

Week 7

Signs: Water to Wine

John 2:1-11

GOAL: To see in Jesus the wine-blood-redemption truth of this sign and the permanent cure for our sins through our Messiah.

CHECKLIST

- ☐ Invest in your own spiritual life by participating in the daily Growth Guide readings. (This will also prepare you to lead the question about it in your group again this week.)
- ☐ Reach out individually to anyone who did not attend last week. Let them know that you missed them and would love to see them this week.
- ☐ Prepare for your group meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader's Guide.
- ☐ If you haven't already, plan your Grow Group Pair-Up by connecting with the leaders of your paired group.
- ☐ Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members (please include their names and contact info in the meeting notes section). Help new members register for your group using the QR code in your room or at vrbc.net/grow.

PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

Father God, you are so loving and patient with me. You reveal yourself in ways that open to me your beauty, power, creativity, and love. Help me to grasp the richness of this first sign about cleansing of sins through the blood of Jesus. Guide me to praise you as my Messiah and increase my faith. AMEN.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

CONNECT & COORDINATE

We will maintain the same rhythm each week this semester:

1. Welcome your group. Repeat introductions if there are any new people.
2. Coordinate any logistics (group socials, snacks, Grow Group Pair-Up, etc).
3. Check in with your group and gather prayer requests. Consider using the following questions:
 - Where did you see God at work this week?
 - Where do you need God in the week ahead?
4. Pray for the requests shared and for God to lead your time together today.

DISCUSS

Leader's Note: Pastor John introduced a new sermon series from the Gospel of John called SIGNS. The key verse for the series is John 20:30-31 and is on the card people received as they came into worship. Encourage your members to memorize it.

The goal of John's Gospel and the series is two-fold: 1) to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and 2) by believing in him to experience the new life he makes possible.

Pastor John shared three things that we will consider each week:

- The sign
- What it points to (Jesus, the Messiah)
- And how we can find life in him.

For the benefit of those who may be unfamiliar with the term Messiah, take a minute to define it. In Hebrew Messiah means the "anointed one". Someone who is anointed has been consecrated or set apart signifying a special role or status. Christ is the Greek translation of Messiah. Jesus was set apart for a special role by God to be the Savior of the world through the forgiveness of our sins.

- What signs have you seen that pointed you to something that was awe-inspiring and memorable? Disappointing?

Leader's Note: Responses may include beautiful scenes from nature, an awesome art exhibit, or an interesting historical site. On a trip to North Carolina I (Carolyn) kept seeing signs about a magnificent underground waterfall. The signs built up my expectation of something awe-inspiring. I went out of my way to see this natural wonder. The actual sight was a grand let-down because it was only a small dribble of water going over some rocks. The sign in this story points us to someone who won't let us down.

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Read John 2:1-5.

- Why do you think a wedding was the setting for Jesus' first miracle? What role does wine play in a Jewish wedding?

Leader's Note: *it is important to understand the cultural context of Jewish life and traditions at the time of Jesus because they are very different from our cultural norms.*

First, weddings were a big deal and were to be the best of all parties. A date was set far in advance so adequate preparations could be made. Some wedding banquets lasted several days requiring provisions for lots of food and drink.

Next, the whole village was invited. It was beyond impolite to decline a wedding invitation because you would be rejecting the hospitality of the host and insulting the family.

Finally, wine was important in a wedding banquet because rabbis in Jesus' day considered it a symbol of joy. The best wine was brought out at the beginning of the banquet when people's palates were more sensitive and could fully enjoy its richness. A cheap wine would have been more quickly detected. To run out of wine was more than an embarrassment; it was a huge crisis for the host because of the cultural value of shame attached to it.

A Jewish wedding was a joyous celebration of the new life a couple was beginning, but it also held deeper meaning. One commentator points out when Jews thought about the coming of the Messiah the wedding banquet was the principal image that came to mind.

In Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul uses marriage to describe the loving and submissive relationship between Christ and his bride, the church. Revelation 19:6-9 paints a beautiful picture of the jubilant celebration of the wedding feast of the Lamb and says blessed are those who are invited. In Revelation 22:17, the Spirit and the bride extend the invitation to come and partake of the free gift of the water of life. How appropriate that Jesus' first sign was given in a place of celebration. We are all invited to the wedding by Jesus, our Messiah!

- How does Mary's interaction with Jesus demonstrate her faith? How does your interaction with Jesus demonstrate your faith?

Leader's Note: *Mothers have an uncanny sense of knowing what is going on around them when others don't. Mary noticed that the wine was gone, not just low but gone! She knew what a disaster this was and took the problem to Jesus. Some commentators think she went to him seeking a solution that was humanly possible. Jesus had not yet performed miracles, so she probably wasn't expecting him to change water into wine. She exhibited faith in her son's ability to solve a problem when she instructed the servants to do whatever Jesus told them to do.*

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Instead of addressing her as “mother,” he calls her “woman.” This was a formal way of addressing a woman, not a harsh response. This word may also show the changing nature of this mother-son relationship. While still her son, Jesus’ life and ministry was being shaped by what he sees and hears from his Heavenly Father (see John 5:19 and John 6:38). He responds, not because his mother asked him to, but because his actions reflect his relationship with God. He has come as Messiah to carry out the Father’s plan.

We can interact with Jesus in different ways just as the people in his day did. Some saw Jesus as a rabbi who taught with great authority. The religious leaders tried to trick him through theological arguments. Others were drawn to him because he fed the hungry, healed the sick, and welcomed the shunned. Wonder if he ever felt used by people? John says he came to his own people, and they didn’t recognize him as their Messiah.

We, too, can see Jesus as all those things listed above but miss him as God’s Anointed One. The sign of changing water to wine wasn’t about pointing to Jesus as teacher, healer, or religious leader. It was and is about knowing Jesus as Messiah and trusting in him.

Read John 2:6-10.

What is the significance of Jesus asking for stone jars used for Jewish cleansing rituals? What did the choice wine at the end of the wedding represent?

Leader’s Note: *The Jews had many different laws related to cleansing born out of the belief that cleanliness was godliness. Washing hands and feet was a ritual cleansing that was commonly practiced. Rabbinic law required the use of stone jars to hold the water used for ceremonial cleansing because clay jars were believed to become ritually contaminated. You don’t want water used for cleansing to be contaminated by the container that holds it.*

The instruction of water meant for purification becoming wine symbolically represents the blood offered for the forgiveness of sins which points to Jesus as Messiah. Gary Burge writes that “Judaism is now meeting its Messiah in his very first miracle . . . Jesus is about to demonstrate the obsolescence of Judaism’s religious forms.”

The Jewish laws and traditions were insufficient for the forgiveness of sins. The rituals and sacrifices had to be offered over and over. Pastor John referred to Hebrews 10:11, which reminds us that Jesus “offered for all time one sacrifice for sins.” Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and invites all who believe in Him to participate in the wedding feast of the Lamb. Every time we celebrate communion, we drink the wine (grape juice at VRBC) to remember what Jesus has done for us as Messiah.

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Read John 2:11.

- How did this first sign point people to Jesus? What “sign” has been used in your life to point you to Jesus as Messiah?

Leader’s Note: *Changing water to wine is a miracle. The Greek word for miracle is dynamis from which we get dynamite. It denotes power and action that creates awe. But John deliberately uses the Greek word semeion meaning “sign” to describe what Jesus did at the wedding.*

A sign pointed to something hidden from view that is now revealed. The sign in John 2 revealed God at work in Jesus who was more than a man. Ceremonial washing is now obsolete because Jesus offered himself as the one who would cleanse us from our sins.

The disciples saw Jesus in a new light. They saw his glory revealed. His worth was visible and acknowledged. John says the disciples not only saw Jesus’ glory but believed in him.

Ask your group members to share what “sign” pointed them to Jesus as God’s Anointed. It may have been a sermon, a song, a person, the Bible, or any number of things. Take the discussion a step further by asking how trusting in Jesus as Messiah has transformed something in their life. This is also an opportunity to encourage anyone who hasn’t taken this step of faith to explore what that means and how to do it.

PRAY

- Ask God to give us eyes to see and hearts to respond to the glory revealed in Jesus as Messiah.
- Think of those who don’t know Jesus as Messiah and pray for someone or something to be a sign that would point them to him.
- Pray that VRBC will be a place where Jesus is proclaimed as Messiah, and that we will trust more deeply in him.