

John on Jesus - Finding Grace

Sign Title: Finding Grace

June 10, 2012

Good morning Faith family. I also want to welcome those of you connecting through the Internet. I am thankful you can join us. This morning, we are back in the Gospel of John. We are discovering the story of God in the flesh.

The Gospel of John divides itself into four sections. The first and last sections are very short. They are Jesus' entrance and exit scenes. The middle two sections contain the bulk of the book. Chapters two through 12 are called the Book of Signs. This is where we learn about Jesus from his miracles. Chapters 13-20 are called the Book of Glory. That is where Jesus receives his glory from God through his death, burial and resurrection.

This morning, we leave the introduction of John, where we learned about Jesus' arrival on planet earth, and we begin the second part of the book. The Book of Signs. We look at Jesus' first miracle.

If you look at all four Gospels, there is a total of 35 miracles. Interestingly, John only talks about seven. He chose a small group of them. Why did John skip the others? John chose to isolate these seven and go deeper with them. While all of Christ's miracles show us he is God, because miracles are things only God can do, John calls these seven miracles signs. In other words, they are more than just miracles. They tell us about Jesus and his character.

The key to understanding the seven signs of John are not just to see them as miracles but realize they teach us about the character of God through Jesus.

When we study them, we want to ask ourselves, what does this teach us about Jesus, who he is and what Jesus is like?

The miracle

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. John 2:1 (ESV)

Jesus doesn't have much of a following. He took some of his cousin's disciples to get things started. They hadn't known each other for even a week. They were still wearing name tags. Jesus' ministry was just getting off the ground.

There was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Nathaniel was from the town. What was the town like? It was a small, farming village. You wouldn't vacation there. The only reason people visited the town was to see their relatives who wished they didn't live there. For excitement, they alternated between cow tipping and watching the grass grow. In this town, when people smiled, it was obvious nobody had a dentist.

I found a picture of Cana of Galilee taken in the 1900s. I like this picture because it depicts the area before it was built up. It is a little closer to the way it was in the days of Jesus. I want you to notice, there is no Wal-Mart. No Casey's pizza. No YMCA. If you lived in Cana, it was because you farmed there.



There was no social life in this city. Do you think a wedding was a big event in this town? It was their time to celebrate!

What is a wedding like? In the ancient world, they rolled the honeymoon and wedding celebration rolled into one. The wedding typically took place on a Wednesday. The honeymoon was all the guests of the bride and groom staying with the newlyweds to party with them all week.

In our culture, the family of the bride picks up the tab for the wedding. In this culture, who do you think footed the bill? The groom. You had a poor rural town where people from out of town partied with the newlyweds for a week. They celebrated at the groom's expense. If he lived in this town, he probably didn't have much money. If he lived in this town, he probably broke his bank to throw the wedding party.

Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. John 2:2 (ESV)

Why were Jesus and the disciples invited to the wedding? I can understand Jesus coming to the wedding. Apparently his mother played a role in the catering. What I am wondering is why the disciples gained entrance. They are last minute additions. Nobody texted the groom to buy more Doritos because Jesus was bringing party crashers. Ladies, how many of you would be comfortable with unplanned guests at your wedding reception? Why did they let the unplanned disciples join the party?

I am reading between the lines on this, so cut me some slack, but I think Jesus was fun to be around. I think people liked Jesus. I think he was great fun at parties. I think he made people laugh. I think the disciples got in the door because they were friends with Jesus and people liked Jesus. The groom figured that he would make room for Jesus' friends because he really liked Jesus.

Personally, I don't think pharisees were invited. They would have killed the party! I think the pharisees found it difficult to laugh. I think they found it difficult to enjoy themselves. I think they broke into a cold sweat at parties. Week-long wedding parties stressed them out. Remember, they criticized Jesus for partying too much! They criticized him for not hanging out with the right people.

The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Luke 7:34 (ESV)

This week, I was thinking, when people think about us, do they think about a pharisee or do they think about Jesus? Do they think we break into a cold sweat at parties? Do they know us as people who have a list of things we won't do or do they know us as people who are fun to be around? Do they know us as real people who care about others? I think some of us need to repent of being too religious and try to be more like Jesus. We need to get the starch out of our shirt and have fun with people.

When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." John 2:3–5 (ESV)

They ran out of drinks. Why is that a problem? Why can't they just drink water? That is what I tell my children. I am too cheap to buy them soda at a restaurant. We need to remember that clean drinking water was a problem. They needed to find a way to kill the bacteria in the water. Fermented drink was one of the most common ways to purify water. Sometimes it was three parts water to one part wine. Sometimes it was ten parts water to one part wine. One

scholar I read said it took 22 glasses of wine in the ancient world to get the rough equivalent of the alcohol in two martinis today. So wine was different in the ancient world than it is today. It was not vodka proof. It was a weak wine. The purpose of the alcohol was to remove harmful bacteria. For example, Paul told Timothy to drink wine to stop getting sick.

(No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) 1 Timothy 5:23 (ESV)

If the water supply in Cana was not good, having everyone drink water would leave them hanging over a piece of porcelain by the end of the week.

The second reason it was a problem to run out of wine is because this was a wedding. This was a time of celebration. Brides will tell you, the one thing they don't want ruined is their wedding day. It is supposed to be the happiest day of your life. The Jewish culture is what anthropologists call an honor-shame culture. That means shaming your name, or your families name, was serious stuff.

Last week at the gym, I forgot my socks and sneakers. I had shorts and a T-shirt, but it doesn't look right lifting weights in dark socks and dress shoes. Even though it was embarrassing, I wore the funky footwear around the gym. The shame of it doesn't bother me, because we do not live in a shame culture. In the ancient world, running short of wine was a big deal. Running short of wine shamed your name and your family. There are even recorded incidents of the bride's family suing the groom's family because they ran out of food during the wedding week. In one sense, running out of wine was a serious problem. First, people could have gotten sick. Second, the happiest day of this young couple's life would have been ruined by shame.

Mary, Jesus' mother, was helping with the catering. Why did she go to Jesus with this problem? She didn't go to Joseph. The Bible tells us Mary and Joseph had other children after Jesus was born, but when Jesus comes on the scene at 30 years old, apparently Joseph is off the scene. The Bible doesn't tell us what happened but apparently Joseph died. As the oldest son, Jesus had the financial responsibility to care for his mother and his younger brothers and sisters because Mary was a single mother. Apparently, Jesus worked Joseph's construction business to provide for his mother and his younger siblings. Jesus held the family together financially when Mary became a single mother. Mary is accustomed to turning to Jesus as the man who met the family's needs. I think Mary was expecting Jesus to whip out his wallet buy some wine.

Some of you think Mary was expecting Jesus to whip up a miracle. I don't think that is what she expected.

This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory... John 2:11 (ESV)

This was the first time Jesus did something only God can do. There are apocryphal books that talk about Jesus performing miracles on the elementary school playground. They tell stories of Jesus making clay pigeons and clapping his hands so they turned into real birds and flew away. Some people wonder if those apocryphal stories are true. No! They are not. This was his first miracle. Up to this point he had not pulled back the cloak of his humanity to reveal his deity.

Jesus had a very interesting response to Mary's request for help.

And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” John 2:4 (ESV)

This sounds nasty. Why did Jesus call her woman instead of mother? In the Greek, it is not as harsh as it sounds in English. Jesus created distance between himself and his mother. Jesus told her he was now focusing on the mission his heavenly father had for him, not the care of his mother, which his younger brothers and sisters were now old enough to do. Jesus created distance between himself and his mother but it was not a disrespectful term he used. It is the same name he called her when he hung on the cross.

What is this hour that Jesus talked about that he was preparing for? The book of John uses that phrase many times. It means the hour of his death.

Now what gets weird is even after distancing himself from his mother what did she tell the servants? “Do whatever he tells you.” Mary knew Jesus’ character. She knew when there was a need and people were hurting, Jesus would do something to help them. She knew Jesus cared about ordinary people with ordinary problems. I think Jesus was the carpenter that went over to the houses of friends and neighbors to help them with simple home repairs. I think she knew Jesus cared about people because Jesus spend time caring for her. She knew she could trust him. She was confident Jesus would do something to help this young couple in its hour of need.

This is cool. We often think of Jesus as the big guy in the sky that we shouldn’t bother with the small problems of life. We don’t talk to Jesus about everyday problems like grades, our marriages, the rising cost of health care or where to find the money to fix the mini van. I think we need to repent. Jesus

cares! We should come to him with real problems, ordinary problems, just like Mary did. This sign shows us that Jesus listens and Jesus cares.

Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. John 2:6–11 (ESV)

Lets talk about these water jars. They were for the Jewish rights of purification. What are the rights of purification?

The Jews developed an elaborate system of hand washing and dish washing to ensure everything and everyone at a party was ritually clean. They even washed hands between courses in a meal.



(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) Mark 7:3–4 (ESV)

These jars are the onsite ritual washing water supply. I don’t know if they were empty. The text doesn’t tell us. Jesus had the servants fill them up. Presto! He turned all the water it into wine. Problem solved! I love the way Jesus did this first miracle. He didn’t draw attention to himself and become the center of the wedding. Quietly, in the background, he loved and cared for this couple in its time of need.

John also pointed out two aspects of the wine in this miracle. First, he pointed out the quantity of the wine. Before this, they were running short. Then, they have 180 gallons of wine. This could fill a baptistry. It was more than enough for the wedding party. I think after the wedding, the groom bottled and sold the remainder on eBay.

Second, John wanted us to notice the quality of the wine. It wasn't cheap stuff. It was good quality wine. I am sure the groom's eyes lit up when he heard that great quantity and quality of wine that mysteriously arrived in his hour of need.

This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. John 2:11 (ESV)

This was the first time Jesus revealed his true identity by doing something only God could do. He did it to show compassion and care to an unknown young couple living in a dumpy rural town.

Remember what we learned at the beginning. In the Gospel of John, signs are more than just miracles. Signs are a window into understanding God through Jesus. What does this sign tell us about God as seen through the life of Jesus?

The message

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John 1:17 (ESV)

This verse, at the beginning of John, is part of the outline of the book. John said that through Moses, we see God's law, but through Jesus we see

another part of God's character, his grace and truth. In this miracle, we get a picture of God's grace to ordinary people in their time of need.

In Jesus, I find God's grace. This is what Mary knew when she was confident Jesus would come to this young couple's rescue. She knew Jesus cared for her, for others and he would care for this young couple on the happiest day of their life.

I think the disciples left the wedding not just realizing Jesus was God because he did something only God can do, but I think the disciples left the wedding thankful that God cared enough to meet the needs of ordinary people. The disciples left the wedding knowing they could turn to Jesus in their times of need and he would be there.

In Matthew 8, the disciples were crossing the sea of Galilee. A great storm arose that threatened to swamp the boat. They were afraid because they probably couldn't swim. Jesus was asleep in the front of the boat as the storm threatened to sink the little craft. I think when the disciples woke him they were hoping that in Jesus, they would find grace in their hour of need. I think some of them who were there at the wedding in Cana were remembering Jesus' care for that couple and banking on his care for them in that stormy moment of their lives.

I also think the disciples left talking about the great quantity and quality of the wine Jesus gave them. Jesus didn't just give them what they needed, he gave them much more. It is just like salvation. We ask to be saved from our sins. Jesus doesn't just forgive our sins, but he gives us all of his righteousness. Jesus doesn't just free us from eternal punishment but he adopts us as brothers

and sisters and in eternity gives us the highest position in the universe, even higher than the angels.

Conclusion

Some of you came in this morning and you are in your hour of need. Your marriage is on the rocks, you are financially struggling, or there are problems in your family. My challenge is to turn to Jesus. I know many of you have called out to God. There is nothing wrong with that but I want you to call out specifically to Jesus. When Jesus came, he became the funnel through which God pours all of the grace we need into our lives. This is why we are told to pray in the name of Jesus. This is why Jesus described himself last week as Jacob's ladder, the bridge between heaven and earth. Through Moses, we see God's law, but Jesus reveals another part of God that we couldn't see before, God's grace for us, especially in our time of need. How does it make you feel about Jesus? How do you feel about approaching God?

In Jesus, I find God's grace. In Jesus, I find God's grace.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for turning the water into wine. Thank you for caring about a young couple on its wedding day in a dinky rural town. Thank you for not stealing the show but quietly loving the bride and groom in their time of need. Thank you that this first miracle gives us a window into the compassion, kindness and love you have for us. Thank you for giving us this miracle in your Word so we know that we can approach you with confidence with our ordinary troubles and difficulties. Jesus, forgive us for not making enough of you. Forgive us for failing to understand that you are the funnel through which God the Father pours his grace into this world and into our lives. Amen.



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