

The Gospel of John – The Miracles in John *New Testament Survey – Lesson 12 (Part 4)*

This past week I had a chance to speak to a local Christian middle and high school on their spiritual renewal day. My assigned topic was finding our Christian roots in the Old Testament, and I gave the presentation three times – to middle schoolers, to 11th and 12th graders, and then to 9th and 10th graders. Because we have been teaching John, and because some of those students make their way to our class, I decided to use John 8:56 as my introductory text.

That verse comes in the midst of certain Jewish leaders challenging Jesus and his qualifications. Jesus told them,

Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.

I quizzed the students about when that happened in the Old Testament. When did Abraham see the day of Jesus and was made glad by it? It is not hard for a father to figure out, but I thought the students might have trouble. I spoke to the youngest group, the middle schoolers, first. I was amazed when a young man raised his hand in response to my question and said,

“The lamb in the bush thing?”

Wow! I was thrilled to hear someone in each of the three groups I spoke to eventually find the same answer.

Of course as a father, there can be no doubt about the day of Abraham’s life that made him most “glad” and “rejoicing.” It surely was the day he found out that he did not have to sacrifice his son, Isaac. The Isaac story so fits the gospel account of Jesus that in living it Abraham saw the day of Jesus with great clarity, even if he didn’t realize it at the time.

Without going into great detail (the story is in Genesis 22 for those who wish to study it), I walked through a number of ways the passage spoke or “previewed” Jesus. The call of God to Abraham echoes John 3:16, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there” (Gen. 22:2). I explained the land of Moriah was the land of Jerusalem, perhaps even the eventual grounds of the temple. Once Abraham made the heart and mind decision to sacrifice Isaac, it took three days before Isaac was, in essence, returned to Abraham alive (Gen. 22:4). Isaac had to carry his own wood to the sacrifice, just as Jesus did the cross (Gen. 22:6; Jn. 19:17). Isaac understood a lamb was to be

www.Biblical-literacy.com

sacrificed, rather than a bird or bull, previewing Jesus as the Lamb of God (Gen. 22:7; Jn. 1:29). Abraham had adequate vision to know that God would provide the lamb, in one form or another (Gen. 22:8). Isaac was bound feet and hands upon the wood, as Jesus would be two millennia later (Gen. 22:9; Mt. 27:2). But Abraham's hand was stayed as he lifted the knife to pierce Isaac, not so for Jesus. At the end of Abraham's day, he named the place "The LORD will provide"¹ (Gen. 22:14). Abraham aptly named the place. It was there, two thousand years later that God fulfilled the promise, and provided the "only Son whom he loved" for sacrifice. Abraham did see the day of Jesus, albeit by living a preview of it, but it was a day that would save the life of his son, and it was undoubtedly a day of rejoicing and gladness!

I like that Old Testament story. It is difficult in places, but it speaks loudly to me. The parallels with the story of Jesus are profound. It is so inundated with New Testament language and events that one might be tempted to think it was written *after* the gospels! Yet we know it was written long before the gospel events. The cynic might think the gospel was made up to then fit the account, but the New Testament church did not seize on this story in that way. It is recorded in Scripture and provides a simple manifestation of the beauty of God's long planned and executed redemption of humanity. In this way, it is not unlike the Gospel of John.

JOHN'S PURPOSE STATEMENT

We have spent three lessons trying to understand why John chose the miracles he did in his gospel. To keep the flow of thought, we put a few review points from the earlier lessons into bullet form here:

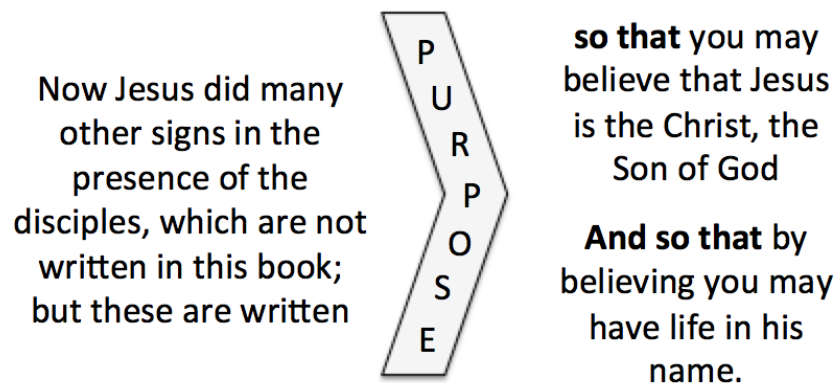
- John wrote his gospel decades after the other three. He likely had them at his disposal, but wrote in supplement to them.

¹ Here and in several other places in this story the Hebrew uses the word *ra'ah*. At its root the word means to "see." John uses the Greek word from the Greek Old Testament (LXX) here that echoes the many times it is used in the Abraham story. It is used where Abraham looks up and "sees" [*ra'ah*] the mountain where the sacrifice is to take place (Gen. 22:4). It is used where Abraham looks up and "sees" [*ra'ah*] the ram that is caught in the thicket as a substitute for Isaac (Gen. 22:13). It is also used in places where our English Bibles translates it as "provides." Thus we see it in Genesis 22:8 – "Abraham said, 'God will provide [*ra'ah*] for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.'" Importantly, it is used twice in the verse where Abraham prophetically names the place in Genesis 22:14 – "So Abraham called the name of that place, 'The LORD will provide' [*ra'ah*] as it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided [*ra'ah*].'"

- John deliberately chose seven miracles to put into his gospels. He had clear reasons for his choices. Some of his chosen miracles are in other gospels; others are found only in John.
- John explained his selections in John 20:30-31.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

- Here John provided a chain of thought to his purpose:



We have here two important reasons for John’s writings. First, as noted in earlier lessons on this verse, he wrote to aid and encourage those who believe in Jesus, affirming that Jesus is the Messiah and the unique Son of God. John then added the importance of this trust and belief in the final clause that “by believing (or “trusting”) people have “life” in his “name.” Both of these words were also carefully considered as used by John.

Having covered these points, we now focus on the seven miracles, asking why John chose those seven to produce his purposes set out in John 20:30-31.

THE MIRACLES

Scholars readily recognize what might seem obvious; John selected seven miracles out of many for his gospel. Leon Morris commented,

John makes it clear that in his Gospel he has made a selection.²

Herman Ridderbos similarly emphasized in his commentary,

The Evangelist's choices of material fit together closely with the purpose of his Gospel.³

As we consider the seven miracles, we see each one fitting carefully into John's purpose of establishing and aiding faith, even as they continue to fit into many of the Hebrew themes we find running throughout the gospel. In this way, they also serve us today, although we often need to climb back into first century Judaic life to fully appreciate why. We will look at each miracle, asking the question: How does this miracle further John's purpose of affirming faith in Jesus as Messiah, as Son of God, and as the source of life for those who believe in his name?

MIRACLE ONE – Water to Wine

John 2:1-11 sets out the first miracle recorded in John, where Jesus turned water into wine. We call this a miracle, but John chose a different word. John labeled this as Jesus' first "sign" (Greek semeion σημεῖον). That does not mean that the event was not a miraculous display of God's power, but it means that it was more than a simple miracle. It was a "sign" in the sense that John used the word in John 20:30-31. Carson explained that signs are,

Significant displays of power that point beyond themselves to the deeper realities that could be perceived with the eyes of faith.⁴

So we properly look at this first miracle as a sign, trying to understand the deeper meaning beyond Jesus simply saving a wedding. The meaning is found in the way John relates the events.

Jesus and his disciples went to a wedding in Cana, a town about nine miles north of Nazareth.⁵ Apparently Jesus' mother was helping in the wedding production. At the wedding, which could last a week, the wine ran out early – a clear social

² Morris, Leon, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans 1995), at 754.

³ Ridderbos, Herman, *The Gospel of John*, (Eerdmans 1997), at 650.

⁴ Carson, D.A., *The Gospel According to John*, (Eerdmans 1991), at 175.

⁵ Most scholars believe ancient Cana was what are now ruins at *Khirbet Qana*, a tell nine miles north of Nazareth.

taboo. Jesus' mother sought help from Jesus. After asking why his mother was getting him involved, Jesus instructed the servants to fill six stone jars with water. Having done so, the servants took the jars to the master of the banquet who, upon tasting the wine, wondered why the best wine was saved until last.

John concluded his account of this sign using words he repeated later in his "purpose statement":

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

This miracle is significant in a number of ways. It is frequently used in weddings to show the compassion of Christ and interest God has in the affairs of man. That Jesus would chose to start his public ministry trying to alleviate the embarrassment of a family running short of wine at a wedding shows the care of our Savior and God over matters that some would consider "incidental." This understanding of the miracle, however, misses the import of this as a sign to aid belief in Jesus as Messiah, the unique Son of God.

First, consider the setting of the sign. To first century Jews, weddings were very holy and important affairs. The Old Testament uses marriage as an allegorical illustration of the relationship between God and his people (Hos. 2:16ff). This perspective was not a first century novelty. The ceremony between God and the Jews at Mt. Sinai where Moses received the law was symbolic of a marriage ceremony. The covenant set up at Sinai followed the covenant of marriage in its form and procedure. In this light, the assistance of Christ at the marriage ceremony becomes something beyond a miracle of mere assistance. There is something very fitting about Jesus Messiah filling the needs at a marriage covenant ceremony through a miracle.

The sign itself centers not only on water, but John informs us about the jars that were holding the water. John made a point to inform the reader about the type of jars that Jesus instructed for this miracle. They were,

stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing" (Jn. 2:6).

John does not accidentally inform us of the kind of jars used. Jesus took jars that were for cleansing under the law (jars that normally held water to pour out for making Jews ceremonially clean). Jesus turned the cleansing agent of water into wine, which would become symbolic to all Christians throughout time as the

blood of Christ.⁶ Here is Jesus as Messiah, bringing purification to a new realm. Rather than the old Jewish ceremonial cleansing water, we have in Jesus, the blood red wine of purification. To a Christian looking back at this miracle, whether in John's day or in our own, the wine surely speaks of the blood of Christ and the Eucharist.

John's selection of this sign serves his purpose well. Jesus as Messiah transcended the waters of Jewish cleansing by the blood of his own purification. We would be remiss if we failed to see the added symbolism that the steward noted the wine of Jesus was of the highest caliber. Nothing but the best blood would replace the cleansing water of Jewish purification under the law.

MIRACLE TWO – Healing the Official's Son

John 4:43–54 sets out the second miraculous sign recorded in John. Since the first miracle, Jesus had gone to Jerusalem and Samaria and then returned to Cana where the marriage was held. At Cana Jesus met a “royal official” whose son lay sick at Capernaum, a town on the Sea of Galilee some twenty miles away. The official heard that Jesus was in Galilee (Cana was part of the region of Galilee) and found Jesus to beg him to travel to Capernaum and heal the official's son, who was close to death. Jesus did not go with the man. Instead, Jesus simply told the man to go home, that his son would not die.

Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live” (Jn. 4:50).

As the man returned home, his servants met him on the road to tell him that the son's fever broke. The fever had broken at 1:00 in the afternoon the prior day, and the boy was going to be okay.⁷ The official realized that this was the very time

⁶ The water itself is a constant theme in John's Gospel. We will see its role in several of the seven signs, especially Jesus walking on water, but also healing the paralytic at the pool of Siloam. Jesus also encountered a woman at the well with a water jar in John Chapter 4. Throughout John's water theme is the message of Jesus that he offered a spiritual water that would cure spiritual thirst for eternity (Jn. 4:14ff.)

⁷ Some commentators try to explain why a concerned father would not get home until the next day. After all, the journey was only 20 miles and the healing was at 1 in the afternoon. Furthermore, John told the readers that the father left Jesus immediately. The opinions range from that the father was so convinced his son was healed that he felt no need to hurry home to that the father was accidentally delayed (or that John used a Roman time system). These commentators forget that the Jewish day began at sunset, not in the morning. So if the father got home after sunset, it makes sense that the servants would speak of a healing that afternoon as one that occurred “yesterday.”

that Jesus had told the man to go because the boy would live. This sign immediately had an effect similar to what John was seeking from his gospel:

And he himself believed, and all his household. This was now the second sign... (Jn. 4:53-54).

The man and his household were all moved to faith in Jesus through this event.

John called this the “second sign,” even though his gospel indicated that Jesus had performed other signs since the wedding at Cana:

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing (Jn. 2:23).

John does so, alerting us to the number of miracles he is selecting in his gospel. It was not the second miracle done by Jesus. It was the second miracle John was writing up.

At this point in John, we see that Jesus’ ministry is rooted not only in creating (water to wine) but also in restoring that which is broken or sick. While the first miracle can harken us back to Genesis one and God’s miracle of creation, this second miracle reminds us of the sickness and disease which came into the world through the fall in Genesis three and Jesus’ work on the effects of the curse that followed the fall. This sign meets John’s purposeful choice squarely. In this story, we have a glimpse of the one who set up ordered creation making it right through reengaging the sin-tainted world. Jesus gave life in John 4, and John wants his readers to know that believing in Jesus brings a new level of life!

MIRACLE THREE – Healing at the Pool

John 5:1-15 sets out the third miracle John chose. In this miracle, John does not call it a “sign.” While it is a sign for John’s readers in the sense that it was a miracle with a deeper meaning, it had no such effect on its immediate participants! This miracle unfolded for a man who had no faith in Jesus, before or after the miracle.

As explained by John, some unspecified time after healing the official’s son, Jesus went to Jerusalem for a feast. While there, Jesus went by a pool called Bethesda where blind, lame, and paralyzed people used to lie, perhaps in hope of a miracle.⁸

⁸ Some lesser reliable manuscripts insert a verse that periodically God would send an angel to disturb the waters and the first one in, after the stirring, would get healed. Most translations that include the verse do so in the footnotes explaining it as most likely a later addition by someone other than John who wanted to explain why so many infirmed and sick were stationed at the pool.

Jesus knew the man had been there as an invalid for a long time. Jesus asked the man whether he wanted to be well. The man made an excuse about his inability to go “down” into the waters when “stirred.” Jesus then stirred up a great deal more than the water! Jesus instructed the man to “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” (5:8). The man did so.

These events occurred on the Sabbath, which made a two-fold problem to the critical religious crowd. First, Jesus should not be healing on the Sabbath; and second, the man should not be carrying his mat on the Sabbath. When certain Jews saw this man “sinning” by carrying his mat, they called him out for the sin.

“It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed” (Jn 5:10).

In modern parlance, it seems the healed man “threw Jesus under the bus.” The healed man told the Jews that his healer had instructed him to so sin. When quizzed about the healer’s identity, the healed man did not know. This shows another level of ingratitude, that the healed man did not engage Jesus in any way after the healing to even learn who he was. It is only later when Jesus finds the man in public that the healed man learned Jesus’ identity. Jesus found the man and instructed him to stop some repetitive sinning. This might convey that the man was caught in some sin that was responsible for the lameness. Whether that is true or not, Jesus did note that something worse than lameness could proceed from the sinning.

Stunningly, the healed man did not fall at Jesus’ feet seeking forgiveness, help, or offering thanks. Whether out of fear or ingratitude, the man instead sought out the inquisitive Jews so he could identify Jesus!

Before we conclude on how this account fit into John’s purpose behind selecting miracles, we should note several interesting contrasts in this story. First, the healed man never saw anything rightly. He was looking “down” at the water when Jesus made him “get up.” At first, he failed to see Jesus because he was too focused on the pool. Then after Jesus healed him, the man did not have the

This insertion readily illustrates the contrast between the way people might think God made the world and the way Scripture reveals God made the world. The world is not a magic land where the laws of nature are readily abrogated. It is not fairyland or magic land where miracles happen because of some system of stirring water. It is a world of rational cause and effect, created by God with discernable laws that are consistent and reliable. If someone wants a miracle in this world, it does not come from some magical elixir or miracle water. It will come from God, and no one or nowhere else. Only the Creator of this world can interrupt its flow of cause and effect and produce something that would not otherwise be.

gratitude one should expect. Finally, rather than owe Jesus a modicum of appreciation, the man gave the establishment Jews who were looking for a reason to condemn Jesus what they wanted.

The Jews were not amazed at the healing. John noted that this Sabbath healing intensified the Jewish persecution of Jesus. The Jewish view of the Sabbath law was based on the Ten Commandment to keep the Sabbath holy, but even more so from passages like Jeremiah 17:21 and Nehemiah 13:15 which warned against working on the Sabbath.⁹ Of course, those passages are all focused on the wrongful usage of the Sabbath as a time for commercial activity and working for economic gain. That is not at all what Jesus was doing.

This sign for us, is right on target for John's purposes. It showed Jesus as the extension of God's work. Jesus was not violating the Sabbath. The very God who rested on the Sabbath and declared it holy was behind the works of Jesus, his son. Furthermore, we can all find affirmation in our faith seeing that the works of Jesus are not limited by man's frailties or lack of faith, any more than they are restricted to the magic of moving waters.

MIRACLE FOUR – Feeding the 5,000

John 6:1-15 records the fourth miracle John chose for his gospel. Near Passover time, Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee, followed by a large multitude. These people followed him because they had witnessed a number of Jesus' miracles. When Jesus saw the multitude approaching, he asked Philip where they should buy bread to feed the folks. Jesus knew he was going to miraculously feed the people, but asked Philip as a test. Philip replied that eight months pay would not buy enough food, at which point Andrew spoke of a boy with five small loaves and two small fish. Jesus instructed his disciples to have the people sit in the grass.

As the approximately 5,000 men sit, Jesus took the boy's loaves and fish, gave thanks, and passed them out. After everyone ate their fill, the leftovers filled twelve baskets. At that point, the people perceived Jesus as their "this world" deliverer and sought to make him king by force. Jesus, knowing his true role in the world, withdrew to another mountain to be alone.

⁹ Jer. 17:21 – "Thus says the LORD: Take care for the sake of your lives, and do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem." Neh. 13:15 – "In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them on the day when they sold food."

One thing that quickly stands out in this account is that this miracle is recorded in each of the synoptics as well. In fact, this is the only miracle that is recounted in all four gospels. This raises a question: If we are correct that John was writing after the publication and distribution of the other gospels, then why repeat this story? One reason seems to be a constant running parallel that John seems to be making between the life of Jesus and the five books of Moses. In addition, John is constantly contrasting Jesus and Moses in ways that show Jesus' superiority to Moses.¹⁰

In that vein, Jesus is elevated above Moses in this story. For Moses had called down God's manna from heaven to feed the Jewish masses in the wilderness. Jesus, on the other hand, gives thanks and himself produces bread and fish to feed the people.

It is no wonder that the people sought to make Jesus king. Here was one who had already exhibited healing power. He was now taking things a step farther and showing a miraculous ability to feed people when there is no apparent quantity of sufficient food. What a king to have! He can heal the sick that no one else can heal. He can offer free food at the expense of no one, and in the whole process show himself greater than Moses, the foundation of religious practice.

What the people offered was really no different than Satan's temptation to make Jesus king in return for subservience to Satan (Lk 4:5-8). Jesus again rejected the temptation, choosing instead the road God set before him with the Kingship that far exceeded that of any earthly realm. Richard Bailey noted the irony,

The king comes to open his kingdom to man. But the blind try to make him their kind of king. In turn, they refuse to honor him as king and lose his kingdom.¹¹

MIRACLE FIVE – Walking on Water

Miracle 5 comes immediately on the heels of the feeding of the 5,000. It is found in John 6:16-21. After the mountainside feast ended, night fell, and the disciples took a boat from the northeast shores of the Sea of Galilee to the northwest where Capernaum was located. Jesus was not in the boat. During the night, a strong wind blew on the lake making the rowing difficult.

¹⁰ For example, in John 1:17, it reads that “the law was given through Moses; grace AND truth came through Jesus Christ.” Similarly, in John 7:16ff Jesus says if it was right for Moses to allow circumcision on the Sabbath, then the leaders should not be upset with Jesus for healing on the Sabbath.

¹¹ Bailey, Richard, *Saint John's Gospel*, (SCM Press 1946).

While the disciples were hard at the oars, they saw in the darkness Jesus walking on the water. Thinking they were seeing a ghost (that detail was provided by Mark's gospel, John merely notes the disciples were "terrified"), they were no doubt relieved to hear Jesus say "It is I; don't be afraid." Jesus climbed into the boat and in no time the journey was over. The people onshore were looking for Jesus and were amazed to find him getting out of the boat with his disciples. They knew Jesus had not gotten into the boat at the start.

This miracle is set between the feeding with the loaves and the teaching that Jesus was the ultimate bread for feeding, far surpassing the manna bread of the forefathers. No doubt John saw in the miracle walking on the water, the many layers of symbolism. First and foremost, while Moses had split the waters for the people to pass, Jesus just walked right across.¹² The Red Sea in the Old Testament set up the issue of manna in the wilderness. For John, this miracle set up Jesus' dialogue with his followers about his role as the Bread of Life.

As a part of this story then, John included core teaching Jesus gave his disciples the following day that links up and explains both the significance of the feeding of the 5,000 and the Mosaic echo from Jesus walking on water. It begins in John 6:25-71 where John recorded Jesus urging his followers not to seek food for the day from Jesus, but nourishment for eternal life. Jesus then offered the Mosaic comparison noting that while manna might have fed the people with Moses, God has given true bread from heaven that should not be confused with manna. This bread is Jesus. Jesus called this the "bread of life" that comes into the world to bring life.

Some of the followers grumbled over Jesus' claim to be bread from heaven. They saw him as,

Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know" (6:42).

In spite of the grumbling, Jesus reiterated that he was the bread of life that, unlike manna which people ate before eventually dying, would give eternal life. Jesus was clear that he was from heaven and would give his flesh up for the life of the world. Those who would partake in the body and blood of Christ would live forever with the father.

This miracle gives strong support to John's work at reinforcing faith in Jesus as something utterly unknown and unique in all of history. Jesus was the anointed

¹² Additionally, Jews equated the water with chaos and danger. They were not a sea going people. A Jesus who tamed the sea was one who rules over chaos and despair.

one (Messiah) who surpassed the great Moses in his miracles. He was the bread of life for eternal life. He walked on water.

MIRACLE SIX – Healing a Blind Man

John 9 recounts the sixth miracle – Jesus healing a blind man. There was a man born blind who supported himself by begging. Jesus and his disciples saw the man and the disciples asked Jesus who sinned, the man or his parents, to cause the blindness. Many Jews at the time believed that sin was the only cause of suffering. In fact, they believed that people with deformity could have resulted from either the baby sinning in utero or the parents sinning in the birth of the child.

Jesus explained to his disciples that the blindness was not the result of sin from either the man or his parents. This sin would show the work of God in the man's life. Jesus then spit in the mud, formed a mud cake, placed it on the man's eyes and sent the man to wash in the pool of Siloam. The man went, washed, and received his sight.

Jesus performed this miracle on the Sabbath. While there might have been some dispute over the mere healing on a Sabbath, there was no question that the process of spitting in the dirt and making a mud cake was “work” in violation of Jewish Sabbath law.

When the Pharisees discovered that Jesus had done this miracle on the Sabbath, they were divided in their opinions. Some thought Jesus could never be from God because of such blatant sin. Others did not understand how a sinner could perform such great feats. The Pharisees asked the healed man his thoughts, and the man proclaimed Jesus as a prophet.

Disbelieving that the man was actually born blind, the Pharisees brought the man's parents in for questioning. The parents confirmed that the man was their son and that he had indeed been born blind. But, they would not comment on how the man was healed out of fear that acknowledging Jesus as Messiah was the basis for expulsion from the synagogue.

The Pharisees again asked the man about his perception of Jesus and the man was a bit flippant. The man asked why the Pharisees wanted to hear the story again. Did they also want to be disciples of Jesus? The man confounded the Pharisees

with a bit of logic (not necessarily great theology),¹³ good enough to frustrate the Pharisees who answered by kicking the man out of the synagogue.

Jesus heard that the man had been thrown out of the synagogue and went to find the man. The man did not recognize Jesus for he had been blind when he left Jesus' company to wash in Siloam. As their conversation unfolded, the man "saw" Jesus truly and worshipped him. To the Pharisees, Jesus made the point that even though they could see, they were blind to Jesus' identity. In that, the Pharisees had no excuse.

This was a marvelous sign for John to include. We know from earlier signs that Jesus could heal one twenty miles away, he could heal one who had no faith, and he certainly did not have to send this man to the pool of Siloam for washing and healing! Yet Jesus did. And John goes to the trouble to tell us so. Why? The answer must lie in part in the meaning of "Siloam." This was no new pool. It has history in the Old Testament where it is called by its Hebrew name *Shiloah*. John himself provides the translation of the word, lest his readers not know. *Shiloah* meant "sent." This is a loaded word in John's gospel. Jesus says over and over, and John made a point of including over and over, that Jesus was "sent" by God. Consider these passages:

- **John 5:36** "But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me."
- **John 6:29** "Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'"
- **John 6:57** "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me."
- **John 7:29** "I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me."
- **John 8:42** Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me."

¹³ The man says, "we know that God does not listen to sinners" (9:31). This is sometime quoted as gospel truth in sermons and lessons. Unfortunately, the gospel truth is that the man SAID those words. That does not mean that those words are true. In fact, we know that God DOES listen to sinners. The only non-sinner to pray to God has been Jesus himself!

John provided this miraculous sign as a confirmation that Jesus was sent by God, Jesus' ministry was sent by God, and Jesus worked under that commission. This sign fit John's purposes like a hand in a glove.

MIRACLE SEVEN – The Resurrection of Lazarus

In John 11, we read the seventh and final of Jesus' miracles that John chose to include. It is the death and resurrection of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha. These siblings were from Bethany and were very close to Jesus. When Lazarus was very ill, the sisters sent for Jesus to come and heal him. Upon hearing of Lazarus's sickness, Jesus declared that death would not be the end of the story on his illness.

Jesus did not leave immediately to heal Lazarus, but Jesus waited two more days. Jesus explained to the disciples that Lazarus had "fallen asleep" and Jesus was going to "wake him up" (11:11). The disciples misunderstood Jesus and actually thought Lazarus would be getting better on his own since he was sleeping. Jesus was then more blunt with the disciples and explained that Lazarus was dead.

By the time Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Martha met Jesus on the road and told him so. Martha noted that had Jesus been there earlier, Lazarus would not have died. Even still, Martha knew Jesus could do anything he wished with Lazarus. Jesus told Martha,

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die (Jn. 11:25-26).

Jesus then asked whether Martha believed this. Martha responded unequivocally,

I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who was to come into the world (11:27).

Mary heard that Jesus was near and went out to meet him. A number of those who were there to comfort and grieve with the family followed Mary and witnessed her encounter with him. When Mary arrived, she was weeping. Upon realizing her pain, Jesus wept as well.¹⁴ While the Jews reacted variously to Jesus, Jesus himself sought out the cave where Lazarus was laid. The tomb had a stone rolled across the face which Jesus ordered to be moved. Jesus had this done in spite of Mary's concerns that the odor would be great from four days of decay.

¹⁴ This is the shortest verse in the Bible, 11:35 "Jesus wept."

Jesus stood before the cave and called loudly, “Lazarus, come out!” Lazarus then came forth, still wrapped in his burial clothes. Jesus ordered the burial clothes removed.

This he did as his seventh miracle, what we might call the “Sabbath day” miracle. It is the perfect finish to John’s choices. He finished the miracles with Jesus setting out life after death.

This death and resurrection account closely relates the ministry of Jesus to all of us. He finds us dead in our trespasses and calls us forth to a new creation – a new life. Of course, many of us never heed the follow-up command to the resurrection story where Jesus orders the removal of the grave clothes. Many of us choose to walk around post-salvation still wearing the clothes of sinful people steeped in the death that was once ours. Much the pity!

John noted that after the events of Lazarus, the Jewish leaders were in a real dilemma on what to do with Jesus. They were worried that the commoners would proclaim Jesus king and cause the Romans to come destroy Jerusalem and the Jewish nation as traitors. This would mean the loss of the nation and their positions of ease and honor. This precipitated Caiaphas, the High Priest, to unknowingly prophesy the death of Jesus that year. Caiaphas believed he was making a good suggestion that enough was enough and they just needed to put Jesus to death. With that in mind, Caiaphas said, “It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.” (11:50). John lets us know that the prophecy was real. Jesus did in fact die so that many would live.

Jesus’ death is previewed in this final climatic sign of Lazarus being raised in a way that makes this the appropriate grand finale to John’s choices. In the case of Lazarus and Christ, we have a rolling stone, an anticipation of what might happen, the people gathered, the expectation of a horrible stench of a body, and yet a resurrection comes. Lazarus is to Golgotha what John the Baptist is to Christ. With Lazarus, Jesus does the resurrecting; with Christ it is the Father – both empowered and working in common ways to a common goal. Surely this miracle affirms Jesus as the unique Son of God!

CONCLUSION

John’s gospel is not a rambling of historical events without aim or purpose. It is a thoughtful gospel that came after decades of reflection and teaching on the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ. It is written with passion, with firsthand details, and with clarity of purpose. It directs one to Jesus as unique and

singular in all of history. Jesus was God incarnate. John wants no one to ever doubt it.

The miracles converge not only to say these individual things but some greater message that John is conveying. Jesus orders relationships, he brings wholeness (Genesis), he forgives sins, he exceeds Moses and he is the manna, he controls the chaos of the world, he is sent to bring the resurrection and the life. Consider the miracles in a group:

Jesus brings focus unto himself and fulfillment of OT concept or category of life and thought for each miracle:

1. Water-wine at the marriage ceremony shows Jesus bringing relationships into order on earth and through divine purification very much in the vein of Genesis.
2. Healing the official's son shows Jesus' authority acknowledged; bringing "shalom" wholeness, battling against the disease and defections inherent in the fallen world explained in Genesis restoration again)
3. Paralytic Shows Jesus power to reach and heal even those not looking for him! It is more typical of the salvation healing of us than we would like to think.
4. Feeding the multitude demonstrates Jesus in a role beyond that of Moses. Jesus provides a greater bread because Jesus IS the Bread of Life who will give or provide himself!
5. Walk on water shows Jesus over the cosmos in a way that Israel had never seen or heard of. It was not a matter of parting the seas, but walking over them!
6. Healing the man born blind in such a way that emphasizes Jesus sent on a mission and also sending us on one as we are healed.
7. The ultimate, pinnacle of the miracles is the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Foreshadowing his own resurrection at the hands of the Father, Jesus makes the ultimate claim on his authority and position. Jesus *is* the Messiah, the Son of God, who gives life in his name to all who believe!

POINTS FOR HOME

1. “...these are written” (Jn. 20:30).

I have often wished to eyewitness something so miraculous there could be no doubt that it involved the holy hand of a mighty God. Yet in truth, my life is that way. That is seen not only in what has brought me to this point today, but in the history that undergirds my faith. These miracles of Jesus are a part of who I am today. They were secured in this gospel and written out in a beautiful and profound way. For me to miss that, waiting on my own miracle that meets my own eyes, is roughly equivalent to the lame man watching the water for a magic cure rather than looking to Jesus. I need to focus on God’s love and provision, and trust that when this life is over, he will hold his promise of eternity in his glorious presence.

2. “...so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (Jn. 20:30).

John chose marvelous ways to underscore the true nature of Jesus. He gave not only a narrative, but he gave signs. Deeper than simple miracles, these signs brought out the truth of Jesus as greater than life or death, law or religious system, time and space. Jesus is not a great man, not a dead prophet. He is the unique Son of God who came in love and power and promises and will come again to redeem his own. What have I to fear?

3. “...by believing you may have life in his name” (Jn. 20:31).

Jesus never had any interest in an earthly kingdom. He could have had the greatest one ever. He could have made Alexander the Great known in history as Alexander the Lesser. But that was never his mission. It is not why he was “sent.” Jesus stayed on mission until the end because he was about so much more than this earth has to offer.

Can I trust that? Can I truly set my sight beyond this world? Can I see each day as a chance to do the will of him who sent me? Can I love others with the love of Christ? Can I serve others as Christ would? Can I serve in Christ’s body on earth? Through my own strength, no! But through his Spirit, absolutely! That is what I press on towards!