

Group Study Outline

LAUNCH QUESTION

What strikes you as we read this passage? What stands out as surprising, encouraging or difficult?

READ John 2:1-11

LOOK at the sign

The passage begins 'on the third day' which points us back to chapter 1. What has been happening in the lead up to this passage?

What are the key 'scenes' in the story? What happens in each one?

What details is John emphasising?

UNDERSTAND the sign

John's original readers would have known the Old Testament promises of the Messiah. So to catch up with them...

Read Amos 9:11-15

Isaiah 25:6-8

Joel 2:23-27, 3:17-18

What will life be like when Messiah comes?

What are the key symbols of this?

v11 describes this miracle as the first sign. What does this sign teach us?

Although the Messiah has come, we still don't yet enjoy the full benefits of the messianic age. How does v4 help to explain this?

What impact does this first sign have on the disciples and why?

OBEY the sign

How should we respond to what Jesus has shown us in this sign?

In the light of this passage, what would you say to someone who said:

- I think Jesus was just a good teacher
- I don't want to become a Christian because then I'd have to give up all the fun things in life
- If Jesus is the Messiah, then why do I still find life so hard?

PRAY

John 2:1-12



John at a glance

'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his 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.'

This is the stated purpose of John's gospel, to show us the signs so that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ and have life.

We're looking at each of the seven signs in John's gospel this term, to see what we can learn about how Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, so that by believing we might have life, and so that we might be witnesses to others as well.

Where this passage fits in...

This is the very first sign that Jesus did, revealing his glory. The effect is immediate: his disciples believe in him.

Theme Sentence

Jesus reveals his glory and shows he is the messiah by turning water into wine.

Application

- Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God
- Look forward to the new age he will bring as messiah
- Give thanks that all this is possible because of his death

Commentary

1 'On the third day' links this passage with what has gone before, the series of days starting in 1:19, making this the sixth or seventh day. These days are linked by the theme 'who is the messiah', with John the Baptist denying it is him and pointing to Jesus, Andrew telling Peter he has found the messiah, Philip telling Nathanael, and Nathanael declaring Jesus is the Son of God and King of Israel (Messianic titles). This passage concludes the week with Jesus himself revealing his glory.

3 It was the responsibility of the bridegroom to provide for the wedding feast. To run out of wine would have been extremely embarrassing for the bridegroom, and ruined the wedding. What should be an occasion for joy is turning into a disaster. Jesus mother is clearly concerned about this, and mentions it to Jesus apparently expecting him to help, though given this is the first of his signs, it's unlikely she was expecting him to perform a miracle.

4 Jesus addresses his mother as 'woman', which is polite, but formal. He seem to be disassociating himself from her and the issue. Jesus actions are not driven by human agendas, even the request of his mother. As he starts his public ministry, his one concern is to do the will of his Father (c.f.5:19ff).

His objection is that his 'hour' has not yet come. This the first mention of a theme that crops up frequently in John's gospel. Twice, the Jews tried to seize Jesus but were not able to because 'his hour had not yet come' (7:30, 8:20). Three times we're told his hour has come, just before he is arrested and crucified (12.23, 13.31, 17:1). Jesus is talking about the hour of his death. But he also talks about an 'hour' when true worshippers will worship in Spirit and truth, and when the dead will hear his voice and rise again (4:21-23, 5:25-28 note v25 the hour when the dead will hear and rise is 'now come'. In other words, as Jesus teaches and people believe they are given new spiritual life). Jesus also talks about an hour when his disciples will be persecuted (16:2-4) and when he will speak plainly to them about the Father (16:25), and when they will abandon him and leave him alone (16:32).

It seems that Jesus 'hour' refers to his death, resurrection, glorification and all that it achieved. Hence, at this point in the gospel, the hour has not yet come for him to fully reveal his glory and take on the role of bridegroom, supplying wine for his people (see notes on bridegroom and wine below). Yet, in supplying wine for the wedding, he does give us a glimpse of his glory in anticipation of what is to come.

From our perspective, Jesus hour *has* now come in that he has died and risen and secured eternal life for us. We now worship in spirit and truth and have risen to new spiritual life. And yet we still wait for the hour when the dead will physically rise for either life or judgement. This explains why we don't yet fully enjoy the benefits of the messiah. We know the joy of new life in Jesus, but still struggle with problems and difficulties in life. The full joy of the new age is still to come.

6 The six stone water jars would together have held around 500 litres of water, equivalent to 600 or 700 bottles (750ml) of wine! Although we don't know the exact strength of the wine (perhaps equivalent to lager today), this is a lot of alcohol to be giving to people who have already drunk the place dry! It certainly addresses the problem of providing wine for the wedding. But why so much? The quantity reminds us of Old Testament descriptions of the messianic age. When the Christ appears, the new age will be like a banquet, with no shortage of wine (see Amos 9:11-15, Joel 2:23-27, 3:17-18, Isaiah 25:6-8). Wine is a symbol of bounty and often connected with joy (Psalm 104:15). Jesus lavish miracle demonstrates that he is the messiah who will bring in the age of plenty and joy promised in the Old Testament.

This is also a demonstration of astonishing power. Water usually goes through a process of rain, entering the vine and the grapes, being squeezed out and fermented before becoming wine. Jesus did it in an instant, without actually handling the water at all. It simply happened at his command.

9 It was the responsibility of the bridegroom to provide wine for the wedding, hence the master of the feast assumed this new wine had come from the bridegroom and congratulates him for it. But we know that he has the wrong man (we're not told how the bridegroom reacted, but he presumably wouldn't have known what the master of the feast was talking about!) This shows us two things: firstly, Jesus is the true bridegroom, the real provider of the wine (c.f. 3:28-30). He is the Christ who will bring about the great wedding feast of the end of the age (Rev 19). Secondly, his wine is much better than that provided by the first bridegroom. The new is better than the old. This may hint at Jesus replacing and being much better than the old Jewish rituals and sacrifices, indicated by the six stone jars for purification, which he instead fills with wine (see how he is the new sacrificial lamb, 1:29, the new temple, 2:18, the new water 4:13-14, the new way to worship 4:13, etc.).

11 So Jesus reveals his glory in the first of his signs. That is not to say that he fully revealed his glory - that comes at the cross. But this first sign offers a glimpse of who Jesus is and what he has come to do, the messiah who brings life.

This glimpse is given to his disciples. It seems that very few people knew about this miracle. The disciples, his mother and some of the servants would have been aware, but key figures like the master of the feast and the bridegroom were not. Jesus reveals his glory to a select group because his hour has not yet come, but also so that they might believe what they saw, and be witnesses to us so that we too might believe (20:31).