

## Jesus' First Sign

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Signs / Sign; Johannine Sign / John 2:1-11

The first sign in John 2:1-11 teaches us that Jesus is the Christ who initiates the new covenant.

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## Introduction

The movie *Signs* tells the story of a former Episcopal priest named Graham Hess (played by Mel Gibson). Graham lives on a farm in rural Pennsylvania with his children. His younger brother, who was a former minor league baseball player, has been helping the family since Graham's wife Colleen died in a traffic accident six months earlier.

One morning, Graham finds a large crop circle in his cornfield. Initially, he blames vandals. But then other crop circles begin to appear all around the world.

What do the crop circles mean?

Are the crop circles the work of vandals? Or, do the crop circles point to something else?

As the movie unfolds, we learn that the crop circles are signs pointing to an alien invasion. Later, there is indeed an invasion of space aliens.

Fortunately, we don't encounter such signs in our daily lives.

But we do encounter signs all the time. In fact, it would be very difficult to live in this world without signs. We have signs telling us which road to take, where we can find a gas station at an exit off the highway, and where the nursery is.

Signs also play a significant role in the Bible.

Like the signs we see every day around us, the signs in the Bible point to something beyond themselves. The difference between our daily signs and Biblical signs is that Biblical signs point to spiritual truths. When God gives a sign, he wants people to learn something about an essential spiritual truth.

Today, I am going to begin a series of sermons on the meaning of the seven signs in John's Gospel.

But before we look at the first of those seven signs, I want to say something about the purpose of signs in the Bible.

The signs in the Old Testament most often involved God performing a supernatural event, sometimes through a human servant.

One of the best examples of signs in the Old Testament was just before the Exodus. God sent ten plagues through Moses to cause Pharaoh to let God's people go (see [Exodus 7:14-12:32](#)).

God gave other signs through many of the Old Testament prophets. For example, God gave a sign through the Prophet Isaiah when he told him to walk naked and barefoot for three years as a sign of judgment against the nations of Egypt and Ethiopia (see [Isaiah 20:2-3](#)).

Whether the signs in the Old Testament were miraculous or mundane, the purpose of the sign was the same: *The signs served to authenticate God's appointed messengers so that people would believe the message they brought.*

When we get to the New Testament we discover that there are plenty of signs in the New Testament as well.

However, signs play a very prominent role in John's Gospel. The seven signs appear exclusively in the first half of John's Gospel. The seven signs are:

1. Turning Water into Wine ([John 2:1-11](#))
2. Cleansing the Temple ([John 2:12-17](#))
3. Healing the Nobleman's Son ([John 4:46-54](#))
4. Healing the Lame Man ([John 5:1-15](#))
5. Feeding the Multitude ([John 6:1-15](#))
6. Healing the Blind Man ([John 9](#))
7. Raising Lazarus ([John 11](#)).

Before we examine the first of the seven signs, I want to mention two more introductory comments.

First, the seven signs have two features in common:

1. The signs were performed in public in the presence of witnesses. They were not done in secret. They were meant to be seen by the public.
2. The signs were specifically called “signs” in John’s Gospel. Some form of the Greek word for “sign” (*semeia*) was used by John in referring to each of the seven signs.

And second, similar to the purpose of signs in the Old Testament, the seven signs in John’s Gospel have two main purposes:

1. *The signs served to authenticate God’s appointed messenger, in this case, the Lord Jesus Christ.* But, more than testify to the authenticity of Jesus’ message, the signs also testify to the reality that Jesus himself *is* the divine message.
2. *The signs were given so that people would believe the message that Jesus brought.* Specifically, the signs were to persuade people to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and the only Savior of sinners. At the end of John’s Gospel, John tells his readers why he wrote John’s Gospel. He wrote in [John 20:30](#), “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book.” John selected just seven of Jesus’ signs to incorporate into his Gospel. And then he goes on to tell us why he did so in the very next verse, “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” ([John 20:31](#)).

Each of the seven signs points to a different truth about Jesus. John presents the seven signs like a lawyer setting forth his case to prove a point. He gives seven strands of evidence to help us understand that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and the only Savior of sinners.

## Scripture

Let’s read [John 2:1-11](#):

**<sup>1</sup> On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. <sup>2</sup> Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. <sup>3</sup> When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” <sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” <sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”**

**<sup>6</sup> Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup> And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. <sup>9</sup> When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom <sup>10</sup> and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” <sup>11</sup> This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.**

## Lesson

The first sign in [John 2:1-11](#) teaches us that Jesus is the Christ who initiates the new covenant.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Jesus Attended a Wedding (2:1-2)
2. Jesus Received a Request (2:3-4)
3. Jesus Addressed a Problem (2:5-10)
4. Jesus Elicited a Response (2:11)

### I. Jesus Attended a Wedding (2:1-2)

First, Jesus attended a wedding.

Verse 1 states, **“On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.”**

John continued his narrative of the life of Jesus. Two days after his encounter with Nathanael (1:43-51), **on the third day**, Jesus and those now following him were in Cana in Galilee.

It is possible that John was noting that this sign that Jesus was about to do took place at the end of seven days.

John was perhaps thinking of the events of the first week of Jesus' ministry.

Scholars believe that **Cana** was most likely the modern Khirbet Kana, a site that is a little more than 8 miles north of Nazareth.

Nathanael was from **Cana**. Interestingly, the first of the "greater things" (1:50) was begun in Nathanael's hometown.

In ancient times, weddings followed a betrothal period. The betrothal could have lasted a year or longer. The wedding celebration could last for a week.

It is possible that Jesus' mother knew the family of the bridegroom, which is why she was there and perhaps assisted in the wedding celebration.

Interestingly, Mary is never called by her name in John's Gospel.

Verse 2 states, **"Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples."**

Since Jesus and his disciples, along with his mother Mary, were invited to the wedding, it suggests that the wedding may have been for a relative or close family friend.

The disciples that were with Jesus were mentioned in Chapter 1: Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, Nathanael, and the unnamed disciple (1:35-40), who was most likely John.

All five of these disciples were about to witness this first "sign" of Jesus (2:11) that he was about to do at the wedding.

## II. Jesus Received a Request (2:3-4)

Second, Jesus received a request.

Verse 3 states, **"When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' "**

Mary knew about the problem regarding the shortage of wine. We are not told why it happened. Perhaps a miscalculation. Perhaps more people attended than were expected. Perhaps some guests were over-indulging.

Whatever the reason for the shortage of wine, Mary knew that in the culture of that day running out of wine would be a massive embarrassment for the host family.

So she went to her son Jesus. She believed that he might solve the problem.

Now some people think that Mary went to Jesus because she expected him to perform a miracle.

But that is not the case. Up until this point, Jesus had never performed a miracle. We know that because John said in verse 11 that Jesus turning the water into wine was “the *first* of his signs.”

So, Mary had never seen Jesus perform a miracle.

The likely reason that Mary went to Jesus is because she had seen him grow and become a man. Her husband, Joseph, was most likely deceased at this point. Jesus had taken up his responsibility as the oldest of seven siblings (see [Mark 6:3](#)). He was reliable, responsible, and resourceful.

That is why Mary went to Jesus. She wanted Jesus to do something about the wine shortage.

Verse 4 states, “**And Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.’**”

The term “**woman**” was Jesus’ normal and polite way of addressing women (cf. [Matthew 15:28](#); [Luke 13:12](#); [John 4:21](#); [8:10](#); [19:26](#); [20:15](#)).

But it was unusual for a son to address his mother as “**woman.**” If a son did address his mother as “**woman,**” he would customarily add a qualifying adjective or title.

By the way, the *New International Version* adds the word “Dear” before “**woman**” to express this idea. However, the word “Dear” is not present in the Greek text.

So, why did Jesus address Mary simply as “**Woman**”?

It probably meant that there was now a new relationship between Jesus and his mother. Jesus was about to embark on his public ministry. He was no longer merely her son; he was the “Son of Man.” His mission to seek and save the lost had begun. Everything that he now did was in fulfillment of that mission.

Jesus’ question, **“What does this have to do with me?”** was Semitic in origin and reads as follows in the Greek text, “What to me and to you?” It had two basic meanings:

1. When one person was unjustly bothering another, the injured party could say “What to me and to you?” meaning, “What have I done to you that you should have done this to me?” ([Judges 11:12](#); [2 Chronicles 35:21](#); [1 Kings 17:18](#)); or
2. When someone was asked to get involved in a matter that he felt was no business of his, he could say “What to me and to you?” meaning, “That is your business, how am I involved?” ([2 Kings 3:13](#); [Hosea 14:8](#)).

The first option suggests hostility, while the second option suggests disengagement.

Jesus’ answer to Mary suggests the second option in that he did not want to engage himself in the problem of a lack of wine.

Jesus went on to say, **“My hour has not yet come.”**

The Greek word for **“hour”** (*hora*) occurs here in [John 2:4](#) and also in 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28, 29; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:25; and 17:1.

It was a reference to the time in Jesus’ life when he was to leave the world and return to his Father in heaven (13:1), the hour when the Son of Man was glorified (17:1).

This would be accomplished through his suffering, death, resurrection (and ascension, although John did not emphasize the ascension).

[John 7:30](#) and 8:20 implied that Jesus’ arrest and death were included.

In addition, [John 12:23](#) and 17:1, which refer to the glorification of the Son, suggest that the resurrection and ascension were included as part of the “hour.”

Here in [John 2:4](#), Jesus' remark to his mother indicated that the time for his death had not yet arrived.

### III. Jesus Addressed a Problem (2:5-10)

Third, Jesus addressed a problem.

Verse 5 states, **“His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’”**

Mary left the solution in Jesus' hands.

If Jesus wanted to stay disengaged, then he would do so.

But if Jesus wanted to do something about the lack of wine, then the servants needed to be ready to do what Jesus told them.

In other words, Mary submitted herself to the will of Jesus. Her faith in her Son Jesus was to acknowledge that he knew best about what to do in that situation.

On the other hand, Jesus was making it clear to Mary that he was under the authority of his Heavenly Father (cf. [John 5:30](#)). When he was twelve years old, he was submissive to Mary and Joseph (cf. [Luke 2:51](#)). But now that he was a man, he was subject only to the authority of the Father.

Mary's recognition of this enabled her to subject herself to Jesus and his will.

Verse 6 states, **“Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.”**

John noted an important detail. The jars were not clay or ceramic. They were jars that were made of stone.

[Leviticus 11:33](#) states, “And if any of them [that is, an unclean animal] falls into any earthenware vessel, all that is in it shall be unclean, and you shall break it.”

However, stone jars did not contract ceremonial uncleanness. So, stone jars were very valuable.

It also made stone jars more suitable for **“Jewish rites of purification.”**

So, the **“six stone water jars”** held between 120 and 180 gallons of water.

Some scholars doubted the authenticity of what took place at the wedding in Cana. They said that Cana was a poor little village and people could never have



owned valuable stone jars. Stone jars were much more expensive than earthenware jars.

However, recent archaeology has vindicated the Biblical account because stone jars have been discovered in the region of Cana.

Liberal scholars in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries often criticized various Biblical accounts. But as more archaeological digs have taken place, one account after another has been vindicated as accurate.

We should never doubt the accuracy of God's word.

We read in verses 7-8, **“Jesus said to the servants, ‘Fill the jars with water.’ And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, ‘Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.’ So they took it.”**

Jesus gave the wedding servants three simple commands: **“Fill,” “draw,”** and **“take.”**

The servants obeyed Jesus' commands. Somewhere between filling and taking it to the master of the feast the water was changed into wine.

A potential social humiliation was turned into a glorious celebration.

We then read in verses 9-10, **“When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, ‘Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.’ ”**

The **“master of the feast”** was like a chief steward or head waiter. It was his task to see to the comfort and well-being of the guests. Contaminated food or wine, or a shortage of either, could bring possible harm to the guests and great embarrassment to the host family.

However, the master of the feast was very surprised at the quality of the wine that Jesus had produced. He expressed his surprise to the bridegroom that the custom had been reversed. The best of the wine was usually served early. But in this case, the superior wine was served later when the guests' tastes were somewhat dulled.

Now, some have asked why Jesus' first sign was turning water into wine. Why didn't Jesus do something really dramatic? Why not start with the feeding of the multitude? Or the raising of Lazarus?

Jesus' first sign shows us that there was to be a transition from the old covenant to the new covenant. The jars of purification showed the people that they were sinners in need of constant cleansing. That is what the old covenant reminded them to do.

However, in the new covenant, Jesus was going to provide a feast for his people. Wine was a sign of joy. Wine was a sign of feasting.

Turning the water into wine showed that Jesus was the one who initiates the new covenant. And that new covenant will be filled with joy and feasting and wine.

#### IV. Jesus Elicited a Response (2:11)

And fourth, Jesus elicited a response.

Verse 11 states, **“This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.”**

John used the word **“sign”** rather than “miracle” or “wonder,” which the other Gospel writers used.

John carefully noted that the miracle of turning water into wine was **“the first of his signs.”** That means that any miracle attributed to Jesus before this one is false.

John said that the sign **“manifested his glory.”** In this case, it was pointing to Jesus as the Logos (1:14) who was with God and was God and was sent from God to show the contrast between the insipid water of the old life (signified by the water in the stone water jars) and the richness of the new life in Christ (signified by the wine now in the stone water jars).

John also noted that after Jesus did this sign **“his disciples believed in him.”** That was the purpose of writing his Gospel. John wrote his Gospel to show how people came to believe in Jesus.

For example, John wrote in [John 2:23](#), “Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.”

As I mentioned earlier, John concluded his Gospel with these words in [John 20:3-31](#), “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.”

## Conclusion

When Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper on the night of his betrayal, he said this when he drank the cup of wine, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” ([Matthew 26:27b-29](#)).

Jesus will not drink wine until all believers are with him in his Father’s kingdom. And that will take place in what Scripture calls “the marriage supper of the Lamb.” We read about it in [Revelation 19:6-9](#):

“Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure’—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true words of God.’ ”

You have been invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

At this wedding feast, there will be joy and delight.

All sin will be gone. All pain will be gone. All suffering will be gone.

Jesus’ first sign teaches us that Jesus is the Christ who initiates the new covenant.

He invites you to join him at this feast.

How do you do so?

You can join Jesus at this feast when you believe that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." Amen.