

“By Believing You May Have Life in His Name”

Scripture Readings: Ezekiel 47:9-10; John 20:30-31; 21:3-14 (text)

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Dear congregation of Christ: Today is our last meditation on the Gospel of John. It has been a most edifying series, as we journeyed through the Gospel of Jesus' beloved disciple. John demonstrates to his Jewish readers that Jesus is the promised Messiah, who fulfilled all of the Old Testaments pictures of the Temple, priests, feasts, prophets, kings. John also shows how Jesus is the Son of God who was sent by God the Father to reveal the only true God so that sinners will be saved from slavery to sin and death.

Our text today is the purpose statement of John's Gospel. It is an evangelistic purpose, witnessing to us that all the signs or miracles that Jesus performed are for the salvation of all who would believe because of the signs. And by believing, they will receive eternal life. Many teachers say that the Gospel can be divided into two parts: The Book of Signs (Chapters 2-12) and the Book of Glory (Chapters 13-21). The Book of Signs consists of seven signs, while the Book of Glory is about Christ's exaltation in his death and resurrection. Although John says that Jesus performed many other “signs” that he did not write about, each of these seven signs were specifically designated by John as a “sign.”

What are signs? In John's Gospel, a sign can be miraculous, but it does not have to be. John does not use the word “miracle,” but the word “sign.” The original Greek word translated as “sign” often means an event that indicates or confirms an intervention by God and that God is at work in that event. The word “miracle” is actually from the Greek word *dunamis*, which means “power” (as in dynamite). So these two words have different meanings, as in Hebrews 2:4, where it says that God bore witness to his gospel “*by signs and wonders and various miracles.*” Both in the Old and New Testaments, the purpose of signs is to validate that those who are sent by God to reveal his word are truly from God. So in the Gospel of John, the seven signs – plus many others not written – authenticate Jesus as the true Messiah sent by God.

Jesus performed these seven signs before his death and resurrection. But after his resurrection, he performed one more sign that was not specifically called a “sign” by John. Still, this last sign again validated his Messiahship. These signs not only showed that he is truly God, but they elicited faith from the many who witnessed them.

So we will meditate on this theme, “**By Believing You May Have Life in His Name**,” under three headings: first, **The Seven Signs - From Old to New**; second, **The Last Sign - A New Creation**; and third, **Signs, Faith, and Eternal Life**.

The Seven Signs – From Old to New

Let us first summarize these seven signs. Jesus performed them not only to validate his claim to be the Messiah sent by God, but also to demonstrate that he came to fulfill all the Old Testament temple, priesthood, festivals and sacrifices.

In John 2:1-11, Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding at Cana, “*the first of his signs.*” He used six stone water jars used for ceremonial purification rites. When a person became unclean under the Old Testament ceremonial laws, such as touching the dead or after a woman gives birth, he or she had to ceremonially purified with the use of water. Jesus was

showing the people that the time of ceremonial purification has ceased, and the time of the purification from sin through the work of the Messiah has come. The righteousness that he brings is like “new wine” in fresh wineskins (Matt 9:17). The old priesthood is disappearing with his coming as the great High Priest.

His next sign is the rebuilding of the temple in three days, following his cleansing of the temple in 2:12-17. The Jews asked him, “*What sign do you show us for doing these things?*” They wanted to know on whose authority he did this. Jesus said he is able to raise the temple in three days after it was destroyed. The actual destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 signified the end of the Old Testament temple, its priesthood, and its ceremonies. John commented that after Jesus’ resurrection, the disciples realized that Jesus was referring to his body, which would be raised from the grave in three days after he was crucified for the sins of his people.

In the third sign, the healing of the official’s son in John 4:46-54, Jesus demonstrated that he is the Lord who “*heals all your diseases*” (Psa 103:3). He is the coming Messiah, the Servant of the Lord who would heal his people by his wounds on the cross (Isa 53:5). Matthew 8:17 says that when Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons, it was to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 53:4, “*Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.*”

The fourth sign he performed was at a pool called Bethesda, where he healed a man who was paralyzed from birth (John 5:1-15). Because Jesus healed this man on a Sabbath, the Jews were furious at him. But Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, “*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath*” (Mark 2:27-28). Jesus is saying to them that God instituted one day every seven days as a gift to man for his physical and spiritual refreshment. More importantly, he was showing them that the time of the old Sabbath has ended because he has come to give eternal Sabbath rest to all who would believe in him.

In John 6:1-15, Jesus fed 5,000 people with only two fish and five loaves of bread. The manna from heaven and water from the rock that God provided for them in the wilderness were mere foreshadows of him. By this fifth sign, Jesus showed the Jews that he is the True Food and True Drink from heaven. While this food satisfied their hunger and thirst, Jesus’ body and blood nourishes our souls to eternal life.

The sixth sign that Jesus performed is the healing of the man blind from birth in John 9. Again, he did this on a Sabbath, provoking condemnation again from the Jews. And again, he was fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy of the coming Messiah’s work of “*recovering of sight to the blind*” (Isa 61:2; Luke 4:18). He did give sight to the blind, but to illustrate that sinners are spiritually blind, without knowledge of who he was, unable and unwilling to accept the true Messiah. So he rebuked them, “*For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind*” (John 9:39). These unrepentant Jews were already under judgment.

The seventh and last sign is the raising of his friend Lazarus from the dead in John 11. When the Jewish leaders heard about this, they were very concerned that Jesus had gathered a big following, saying, “*What are we to do? For this man performs many signs*” (John 11:47). But the high priest Caiaphas had a solution, “*it is better for you that one man should die for the people*” (John 11:50). So the Jews executed their wicked plan, crucifying Jesus. So Caiaphas’ solution became a fulfillment of Jesus’ mission: that one man should die for all the sins of all his people. The raising of Lazarus is fitting as Christ’s last sign, because it was merely a foretaste

of his own resurrection. And his own resurrection is only the firstfruits of the resurrection of all believers. Our physical resurrection is also an illustration of our salvation from sin and death. We who are spiritually dead in sin have been given eternal life through faith in Christ.

Therefore, in all of these seven signs before his death, Jesus demonstrated that he is the Messiah sent by God to fulfill the foreshadows of the Old Testament temple, priesthood, sacrifices and ceremonies. But there is one last sign he performed, and this one was after his resurrection.

The Last Sign – A New Beginning

After the disciples have seen the resurrected Jesus in Jerusalem, they went back to Galilee. Seven of the disciples went fishing at night, but they caught nothing. As dawn was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not recognize him, for it was still dark. Jesus asked them if they have any fish, and they said no. Jesus told them to cast their net on the right side of the boat, and so they did. And just like that, they caught a great amount of fish, but the net was not even torn.

John did not call this a sign, but it was still a miracle, for how did Jesus know that there are many fish on the right side? Or maybe he created or called this many fish on the right side. Again, in this miracle, Jesus demonstrates to them that he is God who is the all-knowing, all-powerful Creator. The seven signs before his death all pointed forward to his conquest of death and sin by his resurrection. The Old Testament temple, priesthood and sacrifices were foreshadows of what Christ would do in the New Testament.

Ezekiel's vision of a river with its headwaters beginning at the New Temple and teeming with fish (Ezk 47:9) is starting to be symbolically fulfilled by this great catch of fish. This sign also points to the disciples' coming work. These "*fishermen will stand beside the sea... a place for the spreading of nets*" (Ezk 47:10). They will preach the gospel to all the nations, and they will haul in a great catch of believers in Christ. As fishers of men, their net would be full with "many kinds" of fish. Jesus was done in preparing them, and they are now ready to receive the Holy Spirit to empower them for this great task ahead. Three times, Jesus asks Peter, who represented the disciples, to feed and look after his sheep. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and now they will be his undershepherds.

When Jesus had breakfast with them, John writes, "*Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them*" (verse 13). These same words recall the night of the Passover meal when Matthew writes, "*Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body'*" (Mat 26:26). By the regular breaking of bread, the disciples will not only remember the sacrificial death of their Savior Jesus Christ, but also be spiritually nourished by his body broken and blood shed on the cross. We too will be spiritually nourished by the regular partaking of the Lord's Supper so that we may be equipped for harvesting a great haul of fish in our community and in all the nations.

And we are equipped today for this great task, not by having power to do signs and wonders, but by God's Word and the Spirit. Through them, many will believe.

Signs, Faith and Eternal Life

The Gospel of John seems to end in verses 30-31, where he writes his purpose statement:

“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.”

There’s no mistaking that this was the end of John’s Gospel. But why is there another chapter after this? Some scholars believe that Chapter 21 is a later addition, but there is hardly any evidence for this. It’s more plausible that John himself added Chapter 21 later, and wrote another conclusion:

“Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25).

John says that he only wrote about selected signs that Jesus performed, but he adds in some texts that Jesus did many others that he did not write about. So when Nicodemus talked to Jesus, he said, *“no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him”* (John 3:2; see also 2:23; 4:45). Nicodemus, like many others, believed that Jesus is God because of these signs. John magnifies Jesus in saying that the world could not contain all of the stories of the signs that Jesus did.

So after each of the seven signs, John would write about the resulting belief. After he turned water into wine, *“his disciples believed in him”* (John 2:11). After the disciples realized that Jesus was speaking about his resurrection as the rebuilt Temple, they *“believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken”* (John 2:22). The official whose son was healed *“believed, and all his household”* (John 4:53). After Jesus healed the lame man, he told him, *“whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life”* (John 5:24). After the 5,000 was fed, they said, *“This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”* (John 6:14). After Jesus gave sight to the man blind from birth, the man said, *“Lord, I believe,”* and the man worshiped him (John 9:36-38). Finally, after Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave, many of the Jews *“who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him”* (John 11:45).

Dear friends, this faith in Christ as the Messiah and Savior sent by God was necessary for salvation. And those who have true faith are given eternal life, a truth that we all have memorized, *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16).

But now that the apostles are gone, the signs and wonders that they have done in the Book of Acts are also gone. How will people believe today? Just like you and me, the elect will believe when they hear the Word of God, the Gospel of Christ, preached, because *“faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ”* (Rom 10:17), not through signs and wonders. This age is an age of faith, not by sight. We don’t believe because we have seen miracles, but because we have heard the true gospel preached. And when we have heard, the Holy Spirit changes our hearts so we may believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior and repent of our sins.

Sinner, do you believe the words of God in John’s Gospel? Do you believe that Jesus was able to perform these signs because he is God himself? Do you believe that Jesus is the only Savior who can deliver you from your bondage to sin and death? Do you believe that Jesus died and rose again from the dead to save sinners, and that you may be one of them? *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!*