

Miracles of Jesus 12-04-22b

We pick up our study now in the first miracle of the Lord Jesus, the turning of water into wine and moving into the second one, which interestingly is going to also take place in this same community of Cana in Galilee, roughly 10 miles north of Nazareth, a place that was only mentioned in connection with these miracles and the fact that our friend Nathanael Bartolomeo is from Cana. So you get the idea that there was a knowledge of God in the placement of these disciples even back to when they were born. Jesus has ministry over the years in Galilee with Peter and Andrew and James and John and Philip and Bartholomew and these men are from this region.

So there is already some infrastructure, there is some knowledge and some family and some familiarity, Jesus himself being from that region. But why wine? Why as the first sign would it be water to wine? We've seen the significance of water. What does wine represent in Scripture? People kind of get nervous, especially if you're from the Baptist persuasion like I am.

Wine kind of makes you nervous. Alcohol makes you nervous. There's lots of warnings in the Scripture about don't look upon the wine when it is red and be not drunk with wine wherein is excess.

There have been some people that have tried to argue that Jesus never actually had any truck with wine at all, that it was just grape juice or new wine that had no alcoholic content. And I say this is pish-posh, it's nonsense. This was actual wine.

But wine was a very significant feature of the old world economy. In Palestine, as I mentioned, Genesis 9.20, Noah was the first to cultivate the vine and he learned the hard way what happens if you not only cultivate but fermentate. Fermentation got him in trouble, led to the curse on Canaan.

But it is often looked at as a beneficial thing or something that is praised in Scripture. Judges 9.13, the vine said to them, should I cease my new wine which cheers both God and men and go to sway over trees. Psalm 104.15, it is wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread which strengthens man's heart.

So it was associated with celebration and with cheer, with gladness. And of course this is in moderation. Fullness of wine is a special blessing from God.

Genesis 27.28, may God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine. It's the divine blessing. Verse 37 of Genesis 27, Isaac answered and said to Esau, indeed I have made him your master, all his brethren I have given him as servants.

With grain and wine I have sustained him. What shall I do now for you my son? Joel 2.23,

be glad then you children of Zion and rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given you the former rain faithfully and he will cause the rain to come down for you, the former rain and the latter rain in the first month. And this is, as you go on through, this is part of what sustains the vineyards and causes the grapes to grow.

If Jesus had a hang up about wine, I don't think he would have said, I am the vine, you are the branches, abide in me and bear much fruit. Because the purpose of vineyards was to grow grapes that were pressed and fermented into wine. They did this for health reasons as much as anything because of the slight alcohol, and it was a slight alcoholic content in wine, it was a preservative.

It would keep, it would last, it would not sour or go bad or grow parasites. It had a natural antiseptic quality. This is why Paul says to Timothy, take a little wine for your stomach's sake.

It had a bit of a medicinal soothing effect. All of these in moderation. There are plenty of warnings against overindulgence.

We saw this in Isaiah 5.11 and following, Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may follow intoxicating drink, who continue until night until wine inflames them. Proverbs 20.1 Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise. The wise are not led astray by wine or strong drink.

Proverbs 21.17 He who loves pleasure will be a poor man. He who loves wine and oil will not be rich. It will impair your judgment.

You will make foolish, stupid decisions harming yourself and others. Wine had significance in ritual, in worship. There are sacrificial instructions such as Exodus 29.38-41. Offer the daily offerings, two lambs of the first year day by day.

This is your Amnon, lamb of the first year. Of course, Amnon is Greek. One lamb you offer in the morning, the other lamb at twilight.

With one lamb, one-tenth of an ephah of flour mixed with one-fourth of a hint of pressed oil and one-fourth of a hint of wine as a drink offering. This is real wine. It doesn't say grape juice.

It doesn't say pomegranate juice. It doesn't say orange juice or anything else. This is wine.

It is a part of the sacrifice, the daily sacrifice. And they had vats of wine in the area of the tabernacle and later the temple. You find this out if you read Josephus, Wars of the Jews, 5.565 when you come to the invasion of Titus and all of the horrible things that were going on in Jerusalem.

By the way, if you want to know why Jerusalem got judged, just read Josephus' account of the people and the stuff that they did and the heinous things that went on amongst the population just before and during that judgment. You cannot believe the depravity of these people. They were ripe for judgment.

God did the world a favor by taking Jerusalem and Judea out in 70 A.D. Read Josephus if you want to know the details. One of the things one of the leaders did with the legions of Titus facing them is he emptied the vessels of sacred wine and oil which the priests kept to be poured on the burnt offerings and which lay in the inner court of the temple and distributed it among the multitude who in their anointing themselves and drinking used them up. Used up all the sacrificial oil and wine, getting drunk and massaging each other I guess.

But that's not the worst of it. I don't even have time to tell you what all went on. So wine is specifically mentioned as a part of the Passover meal.

You have the four cups that are covered in rabbinical literature. And by the way, you do not have those four cups in the night that Jesus ate the last meal with his disciples because it wasn't the Passover. So all the people that do Pesach at Easter and so on, I mean it's interesting, it's informative, but that's not the meal that Jesus ate with his disciples.

But he did have the cup and that cup, the new covenant in his blood was wine. Why wine? When you compare it to water, water sustains, water is necessary for life, but wine has got power. Wine has transformational power.

It can make you merry or it can make you stupid. And it takes the wise to make proper use of this powerful liquid. It has power beyond the water and it speaks of divine power, transformational power.

And that's why Jesus used wine, oinos, it means nothing but fermented grape juice. Everywhere in Greek literature you cannot make this into a non-fermented, non-alcoholic drink without doing violence to the Greek language and to the Bible itself. The fact that a thing can be abused doesn't mean that it is evil in all forms.

Anything can be abused, food is necessary, but gluttony is a sin. So Jesus changes the water to wine. Why? Well, this is important because who sees this? Who benefits from it? Who believes as a result of it? What does it tell us at the end of the account? In verse 11, his disciples believed in him.

Now, they already believed in him, did they not? Had they not come all the way down to the Jordan looking for him? Had they not heard the testimony of John identifying him? Had they not sought him out and followed him to where he was staying? Did they not go back to Galilee with him and leave John down at the Jordan? They believed in him

already. You remember the protestation of Nathanael, Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel. First day they had this figured out.

So why does it say they believed in him? Well, this is a confirmation, this is an assurance. They are qualified to see this sign behind the scenes because they are already there seeking, they have already initially believed. And this is a strengthening and a confirmation.

You remember the Scripture, to him who has, more will be given. To him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. You have this in Matthew 13.12, Matthew 25.29, Mark 4.25, all record the same words of Jesus.

Whoever has, to him more will be given. They believed the word and then Jesus confirms their belief with this sign. It is confirming, it is authenticating, it is almost a reward for their faith because they believe they see.

Jesus will say at the end of this same Gospel, 20.29 of John, Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. The greater blessing, and we saw this in Peter, we have seen it in the epistles of John, we have seen, we have handled, we have touched, but you have the prophetic word made more sure.

It is better to be a disciple of Christ through the word than even to have traveled with him and seen the limited number of signs that he was able to do in those three and a half years. The word is ever present, the word is constant, the word is available night and day, every situation. We don't have to go find the Lord.

So the message in this first sign that John gets across and it defines the whole sign ministry that you see throughout this Gospel, the seven great signs that John records is the value of believing the word. To him who has more will be given. If we believe and trust based on the word of God, God is able to open to us visions of the supernatural and the miraculous and it doesn't knock us off our feet.

We don't get drunk on the wine. We are wise. We can appreciate these things in balance and appreciate them for their goodness.

There are people who get hung up on signs and wonders. You get your signs and wonders movements and your Pentecostal branches are constantly seeking a sign and constantly looking for a miracle, trying to find affirmation of their faith and their standing with God by some sort of supernatural activity. This is, be not drunk with wine wherein is excess.

If you are truly filled with the Spirit, and this is what your Holy Ghost types miss, if you are truly filled with the Spirit, you don't need a sign. You have the word and when you believe the word, when the miraculous does happen, we take it in stride. We see it in the

context of God's plan and purpose.

This is what we want. This is what you and I want to seek. We want to be like John and Andrew and Philip and Nathanael and Simon Peter.

These five, the first five who joined the Lord Jesus as his disciples before they ever saw a miracle and they are the first to see a miracle because they already believed based on the word. Jesus contrasts this. We don't have time to go through this section of John, but Jesus talks about the people in Galilee who accept him and welcome him when he comes back in John chapter 4. The Samaritans believe Jesus.

Jesus doesn't do a miracle at the well, does he? When he meets the woman in John chapter 4, the woman at the well, the Samaritan woman, he speaks to her and tells her words and she believes in him and goes and celebrates him to the town. They all come out based on the word of testimony. Now, Jesus has got a whole well full of water there in Samaria.

Did he turn any of it to wine? Did he do any kind of miracle? Come see a man who told me. Come see a man who speaks and the Samaritans believed. The scribes, Pharisees, representatives of the priests that came out to John didn't believe.

None of them followed Jesus. The people who believed the word followed him. The Samaritans believe.

He goes to Galilee. They accept Jesus, but they are looking for a sign. Look at the latter part of John chapter 4 for our second miracle.

In verse 43, after two days in Samaria, Jesus departed from there and went to Galilee. What day would this be? After two days, what is the day? It's the third day, right? He spent two days. It tells us in the preceding couple of verses, verse 40, when the Samaritans had come to him, they urged him to stay with them and he stayed there two days.

Many more believed. Why? Because of his own word. It doesn't say he ever did a miracle anywhere near that well.

He spoke. Those who come to God must worship him in spirit and in truth, he tells the woman. Then they said to the woman, now we believe not because of what you said, but we ourselves have heard him and we know that this is indeed the Christ.

The Samaritans accept him. Then what happens when he goes to Galilee? After two days, this will be the third day, verse 43, he departed from there and went to Galilee. Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.

A prophet, a forth teller, a word speaker, no honor in his own country. So when he came

to Galilee, the Galileans received him, this is Lombano, they let him come in having seen the things he did in Jerusalem at the feast for they had also gone to the feast. They saw signs and they wanted to see more.

John does not record those. Jesus came again, verse 46, to Cana of Galilee, where he had made the water wine. John connects these things for us.

There was a certain nobleman, this word is basilikos, and we know from this word that this man was an official of Herod's government. He's probably a Roman, probably not even a Jew. But he is up in the civil government and he is a high official.

Some have even suggested that he was a nephew of Herod, but there's no evidence for that. But he's a notable ruler, nobleman. His son is sick at Capernaum.

Capernaum is about 17 miles away, really too great a distance to cover conveniently without a long full day's journey at best, probably two days. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to him and implored him to come down and heal his son. Come down because Capernaum, of course, is by the sea, lower altitude, Cana is up in the hills.

Heal his son for he was at the point of death. Jesus said to him, unless you all see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe. The nobleman said to him, Sir, come down before my child dies.

Remember that attitude of Mary, do whatever he says, undeterred by sort of a first negative response? This is sort of a test. Think about it. Sometimes we get into a situation, we pray, we don't see an immediate resolution.

It's a test. Can you believe past the first moment? Can you keep on believing even when you seem to get sort of a negative reply? Jesus seems reluctant to do anything at the feast. Mary has confidence that he will.

Jesus seems to be reluctant to heal the nobleman's son. Well, unless you see people, unless people see these signs and wonders, they're not going to believe. This is you all here.

The nobleman says, Sir, come down. He thinks Jesus will do something even when he gets this mild rebuff. Jesus says to him, Go your way, your son lives.

Now, like the wine and water episode, have we seen anything? The miracle happens off stage, happens out of sight, doesn't it? Go your way, your son lives. So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him. The man believed the word.

If you remember one thing out of these two signs, look at people who believe the word. Having seen nothing, Jesus says, Go home, your son's alive. The man believes it.

The man leaves. He doesn't importune and say, Well, Lord, unless you show up there, I really think if you would lay on hands, I think I heard in Jerusalem you were really present. My son's 17 miles away.

How far does your power extend? Have you got a bursting radius that great? Can you remote control heal at this fight? I really feel better if you would just... The man believes. He believes the word of the Lord Jesus. Jesus just looks at him and says, Go your way, your son lives.

The man believes the word. This has to be us. If you want to truly see the power of God in signs and wonders, you've got to first believe the word.

It's a necessary precursor. Before Jesus made wine available at the feast, there had to be water there, right? Somebody had to fill those pots. Water of the word.

So the man believed the word and he went his way, and as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, Your son lives. Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better, and they said to him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. The father knew it was at that same hour in which Jesus said to him, Your son lives.

He gets the confirmation afterward. And he himself believed and his whole household. This again is the second sign Jesus did when he had come out of Judea into Galilee.

Now, just like with the disciples, we have two mentions of belief. The man believes the word. When he receives confirmation and knowledge of the sign miracle, he believes again.

Well, are these both salvation? Actually, neither are salvation. This man would not have come to Jesus if he didn't believe what he had heard, and he wouldn't have been insistent except that he believed. He knew something about the Lord Jesus.

This is a response that God is looking for. God is looking for people who will respond to the truth that they hear. We have a built-in receiver for the truth, and when we hear the truth and God the Holy Spirit confirms the truth and convicts us of the truth, we choose how to respond.

God is looking for people who choose to respond in belief. And to him who has, more will be given. Blessed are those who not having seen believe because those blessings will follow, those supernatural benefits, the wine of joy, the blessing of life of a son, posterity, heritage, your loved one.

These things come to those who first believe. Sans evidence, sans miracle, sans any demonstration. God is looking for those who respond in faith.

These things both happen in Cana of Galilee. Why? Back and forth, back and forth. There

is a comparison of the disciples who believe and follow Jesus to the representatives of the priests and Pharisees who do not.

There is a comparison of the Samaritans, sandwiched right in here, who respond and believe based on the word alone. Jesus never even does a miracle for them, but he stays with them two days and they believe. Some of the first believers in the Lord Jesus, of any quantity, are not strictly Jews.

There is a sense in which the Gentiles get there first. So what do we discern from this? Well, first of all, receiving is not believing. The Galileans receive Jesus.

They lambano him. He comes in. But what is their motivation? What are they looking for? This guy is a David Copperfield.

Watch this. He's going to perform some tricks. He's going to impress us with the supernatural.

This is the real deal. I don't know how he does it. Bring him crippled people and they suddenly get well.

This will be fun to watch. Looking for an answer, looking for a solution to a problem without first believing, without investing, without seeing the bigger picture, that this goes beyond the moment, goes beyond the urgent need of the hour to long-term relationship with God, long-term redemption, sanctification, propitiation, atonement, cleansing, renewal, life with God, being able to put things in context. So this, like Mary, the nobleman, repeats the request.

Mother of Jesus basically emphasizes her request by telling the servants in Jesus' hearing, do whatever he tells you. She is expecting him to act. He repeats his request.

And just as the first, the actual thing is unobserved. And it's interesting that in the case of the water turned to wine, the master of the feast says, you've saved the best till last. Who's he talking to? He's talking to the groom.

What does the groom say? What are the recorded words of the groom? For whom this is probably the most important of anyone because it's his wedding. He doesn't say anything, does he? What does Mary say when she finds out that the water's been turned? Oh, thank you son. Does she reappear? The beneficiaries don't even speak in John's account.

It is unobserved. And this is so much the nature of our life in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not horn blowing, glory in the skies, hallelujah choruses, angels flocking around and descending in droves.

The real work and power of the Lord Jesus Christ is manifest in quietness, in out of the

way places, in the back room with the water pots, back home 17 miles away. By the time news of this is going to filter back to Galilee, Jesus will be elsewhere. He's going to head down to Capernaum with his family.

The sign and observation of Jesus' power is confirmation. Now, Jesus does the first miracle at Cana and this second one with no fanfare. Why? His hour has not yet come.

What is his hour? It is the hour of his manifestation, of his public presentation to the people. This is going to come later. Remember the donkey, Hosanna, blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord, going down to the temple.

Now is the hour. Are you ready? Well, at that hour it becomes evident that those who were seeking a sign aren't going to get any sign. The ones who weren't seeking a sign receive it.

Those disciples that were following Jesus, they didn't say, Lord, it should be nice if you'd show us a sign so that we really know who you are. Jesus gives it to them without request and he does it in a great way. He meets the need and this is really the ultimate and probably most difficult point to get across.

But you think about the Lord Jesus being confronted by his mother with this situation and he says, well, my hour has not yet come. It would be easy for him to say, well, I'm not going to do anything here. You're on your own.

You should have planned ahead, kind of like those foolish virgins who didn't bring enough wine. Tough. Maybe you'll learn a lesson here.

Next time you put on a wedding, you'll bring more wine. He finds a way to turn this problem into an advantage, to turn a difficulty into a blessing and he does it without compromising his mission. He doesn't look at it as, well, if I help out here, I'm going to preempt my hour.

My hour has not yet come. I shouldn't be doing anything. On the other hand, here is my mother.

I'm the eldest son. I ought to do something. So what does Jesus do? He finds this elegant way to solve the problem without compromising his hour of public disclosure because it's done in a hidden way.

At the same time, it is a beautiful symbolic manifestation of the truth of his ministry. He is the reality that fulfills all of those Old Testament shadows. He is the wine that replaces the water.

He is the fulfillment of the word. He is the living and embodied word, not the dead letters carved in stone. He puts this difficulty in the context of God's plan and purpose.

He says, there is a way to address this problem that will not only not compromise God's plan, it will further God's plan. This is a great way for us to pray. Here is a difficulty.

How can we pray not just to meet the need of the moment and put the problem in the context of our desires? How can we put this problem in the context of God's plan and purpose? This is the beautiful thing that Jesus does. He says, you know, this is a great opportunity to show how six, the number of these water pots, is the number of expectation. It's not quite full.

Where is that seventh thing? This is the seventh day since identification by John. What a great day to fulfill, to show the fulfillment, to fill those water pots to the brim that have become depleted, that have been used, that are made of stone, and to produce something that is a blessing and something that is an occasion of joy and something that will launch a new marriage with great happiness and success, will support and fulfill the request of his mother. This is a great and not compromise, in fact, advance the plan and purpose of God.

This is the first great sign and it confirms the faith of his disciples. It doesn't preempt. It doesn't destroy anything.

But this didn't happen accidentally. Jesus thought this through in his humanity. He figured it out.

And this is a tremendous example for us. Do we have the objectivity? Do we have the Word of God in our souls to look at our difficulties and figure out how to put them in the context of God's plan and purpose, to pray in that light, to act in that light, believing the Word, believing what we know? And the same thing with the nobleman. In some ways it's a greater miracle.

Here's a guy that was on the point of death and now he's healthy. But Jesus accomplishes this with three words. He says three words.

He says, and the nobleman believes, your son lives. Three words. And this nobleman, probably a Roman, probably not even Jewish, just like the Samaritans, believes that word.

He believes. Three words. Your son lives.

That's all I want to hear. He goes his way. John 5:37 tells us, by way of contrast, Jesus says, I have a greater witness than John's for the works which the Father has given me to finish.

The very works that I do bear witness of me that the Father has sent me and the Father himself who sent me has testified of me. This is the Old Testament witness. This is the prophetic word.

This is John the Baptist summing up and expressing and culminating in living form all of the Old Testament witness. Behold the Lamb of God. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form, but you do not have His word abiding in you.

Because whom He sent, you do not believe. If we do not learn and trust the word of God, we cannot recognize the power of God when it walks in our midst, the living word. We're never going to appreciate Jesus Christ because the word precedes the supernatural presence and sign power.

The word comes first. And even when you see the sign, if you don't have the word, you misconstrue the sign. You misunderstand the sign.

You misappreciate the signs. So a sign, you want to see another one. I've seen you heal all day.

Let's see you raise somebody from the dead. I've seen you raise somebody from the dead. Let's see you calm a storm.

It's just theatrics. It's just entertainment. So these first two miracles as a set teach us what? How important it is not just to come to Bible class, not just to hear the word.

Many were standing on the banks of the Jordan when John said, Behold the Lamb of God. How many of that crowd, how many of the men from Jerusalem sent by the scribes and the Levites and the Pharisees, the scholars, the knowledgeable, the spiritual quote unquote giants of the day, how many of them followed Jesus and said, Rabbi, where are you staying? How many did that? Two. Two men from the fishing villages up in Galilee.

We want to be those two guys. We want to be John. We want to be Andrew.

And notice Andrew is famous for what? Introducing his brother to the Lord Jesus Christ. He wouldn't be qualified to do that except that he himself believed. It is believers who introduce others who are seeking to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Andrew has the privilege of literally leading his brother to Christ. And it doesn't get any better than that. But it is because he believed the word.

We are challenged every time we meditate, every time we open our Bible, every time we think about a memory verse. This is the word of God. What am I going to do with it? Do I treat it as reality or do I wait until I see God intervene and act and answer a prayer in a dramatic way? Well, I've prayed a lot of prayers.

I didn't see anything happen. I wanted something to happen and it didn't. I don't think God is even there.

How many times do you hear people say, oh, I tried that God thing, but I put God to the test and it didn't come through. Well, of course not. Belief in God's word has to precede

it.

So this is the introduction to our study of the miracles. There is a lot of content in each one of these as we will see. May God bless it to our spiritual apprehension and application.

We will pick up with miracles three and four next week, but we will close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for your grace in revealing yourself to us through the Lord Jesus Christ, through his words, through his actions, through the record that we have of these things in your word, both the Old Testament and the New.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will bless these things to our hearts, remind us of them as we face our daily challenges, opportunities and decisions. In all things, may the Lord Jesus Christ be glorified through the witness of your spirit, through the power of your word, and through our response to them. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen.