# John 2:1-12 • The Threefold Lessons of a Sign

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| Introduction  If we sneak a peek at the very end of John’s Gospel we are provided with the specific reason **why** signs and miracles are included:  Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but **these** have been written **so that you may believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (Jn. 20:30-31)  We need to understand how each of the signs prove that Jesus is God so that we might believe in Him and be saved; anything short of that is biblical and spiritual failure. We will look at this early miracle in terms of three different yet side-by-side studies: the dispensational lessons (a picture of Israel’s failure), the doctrinal lessons (how the sinner is saved), and the practical lessons (how to serve Christ). | |
| 1On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; 2and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. 3When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “They have no wine.”  4And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come.”  5His mother said to the servants, “Whatever He says to you, do it.”  6Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each. 7Jesus said to them, “Fill the waterpots with water.” So they filled them up to the brim. 8And He said to them, “Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter.” So they took it to him.  9When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom, 10and said to him, “Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now.”  11This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.  12After this He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother and His brothers and His disciples; and they stayed there a few days. | [Read v.1-12] The Dispensational Lessons  Q: What is the theological meaning of the term “dispensation”?  A: The term “dispensation” on the most basic level describes a time period for the particular way God deals with mankind, literally meaning “a giving out”. There have certainly been periods where God’s dealings with mankind were different from each other, such as before Moses and the giving of the Law and afterward. Many scholars characterize Jesus’ earthly ministry as a transition between an age or dispensation when God goes from dealing with mankind through Israel to one where He subsequently deals with mankind through the Church.  Q: Why might we ascribe the reason for the end of God working through Israel to the failure of Israel?  A: The majority were ignorant of and rejected their own Messiah. As John the Baptist pointed out from the beginning of his ministry announcing the Messiah’s imminent arrival, “…*but among you stands One whom you do not know*”. (Jn. 1:26)  **Point**: From the very outset of His ministry, Jesus did not merely perform miracles but what can better be translated as “attesting miracles”—signs that He was nothing less than the Messiah they were expecting. And yet in spite of witnessing such signs, the vast majority did not recognize Him as such. Here Jesus is working in a very public setting, yet the greater meaning of the sign is lost on the greatest part of those in attendance in much the same way His first coming was missed by the nation of Israel collectively.  Q: From a dispensational point of view, what does the wedding feast represent?  A: It is a picture of the nation Israel.  Q: What do the liquids represent?  A: First and foremost liquids throughout Scripture represent different aspects of the working of the Holy Spirit. Water is associated with the work of the Holy Spirit for washing (making spiritually clean) by the Word, and wine is a metaphor for being anointed in the Holy Spirit.  Q: So what do the six waterpots represent in the dispensational context?  A: They were literally used for ceremonial cleansing and represent Israel’s commitment through the Old Covenant to the ceremonial Law. The people’s commitment to external ceremonies was neither sufficient nor satisfying spiritually, and yet here is the Messiah who had come into their midst to help them. What they had was “good”, but as the headwaiter will testify, this is “better”. In figure it is the expression of the explanation given by the writer of Hebrews, “*But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises*.” (Heb. 8:6)  **Point**: What God’s people had in the old dispensation under Israel through the Law was “good”, but the “best” was kept for last in the new dispensation under Christ the Messiah who is the fulfillment of the Law.  For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.  — Romans 8:3–5  Q: What is the meaning of His statement, “My hour has not come yet”?  A: In John’s Gospel this is the first of seven recorded occurrences when Jesus referred to His time, each occasion having a different reason. (Jn. 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1) However, what they all have in common is to teach something about the fact that Jesus does nothing on His own, but only in concert with the Father’s Word and will. (Jn. 5:19, 30; 8:54)  **Point**: If Christ chooses to perform an earthly miracle on someone’s behalf, it is only undertaken for the greater spiritual purposes and glorification of the Father, not for any earthly or personal benefit. Those who accept the greater spiritual lesson of an “attesting miracle” always come away changed spiritually; those who do not are judged by it as it exposes their true spiritual condition.  Q: Who were the only persons in attendance at the feast who were spiritually changed by this first of seven “attesting miracles” recorded in the Gospel of John?  A: “*His disciples believed in Him*”. (v.11)  **Point**: It is only those who accept and put into practice God’s Word who are sufficiently equipped to rightly handle a true sign from Christ.  Q: Does this mean that Jesus is through with Israel?  A: This first sign can be thought of as a first warning to Israel of what is about to happen in terms of the dispensation of Israel giving way to the dispensation of the Church through Christ. But Scripture is very clear that God is not through with Israel. (Rom. 9-11; Zech. 12:10) The greater theological purpose behind the Rapture is to signify the transfer of authority from the Church back to Israel in much the same fashion as is being taught in the greater meaning of the Rapture of Elijah and the transfer of authority to Elisha. (2 Ki. 2)  **Application**: In spite of having the Word which spoke clearly of not just the timing of the Messiah’s arrival but His character and work, it was only those who actually lived by, or were willing to repent and put into practice, God’s Word who recognized Him. The Old Covenant was the responsibility of the whole nation of Israel, and as a whole they rejected their Messiah from the outset, but as a whole will receive Him in the course of His Second Coming. |
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|  | Overall Application  These are three layers of teaching which are ever present in the Gospel of John which can actually be applied to all of Scripture. Yes, this is first and foremost a literal, historical record of actual events which took place, but to the Spirit-filled Believer there are three spiritual levels which are simultaneously addressed:   * First there is the dispensational lesson, or what can be viewed as the eschatological application—something which teaches us about God’s plan for the Last Days. * Second there is the doctrinal lesson, the fundamental theological plank being laid by Christ in the overall foundation of the Body of Christ based on His Word. * Third there is the practical application of personally applying the lessons to our own life and behavior.   These approaches are accomplished because Scripture is always the best interpretation of Scripture, and we should not study a section in isolation from the rest of God’s Word, but by looking at the whole counsel of God’s Word.  But the ultimate application here may be that no degree, formal education, or even the highest personal enthusiasm will cause these things to be revealed. They only come to those who do not merely listen to His Word but prove their belief in it by putting it into practice and experiencing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a result. If we want others to understand and obey God’s Word, we must never fall short where the preaching of the Gospel is concerned for that is the only way by which it will come about. |