

The Sign

January 23, 2022

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

John 2:1-12

Session Outline

1. Our Efforts (John 2:1-4)
2. Christ's Work (John 2:5-8)
3. Our Reward (John 2:9-12)

Theological Theme

Jesus Christ is God in flesh. Jesus entered His creation, taking on flesh and the nature of man so that He might obey the law of God flawlessly and die the death of a sinner sacrificially. His miracles prove He is truly who He claimed to be.



Leader Guide

The Sign

Introduction

- ? Have you ever stubbornly refused help from someone on a project because you wanted to do it by yourself? What was the project? How did it turn out?
- ? What prevented you from seeking help? Why is this often hard for us?

Parenting is tricky. It takes a lot of wisdom to know how to help children grow into maturity and independence. Sometimes parents should let children try something on their own even when they know that the child is going to make mistakes. Sometimes a parent needs to let a child fail. These can be great learning opportunities. Situations in which a child realizes their inability can teach them valuable lessons. However, there are also times when a parent must step in and take complete control.

Imagine if you and your family were out hiking. The terrain is rough and there are even some small cliffs that must be scaled for hikers to make their way through the trail. You come upon one of these cliffs and you realize it's going to be difficult. It's completely vertical and about 40 feet high. You walk around the base of the rock face to try to determine the best route to the top. There are plenty of cracks and crevices to grab on to, but it's not going to be easy or safe. Just then you hear a noise coming from above. Then, you notice that there is a family coming in the opposite direction as you and they are about to make their way down the cliff. You realize that this is a great opportunity to see how someone else navigates the cliff to help you chart a course up it. So, you signal to them to come down.

As you watch the father and mother carefully descend, you are impressed with their ability to climb. Then, you realize that at the top of the cliff is their child. He appears to be 5 or 6 years old. When the parents reach the bottom, they look up and yell up to him to start climbing down. The child is obviously frightened, but he slowly starts to descend. To your horror, you realize that this child is unable to safely make it down the cliff. His coordination is awkward, he clearly doesn't know where to put his hands

and his feet, and he isn't strong enough to hold himself against the rock face. Yet, the parents just keep encouraging him to climb.

Children need to make mistakes so that they can learn from them and mature. But sometimes parents need to step in and rescue their children because the task is just too great for them and the stakes are just too high. This example is a parable of what God has done for sinners. Similarly, the narrative from the Gospel of John that we are studying today can serve as an allegory of Christ's work on the cross for those who were dead in their trespasses.

Session Summary

John, the beloved disciple and author of the Gospel of John, stated his purpose for writing his account of Jesus's life, saying, "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31).

This makes plain to us three important facts. First, the miracles Jesus performed were many more than what John recorded. John recorded the signs Jesus performed that were the most important or memorable. Yet, He performed many others. Second, John recorded the signs contained in his Gospel because he believed they were irrefutable evidence that Jesus "is the Messiah." Finally, John desired to persuade his readers concerning the nature of Christ because their very eternity hung in the balance. What a person knows about Jesus Christ and how they respond to that information is all that matters for this life and the next. A day of judgment is coming. It is appointed once for a person to die and then face the living God before whom all their deeds will be made plain, both good and bad.

1. Our Efforts (John 2:1-4)

Jesus's miracle at the wedding in Cana is generally thought of as His first miracle and the beginning of His public ministry. Weddings were extremely important events in ancient Jewish society, as they have been for most cultures throughout history. The celebration could last for days and was an opportunity for communities to come together and strengthen their familial and filial bonds. Marriage ceremonies have been viewed as special and sacred because they signify the beginning of a new family unit, which makes up the fabric of society. Strong family units mean healthy, vibrant communities.



What are some common elements of wedding celebrations in your community? How do wedding ceremonies reflect the importance people place on marriage?

In ancient Israel, an important element of the wedding celebration was the banquet. There are vestiges of this custom in the West. For example, there is often a “rehearsal dinner” the night before for the wedding party, and food is often served after a wedding at the reception. But these aren’t the same as what was practiced in ancient Israel, where a sprawling banquet for all of the wedding guests would have been expected. An important aspect of the banquet was the wine.



What was the problem that occurred with the wine at the banquet? How might this problem illustrate every person’s spiritual dilemma?


Just like any big event, a lot of planning and money went into the wedding banquet Jesus attended at Cana. However, it seems that someone miscalculated how much wine would be needed, and to run out of wine mid-banquet was a very embarrassing and even shameful thing for the host family. There was really nothing to do once the wine ran out except to serve water. There was no easy way to go and buy enough wine to continue to serve all the guests. What was supposed to be a joyful celebration quickly turned into a distressing and gut-wrenching reality for the wedding party.

There is a parallel here for all people regarding their spiritual reality. Just like the bride and groom had no wine to offer their guests to honor, thank, and please them, people have no righteousness of their own to honor, thank, and please God. Just as the wedding party had no ability to take care of the problem before them, people today have no ability to remedy the sin problem that plagues them.

Isaiah described it this way: “But your iniquities are separating you from your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not listen” (Isaiah 59:2). The symptoms of our sick spiritual state were evident. Our minds were hostile to God and did not submit to his law. Paul said that those without Christ “cannot please God” (Romans 8:8). Without Christ, people are alienated from God (Colossians 1:21). Their minds and consciences are defiled (Titus 1:15) and there is absolutely nothing people can do to make themselves well.


A person’s sinful nature simply means this: God saved must save them completely without any contribution from the person whatsoever because they are unable to contribute anything. It means the only part a person has in their salvation is the offense that occasioned it. It means they must be “saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift—not from works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Susannah Spurgeon said it like this: “He saves us, not because of any merit in us, or any deservings of our own; but because sovereign grace chose us, and Divine compassion redeemed us; and when we were far off, infinite pity brought us back, and made us near by the precious blood of Christ.”¹

 Application: Have you been forgiven of your sin and now are a child of God? How did that come about? How did you come to see your great need for God to save you?

2. Christ’s Work (John 2:5-8)

John didn’t describe the wedding party’s state of mind when they realized the wine was exhausted, but we do know word was starting to spread about the debacle because Mary, the mother of Jesus, found out and told Him. It’s rare that we are given a glimpse into Jesus and Mary’s relationship, so their interaction here is noteworthy. It appears that Mary brought this news to Jesus because she believed He could do something about it. If that had not been her intention, then Jesus’s response does not make sense. Of course, it’s not surprising that Mary knew Jesus was no mere man.

 What did Jesus do? What spiritual lesson do we find in Jesus’s miracle?

Mary told the servants to obey Jesus. They did, and Jesus miraculously turned water into wine. He overcame the natural order of things (that He himself had put into place) by causing ordinary water to turn into wine. This was an example of mediate creation. Mediate creation refers to an act of creation in which God uses material to bring something into being. This is contrasted with immediate creation in which he brings something into being out of nothing.

There is a spiritual lesson here for people today: where people are spiritually unable, Christ is able. Just as the bride and groom were unable to produce more wine for their guests, people today are unable to do anything to wipe away their own sins. The good news is that just as Jesus was able to produce wine from water, He is able to give sin-dead people spiritual life.

 How does this spiritual lesson connect to the gospel?

There are two systems of religion. Christianity’s fundamental message is that forgiveness and spiritual life is only by God’s grace, it can’t be earned. All other religious systems are designed for the adherent to earn their way to heaven. True Christianity says people need a rescue while all other religious systems claim that people need to produce good works.

The First Miracle


The wedding at Cana was Jesus’s first public miracle and one of the seven signs in the Gospel of John. The water changed to wine revealed Jesus’s power and His purpose. He rescued the wedding, which was in peril, foreshadowing His rescue of His bride, the church.

A person doing good works that earn them salvation is not the gospel message of the Scriptures. This teaching is false, and it is a trap. Remember, we are unable to pull ourselves up by our own spiritual bootstraps, although we are prone to think we can and should. This was precisely what happened in Galatia. After Paul preached the gospel there, Judaizers came in behind him and taught a false gospel of good works. They said faith in Christ was helpful, but they also had to keep the law of God as set forth in the books of Moses (see Galatians 1).

This still happens today in Christian churches. If pastors aren't careful to help people examine themselves to make sure that they are in the faith and to continually clarify and apply the gospel to their lives, false gospels can creep in. For example, a person can begin to look to their baptism or church membership as the basis for their salvation. Some people will rely on their own decision or a prayer they prayed for their salvation. The problem is that none of those things save anyone. It is the finished work of Christ on the cross that brings a dead sinner to life. All responses (faith, repentance, prayer, confession, baptism) that come because of Christ's saving work on the cross never taken precedence over what He alone has accomplished.

 Application: What did Christ do on behalf of sinners? Why was it enough? When is this hard for you to believe?

3. Our Reward (John 2:9-12)

 What was the result of Jesus's work on behalf of the wedding party? What spiritual lesson do we find here?

The headwaiter said it best: "Everyone sets out the fine wine first, then, after people are drunk, the inferior. But you have kept the fine wine until now" (v. 10). What was about to be a nightmare for the bride and groom turned out to only increase their joy. Not only were they celebrating their union, but something extraordinary that was done for them.

Jesus's work on behalf of sinners results in their great joy. Jesus undoes evil. Just as He changed the wedding party's sorrow into rejoicing, so He redeems from death those souls that look to Him in faith. He did this through His own death on the cross: "when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses. He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:13-14).

 What does it mean that death is undone in the lives of Christians?

While Christians were previously under the curse of death and enslaved to sin, now they are blessed with spiritual life and are servants of Christ. Christ works on their behalf so that they are continually conformed to His image more and more. He intercedes for them and unites them to Himself by His Spirit. He persuades them to believe and obey, and He governs their hearts by His Word and by His Spirit. Jesus overcomes all their enemies by His power and His wisdom.

These truths are profoundly important for the health of the church. The church is made of its members, and if its members are spiritually healthy, then the church will enjoy unity, vibrancy, and joy among the membership. But a church can't be healthy if its membership doesn't recognize its spiritual inability, the gospel of grace, and the work of Christ on their behalf.

- ❓ Application: How is God calling you to respond today to the truth of the gospel message? How does the miracle of the gospel surpass any other miracle Jesus did in His time on earth?

Conclusion

- ❓ How do you respond to the fact that you are completely unable to save yourself from your sin? Why?
- ❓ Why do you think a works-based gospel is offensive to God? Do you ever find yourself slipping into this way of living?
- ❓ How should the kindness God has shown you lead you to tell others about Him?

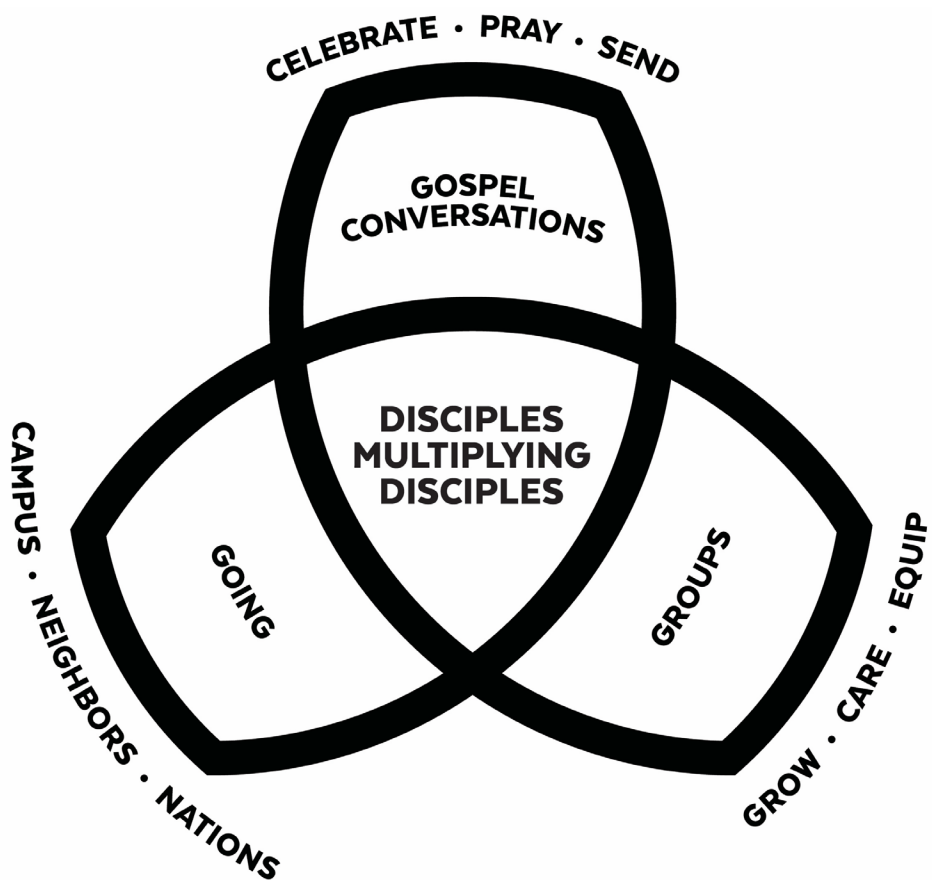
Prayer of Response

Pray for the grace and wisdom to reject even a hint of the false gospel of works. Give thanks to God for the ongoing work of Christ in your life.

Additional Resources

- *The Wonder-Working God* by Jared C. Wilson
- *John* by R. Kent Hughes
- *John 1-12 for You* by Josh Moody

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



DxD This Week

Group Emphasis

Spend more time in prayer during this meeting than others. Help your group bring their concerns to Him.

For Next Week

Session Title

- The Bread of Life

Main Passages

- John 6:1-15

Session Outline

1. The Need for Bread (John 6:1-9)
2. The Bread Provided (John 6:10-15)
3. The True Bread (John 6:30-40; 47-58)

Memorize

When the wine ran out, Jesus's mother told him, "They don't have any wine."

⁴ *"What has this concern of yours to do with me, woman?" Jesus asked. "My hour has not yet come."*

⁵ *"Do whatever he tells you," his mother told the servants.*

-John 2:3-5

Historical Context of John

Purpose

The purpose statement in 20:30–31 indicates that John wrote with an evangelistic purpose, probably seeking to reach unbelievers through Christian readers of his Gospel. If the date of composition was after AD 70, the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, it is likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and center of worship for God’s people in replacement of the old sanctuary.

Author

A close reading of the Gospel of John suggests that the author was an apostle (1:14; cp. 2:11; 19:35); one of the Twelve (“the disciple Jesus loved,” 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20; cp. 21:24–25); and, still more specifically, John, the son of Zebedee (note the association of “the disciple Jesus loved” with Peter in 13:23–24; 18:15–16; 20:2–9; 21; and in Lk 22:8; Ac 1:13; 3–4; 8:14–25; Gl 2:9). The church fathers, too, attested to this identification (e.g., Irenaeus). Since the apostolic office was foundational in the history of the church (Ac 2:42; Eph 2:20), the apostolic authorship of John’s Gospel invests it with special authority as firsthand eyewitness (Jn 15:27; 1Jn 1:1–4).

Setting

The most plausible date of writing is the period between AD 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and 100 (the end of John’s lifetime), with a date in the 80s most likely. A date after 70 is suggested by the references to the Sea of Tiberias in 6:1 and 21:1 (a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the first century); Thomas’s confession of Jesus as “my Lord and my God” in 20:28 (possibly a statement against emperor worship in the time of Domitian); the reference to Peter’s martyrdom, which occurred in 65 or 66 (21:19); the lack of reference to the Sadducees, who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after 70; and the comparative ease with which John equated Jesus with God (1:1, 14, 18; 10:30; 20:28).

Special Features

The Gospel of John is different from the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—in that more than ninety percent of its material is unique. John’s Gospel does not focus on the miracles, parables, and public speeches that are so prominent in the other accounts. Instead, the Gospel of John emphasizes the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and how we, as believers, should respond to his teachings.

Extended Commentary

John 2:1-12

2:1–2 Third day is probably counted from Jesus’s encounter with Nathanael. Cana of Galilee was later the site of Jesus’s third sign (“the second sign” performed in Cana, 4:54). Jewish weddings were community events, a time of special focus not just on bride and groom but also on their extended families. Jesus’s mother may have been a friend of the family, helping behind the scenes. Jesus’s disciples probably included the five mentioned in 1:35–51.

2:3 The wedding party’s running out of wine ironically calls to mind the spiritual barrenness of first-century Judaism.

2:4 Jesus’s use of woman to address his mother established a polite but firm distance between them, as did his question: What does that have to do with you and me? On Jesus’s hour has not yet come, cp. 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20. Because of misconceptions about the coming Messiah, Jesus chose not to reveal himself openly to Israel (though he did perform numerous messianic “signs”; see note at 2:11). John portrays Jesus as the “elusive Christ” via Jesus’s pattern of occasional withdrawal (7:6–9; 10:40–41; 11:56–57), his realism about people’s true motives (2:23–25), and his ability to elude his opponents when charged with blasphemy (7:44; 8:59; 10:39). Jesus remained elusive until his time finally arrived (12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:32; 17:1).

2:5 Mary’s instruction, Do whatever he tells you, recalls Pharaoh’s instructions in Gn 41:55.

2:6 The number of jars (six) may indicate incompleteness since seven represented fullness. Since each contained twenty or thirty gallons, this added up to as much as one hundred eighty gallons. The Jewish purification ritual may have involved the washing of the guests’ hands and certain utensils used at the wedding.

2:7 Filled them to the brim points to the abundance of Jesus’s messianic provision (3:34).

2:8–9 The headwaiter was in charge of catering. He supervised the serving of food and drink, and employed several servants.

2:10 John shows Jesus not only miraculously making wine, but making high-quality wine.

2:11 The fact that Jesus’s turning of water into wine at the wedding is called the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, leads the reader to expect more signs to follow. The corresponding reference in 4:54 is to Jesus’s healing of the royal official’s son again while at Cana, “the second sign Jesus performed after he came from Judea to Galilee.” Beyond this, Jesus’s signs include the nonmiraculous but prophetic temple clearing (2:13–22, one of Jesus’s Judean signs; cp. v. 23; 3:2); his healing of a lame man (5:1–15); the feeding of the crowds (6:1–15); the healing of the man born blind (chap. 9); and the raising of Lazarus (chap. 11).

In each case, the emphasis is on the way the “sign” revealed Jesus’s messianic nature (12:37–40; 20:30–31) and on the striking nature of the feat. These signs pointed unmistakably to Jesus as Messiah—whether it be the large quantity and high quality of wine (2:6, 10); the short span required by Jesus to “rebuild” the temple (vv. 19–20); the long-distance healing of the royal official’s son (4:47, 49–50); the lame man’s thirty-eight years as an invalid (5:5); the abundance of food Jesus produced (6:13); the man’s congenital blindness (9:1–2); or Lazarus’s four days in the tomb (11:17, 39). The phrases he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him hark back to 1:14.

2:12 Jesus went down from Cana (in the hill country) to Capernaum (situated by the Sea of Galilee). Capernaum was about fifteen miles northeast of Cana and could be reached in a day’s journey. Capernaum served as Jesus’s headquarters after John the Baptist’s imprisonment (Mt 4:12–13; Lk 4:28–31; cp. Mt 9:1).²

References

1. Susannah Spurgeon, *A Cluster of Camphire: Words of Cheer & Comfort Toi Sick & Sorrowful Souls* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2016), 3.
2. *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).

Author Bio

Susannah Spurgeon (A Cluster of Camphire)

Susannah Thompson Spurgeon (1832-1903), Author, book supplier, and devoted wife of C. H. Spurgeon. They were married in January, 1856 and they had twin sons, Charles and Thomas. She started a Book Fund to give theological books to ministers, preachers and missionaries and by 1902 had distributed more than 10,000 volumes. She wrote three books, including *A Basket of Summer Fruit*.

Jared C. Wilson (The Wonder-Working God)

Jared C. Wilson is assistant professor of pastoral ministry at Spurgeon College, author in residence at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and general editor of *For the Church*. He is a popular author and conference speaker, and also blogs regularly at Gospel Driven Church, hosted by the Gospel Coalition. His books include *Gospel Wakefulness*; *Gospel Deeps*; *The Pastor's Justification*; *The Storytelling God*; and *The Wonder-Working God*.

R. Kent Hughes (John)

R. Kent Hughes (DMin, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is senior pastor emeritus of College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, and former professor of practical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Hughes is also a founder of the Charles Simeon Trust, which conducts expository preaching conferences throughout North America and worldwide. He serves as the series editor for the *Preaching the Word* commentary series and is the author or coauthor of many books. He and his wife, Barbara, live in Wyncote, Pennsylvania, and have four children and an ever-increasing number of grandchildren.

Josh Moody (John 1-12 for You)

Josh Moody (Ph.D., University of Cambridge) is the senior pastor of College Church in Wheaton. He is a pastor, author, conference speaker, and college campus speaker. He is the president and founder of God Centered Life Ministries. His books include *7 Days to Change Your Life* (Abingdon Press 2017), *How Church Can Change Your Life* (Christian Focus 2015), *Preaching to the Affections* (Christian Focus 2014), *Journey to Joy* (Crossway 2013), *Jonathan Edwards and Justification* (Crossway 2012), *No Other Gospel* (Crossway 2011), and *The God-Centered Life* (Regent 2007; IVP UK 2006).