is used an additional 25 times in reference to such powerful supernatural events. **The use of the word “sign” is significant. It means that this supernatural act was pointing to something.** It was indicating that **something was at work that was more than human.** Although there could be false signs, miraculous or powerful works caused by demonic power (2 Thess. 2:9), **most of the references to “signs” are meant to indicate that God is the dynamic force behind them. They indicate that the person performing such miracles must be in league with God. They must represent Him, or be sent by Him.** For example, this was Nicodemus’ conclusion, recorded in John 3:2, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” Or, later on, when some wanted to criticize Jesus, and referred to Him as a “sinner”, “others disagreed, saying, ‘How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?’” (Jn. 9:16). **The miraculous signs which Jesus and other believers did were a strong testimony that indicated that they were sent and empowered by God.**

The apostle Paul said that Jews “asked for signs” (1 Cor. 1:22). Apparently, this was a common expectation, just like we see here in John 2. In the first chapter, when John the Baptist “stirred the pot” by advocating that people

repent, recommit themselves to God, and get baptized like a new convert, the Jews challenged him, saying, “Who do you claim to be? Why do you baptize, if you are not the Christ, Elijah or the Prophet?” Now, in chapter two, Jesus *really* stirred the pot! In fact, you could say He stirred up a hornet’s nest when He drove the moneychangers and sellers of animals out of the temple. **They immediately demanded, “What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?”** (2:18). **In that case, Jesus referred to a different kind of sign that they were not expecting, and certainly could not have understood at that time.** He said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn. 2:19). Looking back, the disciples realized that **He was referring to His bodily resurrection as the ultimate sign of His authority from heaven.** That statement did not at all satisfy the religious leaders who were challenging Him. Probably the only thing that saved Him from their wrath was that they knew He was right. They had misused the sacred space of the temple by putting stalls for animals, and conducting business right there. Jesus had the moral authority behind Him, and they knew it.

If they had been interested, as some of them proved to be, they would have noticed that Jesus was actually doing many signs. Many people were believing in Him because of the signs He was doing (2:23). They could see the unquestionable activity of God at work in the miracles He was doing, so they believed what He was saying, and, most importantly, they were trusting in Him as God’s man. At the end of the chapter, however, there is a foreshadowing of what was to come. **Even though many were believing in Him, He was not trusting in them,** because He knew that people were not dependable. Some of these same people who were trusting in Him this day, would one day turn against Him, ...in spite of the signs they had witnessed. Signs were not enough. In fact, even at His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, John wrote, “Though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him” (12:37). **Signs do not compel faith, they simply point to the presence of God at work.** The observer must then choose whether to trust in the person God authenticates as being from Him, or not. As valuable and helpful as they may be to reveal God at work in a person, not everyone is inclined to yield to God.

I want to direct your thoughts to another aspect of this chapter. **This was the first of Jesus’ signs. He had not ever done anything like this,** ...at least not in public, or in any record in the scriptures. **The cleansing of the temple was a first, too. He had never done anything like that before, either.** In fact, when He returned to Nazareth to preach in the synagogue there, they were surprised at the words He was saying. **Apparently, this was the first time He had ever talked like this, or taught like this.** They were taken aback. They said, “Is this not the carpenter, the son of Joseph? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” (Matt. 13:54-46). **There were a lot of “first’s” happening in Jesus’ life at this time.**

This is important to see and acknowledge. **Jesus had to learn to step out in new ways. He had to learn to respond to what He sensed or saw the Father doing in His life, and in His surroundings. The apostles had to go through a similar process. So did the 70 in Luke 10, ...Stephen, ...and Philip, ...and Paul.**

The signs of the kingdom were not to be limited to them, either. Jesus said that the one believing in Him will do the works that He did, and even greater works than these, because He would go to the Father and send the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:12,16,26). **It was the expectation of the apostles and the early believers that God would bear witness to His word with healings, signs and wonders as a testimony and witness to the name of Jesus Christ** (Acts 4:29,30). **God kept testifying to the authenticity of His message as the gospel spread, using signs and wonders to show this was really Him at work** (Acts 14:3; 15:12; 19:11,12; 28:9; Rom. 15:19; Heb. 2:4). These are spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:4-11). These did not cease to operate in the first century. **These gifts and acts of the Holy Spirit are for us today, as well.** God still likes to use signs, wonders, and powerful acts to authenticate His message and accredit His messengers in our time. The question I want *you* to consider is **“How would I learn to recognize what, when and where God may want to do such a thing through me?”**

As I think back on my life, I can see times where there have definitely been “firsts” in my spiritual experience. I remember the first times I had to deal with a demon. I recall the experience of God speaking through me when I had to testify about Him (or even what I continue to experience when I preach today). I can think of a number of times of “holy agitation” where God prompted me to do something that was beyond my normal pattern of living. I could not simply sit still and do nothing. I had to step out to do what He was prompting me to do. I remember praying for someone in the hospital, and they were dramatically healed (I also remember that I “felt nothing” at the time, but the person I prayed for felt a change in their body.) I am also thinking about the first time I spoke in tongues, and how that phenomenon continues to come up in my life, since that day. I have seen *many* dramatic answers to prayer, which testify to me that God is at work. Often, they are also a powerful testimony to *others*, as well. **How about you?** Can you recall those “firsts” in your spiritual history? **We need to be praying for the signs and powerful acts of the Holy Spirit to be pushing us into new experiences with Him, and bearing witness to the authenticity of His word today.**