

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

### 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).

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### [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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## **[Read v.1-12] The Doctrinal Lessons**

### **Q: What is the greater doctrinal lesson behind this miracle?**

A: Of all the many miracles effected by Christ during His ministry, the Gospel of John only details seven. This is because they all illustrate how a sinner is saved and what the results are in his life. This first miracle teaches that salvation is through the Word of God.

### **Q: How is this conveyed through the thirsty crowd?**

A: It is a picture of the lost world, tasting the world’s pleasures but finding no personal satisfaction. Whatever fulfillment they think they have achieved is eventually discovered to actually have run out.

**Point:** *Scripture often invites thirsty sinners to Christ for salvation and true spiritual satisfaction. (Jn. 4:13-14; 7:37; Is. 55:1; Rev. 22:17)*

### **Q: What is being taught by the empty waterpots?**

A: “Waterpots” is also the word elsewhere translated as “vessels”, which Scripture uses to describe a person. (2 Co. 4:7; 2 Ti. 2:20-21) They represent the human heart as being hard and empty, in spite of looking lovely from the outside. It first needs to be cleansed by the washing of the Word (the water which was first poured into them).

**Application:** *Our job is not to save souls, but to provide the Word and allow Christ to perform the miracle of salvation, evidenced by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is similar to what happened to Lazarus as a representative of those dead in their sins—all we can do is roll away the stone of their heart so that they can hear and respond to the Master’s voice. (Jn. 11)*

### **Q: What is the meaning in this context of changing the water into wine?**

A: The sinner must first accept and be filled with the Word so that Christ can perform the miracle of salvation. “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ”. (Rom. 10:17) The repeated example throughout the New Testament is to fill people with the Word so that when they believe it, the miracle of salvation ensues. (Example: In Acts 8:26-40 Philip preaches the Word to the Ethiopian, the man believed the Word, and the miracle of salvation subsequently took place.)

### **Q: What is the difference between how water is changed by Christ in the New Covenant and Moses in the Old Covenant?**

A: Whereas Christ turned the water into wine to effect the work of salvation, John notes in Jn. 1:17 that “the Law was given through Moses” who changed water into blood—the biblical symbol of judgment.

### **Q: What might be significant about the specific annotation that this miracle took place “on the third day”?**

A: It foreshadows the Resurrection when the work of the cross is completed by His rise from the dead on the third day.

### **Q: Keeping within the context of teaching the greater doctrinal issue of salvation, what might we make of the fact that John qualifies that this miracle is “the beginning of His signs”?**

A: Salvation is the first and beginning of many miracles to come for a person who is saved; Christ works one miracle after another in us in the course of completing the work of salvation.

**Application:** *The miracle of salvation only comes about when each individual puts into practice what is here the last recorded words of Mary, "Whatever He says to you, do it". (v.5) Salvation comes about by Christ's Word alone.*

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## **[Read v.1-12] The Practical Lessons**

**Q: What group is the right example in this recorded event of the result of obedience to the Word of Christ?**

A: The servants, because they followed His instructions and literally acted upon His Word.

**Application:** *Those who are truly servants of Christ prove that they are not merely hearers of the Word, but doers. (Ja. 1:23-25)*

**Q: How is the primary work of these servants reflected in what is expected of all of Christ's servants?**

A: They obeyed the Word of Christ and filled the empty vessels with the Word, a picture of our first and foremost responsibility to see others saved through our own obedience to and preaching of the Word.

**Application:** *People are not saved through programs emphasizing entertainment, recreation, or by being "seeker sensitive", but by being obedient to Christ and giving others the Word. If we do our part, Christ will do the rest.*

**Q: What might be gleaned from the fact that the servants knew where the wine came from but the "important people" did not?**

A: It is only those who serve Christ who know and understand the secrets and working of Christ. Everyone, regardless of their station in life, can only come into a full knowledge of Christ by first accepting His Word and then being filled with the Spirit as a result.

**Application:** *It is better to be the humble servant of Christ and share in His miracles than to sit at the head of the table of even the greatest feast ignorant of them.*

**Q: What might be the overall application of this event from the standpoint of using an opportunity like a wedding feast, which is arguably not the best venue to demonstrate the Gospel from an earthly point of view?**

A: We should use every opportunity to serve Christ, just as Paul and the Apostles never ceased preaching the Gospel regardless of being in jail, persecuted, or in any less than ideal situation.

## **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.*

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- *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.*