

Signs and Miracles

I hope you all are refreshed and ready for another week of homework. Last week was fascinating, and I learned so much about what a lightning rod our Savior is! It seems no one can come into contact with him without some sparks flying! This week we will follow Jesus in his ministry observing the signs and miracles that abound. We will begin with the wedding in Cana and be astounded by the miraculous event that occurs among the water jars. Next we will accompany Jesus on his return to Nazareth and the beginning of his ministry in Galilee. Then we will return to Capernaum where we witness Jesus, with power and authority, cast out demons. As news of him spreads throughout the region, we will be joined by more and more of the hurt, sick and lost seeking his miracles and his teachings. It promises to be an interesting week of signs and miracles.

Heavenly Father, be with each one of these ladies this week as they pursue your word. Let them know how proud you are of each one devoting their time and efforts to study and seeking to know you better. Let them hear your voice of encouragement and feel your presence. – Amen!

Water Jugs and Wine Glasses

This is one of my favorite stories about Jesus. It never ceases to amaze me that Jesus' response to our need is overwhelming. It is beyond what we perceive to be our immediate needs. In fact I think he takes much pleasure in being able to bless us beyond our expectations – one only has to be open to receiving those blessings!

Little needs to be said to introduce this wonderful story. Let's just say a few words to thank the Lord for the opportunity to spend time in his Word, learn about his love for us, and his desire to meet our needs beyond our expectations!



Let's join Jesus, his family and friends at a wedding celebration. Read John 2:1-11 and answer the following questions.

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Describe the containers Jesus tells the servants to fill, and their original purpose.

What did the master of the banquet say about the wine in verse 10?

"This, the first of his miraculous _____, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee...." (John 2:11a)

✂ This miracle is a sign and illustrates something about who Jesus is and what he has come to reveal about the kingdom of God. Think for a minute about what you think this sign reveals and write a few sentences about it. (See also Jeremiah 31:12; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13-14; John 3:16-17, 10:10)

Weddings in Jesus' time were week-long celebrations where not only the bridal couple's family and friends joined the celebration, but the whole town as well. Enormous quantities of food and wine would be needed and was provided by the bride and groom's family and friends. If the wine had run out it would have been a great source of embarrassment and humiliation. Mary discreetly calls Jesus' attention to the failure of the wine. It is not likely she was asking for a miracle – John makes it very clear in his gospel that this is the first miracle performed by Jesus. Mary was asking her son to do something before embarrassment was brought upon the bridal families. Perhaps she hoped Jesus knew where he and his friends could go find some more, but clearly she trusted in her son to do whatever he could to help.

Jesus response of *"Dear Woman, why do you involve me?"* may sound harsh to modern ears, but the term "woman" is a term of endearment in the 1st century. The rest of his statement "Why do you involve me?" is more curious. Is he saying, "What have I got to do with this? Refreshments are women's work." Or, perhaps he saying, "Why trouble me with this? I'm enjoying myself, I will not run about submitting myself to your authority in the presence of all these people. I am the man of the house." I think more likely there is a tension between who is in authority. Does Mary have the authority to instruct her son on what he ought to do, or does authority reside with Jesus and he won't submit to his mother's rule. The allusion to "my time

has not yet come” leads one to think ahead to Jesus future work of redemption and submission to the authority of God and his plan for salvation. I believe these words do carry a gentle rebuke to his mother that it is not her place to tell him what to do and she must remember that authority rests with him. Mary is learning a lesson that his authority is over not only earthly matters (domestic and social), but spiritual matters, as well. But Jesus intervenes, not in compliance, but in concert with her wishes in order to prevent upcoming humiliation and pain because of who he is – his Father’s son, full of grace and truth. Despite the gentle rebuke, Mary’s submission to Jesus and her faith in his ability to do *something* about the wine shortage is evident in her instructions to the servants to do whatever he tells them to do.

As instructed by Jesus, the servants fill the stone jars (each holding somewhere between 20-30 gallons of water, an immense amount of wine!) with water and to present a portion to the banquet master. What is significant about this event is that Jesus used stone jars set aside for the specific use of ceremonial washing in which to make wine. It draws attention to Jesus making way for the new order of the kingdom of God by transforming the old ways. Vessels “sanctified” for ceremonial washing – ritual legalism, are transformed to vessels of abundant blessing. And water so vital to life becomes wine a sign of abundant life and God’s blessing upon Israel in the Old Testament.

Before Jesus came with his good news of forgiveness, restoration and righteousness, the Jews knew only one way to achieve righteousness with God. Their adherence to demanding rituals were what they understood to make them acceptable to God. The ceremonial hand washing made them clean before God. The understanding that nothing they could physically *do* was enough to merit righteousness was inconceivable. By grace and faith comes salvation as an unearned gift was unheard of despite testimony in their own Torah. They had forgotten that righteousness had been credited Abraham because of his faith, not anything he had done (Gen 15:6). David too speaks of the blessings of righteousness given by God, not earned by works in his Psalm (32:1-2). Just as Jesus transformed stone jars to vessels of abundant blessing, he does the same with each one of us when we come to believe in his ability and willingness to forgive and cleanse us of our sins, purify us, restore us, and transform us into vessels of abundant blessings for his kingdom. It is not by ceremonial water that we are cleansed of sin, but by the Living Water, Jesus Christ.

As I mentioned above, I love the fact that our Savior doesn’t enter into our lives at just the last second to give us the bare minimum of what we need. He comes in mightily, (although here, somewhat discreetly, but still with power and might) to transform a potentially painful situation into one over pouring with abundant blessing. He doesn’t say, “This is good enough to get you through whatever trifling problem you may be encountering today.” He says, “Let me show you how much I love you. I will bless you in ways you can’t even conceive if you will only come to me and tell me what you think you lack.”¹

¹ Based on Psalm 81:10,16

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"...He thus revealed his glory, and his _____ put their faith in him." (John 2:11b)

It is important to note that Jesus' sign wasn't for everyone, just those with eyes to see and hearts ready to accept who he is. Not everyone portrayed in John's gospel comes to an understanding of who Jesus is. Only those with insight were able to perceive what Jesus was revealing about himself through this sign. Beginnings of understanding something of the nature of Jesus' divinity were coming together for the disciples. It was not all there yet, but piece by piece, sign by sign, Jesus was leading them to understand the full ramifications of who the Son of Man is, who the Savior is, and what He will one day do.

A Disappointing Return Home

Last week we saw Jesus baptized and anointed for his ministry and then promptly tested in the desert. Nothing reveals the strength of one's character and faith than a time spent alone in the desert (metaphorically speaking!). Satan looks for those opportunities when we are stripped of our support system – our family, friends, church, those we depend upon in the hardest moments and those we turn to in joy and celebration. Jesus was victorious because he knew his father was with him, he was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1) and he knew his adversary from the beginning of time. Times of testing often come after times of celebration. Jesus had been at a spiritual highpoint at the Jordan River, and then faced a low point of testing in the desert. In our reading for today we will see a similar parallel to a lesser degree.

After his time in the desert, Luke tells us *"Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him."* (Luke 4:14-15)

After his victory in the desert, Jesus returned to Galilee to teach. Word spread about him, people came to hear him, and we can infer from verse 4:23 that he was also healing the sick. His ministry is taking off and he has a following – then he returns to Nazareth. Today we will spend our time focusing on how Jesus was received in his hometown. Throughout our study we have noted that Jesus has a strong effect on those with whom he encounters. He pierces the heart of each person he comes in contact with and is either accepted or rejected almost immediately. The events that occur in Nazareth, his hometown are no different. Surely those he has grown up with and known since childhood would be the first to rejoice at his homecoming, wouldn't they? Let's say a little prayer for wisdom and understanding of today's scripture passage and then open our Bibles and see what transpires.



Luke 4: 14-30

The key to understanding today's passage is a good grasp of verses 14 and 15. Fill in the missing blanks. Think about each element of these two verses and write down in a few words the significance of the statements.

¹⁴Jesus returned to Galilee in the _____ of the _____,
and news about him spread through the _____.

¹⁵He _____ in their synagogues, and everyone _____ him.

Jesus went into the synagogue to read the scriptures before the congregation. Just as he had done elsewhere in his ministry, Jesus read the scriptures and then prepared to teach from them. The passage he read was from Isaiah and spoke of the coming of the Kingdom of God. The Isaiah passage distinctly outlines Jesus ministry. The Spirit of the Lord is clearly upon Jesus – evident by the authority with which he speaks and the miracles he performs. He is proclaiming to the congregation before him that “*the year of the Lord's favor*” is before them if they choose to believe what he is telling them. Jesus had come to offer healing and salvation, the restoration of a relationship with God. This is the Good News, the Gospel, the coming of the long awaited Kingdom of God.

What does verse 22 tell us of the two-fold response Jesus received to his proclamation?

- 1.
- 2.

There is a distinct shift in the response of those listening to Jesus words. First they are “amazed at the gracious words”. The word “amazed” is translated from the Greek word *thaumazo*, meaning “admire, have in admiration, marvel, wonder.”² It is the same word Luke uses in 2:18 describing the reaction the Shepherds received in telling of the appearance of the heavenly host and the announcement of the birth of the Savior. The congregation in the synagogue hearing Jesus speak with authority were stuck slack-jawed with amazement. They were utterly astounded by what they were hearing. But in the man standing before them they saw the boy Jesus who grew up among them and began to doubt. They questioned, “Isn't this Joseph's son?” They had known Jesus and Mary and Joseph for his entire life. They had seen him running about and playing with the other boys in town. They had seen young Jesus following in his father's footsteps surely to become a carpenter like his father. What was the son of a carpenter doing speaking in this manner? They

² Strong's

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thought, "It is Joseph's *son*, a carpenter, not a schooled and learned teacher, certainly not the awaited Messiah!" He was like any other boy-become-a- man in Nazareth. Jesus, full of the power of the Holy Spirit, who was ready to open the doors of the Kingdom of Heaven to his family and friends, ready to teach, turn hearts, heal and save, recognized the doubt murmuring throughout the congregation.

Jesus next statement to them in verse 23 is something of a rebuke. What does he say they'd heard about him in Capernaum?

✧ Why do you think Jesus is rebuking them for what he knows they are thinking?

Read verses 24-27 again, what is the gist of what Jesus is saying to them?

What was the response of Jesus' words to the congregation?

In both cases Elijah and Elisha, were prophets of God. (Remember, a prophet is one who speaks with a message from God and with the authority of God as God himself is speaking through the prophet.) They came to the Jews with a specific message from God, and the Jews rejected the message. The prophets, in both cases were sent to Gentiles to speak the word of God and minister to them with miraculous healings, the miracles attesting to the power of God behind the words spoken by the prophets. God's salvation plan has always included the whole world. God chose one nation to be a light to the rest of the world, to draw the world to God. Israel viewed their position as God's chosen people as an exclusive privilege, not as the responsibility of drawing the world into a relationship with God. Their exclusive view of the world grew over the generations into a prejudice against all gentiles. They believed that God's promises and salvation were for the Jews alone. Jesus' response implied that the blessings of the Kingdom of God were not only for the Jews, but would also be for the gentiles. This implication drove the Jews into a fury. In fact the word "furious" is translated from the Greek word "*thymos*", meaning: *passion* (as if

breathing hard), fierceness, indignation, wrath.³ In a matter of moments the crowd shifted from praising to deadly wrath. The people in the synagogue drove Jesus out to a bluff to push him off and presumably stone him for claiming that the Kingdom of God had come with him, and that the blessings of the kingdom would be given to the gentiles. This mob was out for his blood. Images of men with pitchforks and torches going through the town made famous by Hollywood is not unlike what is described here.

The final verse telling us that Jesus just walked through the crowd should seem nothing less than miraculous. It was not yet time for Jesus to die. His ministry was not yet finished. Providence would not permit his death until the appropriate time.

Jesus Teaches with Authority

Jesus may not have had the reception he was looking for in Nazareth, but he appears to have been well received in Capernaum. Perhaps it is hardest for those who knew Jesus the longest to see him in a new light doing something with his life so drastically different than what had been expected of a young carpenter. Our scriptures today tell us that he and his disciples next went to Capernaum. Capernaum lies on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was an important town in Galilee and was on the main road from Egypt to Mesopotamia. It was the home of several of his disciples and seems to have become his home away from home. Jesus spent much time in Capernaum during his ministry. Today's lesson takes place not long after his ministry began and the calling of his disciples. He evidently had been teaching and healing in the vicinity and had already begun to establish a following.



Turn to Mark 1: 21-28. Read the passage and answer the questions.

Where did Jesus go next?

With whom? (Glance back at verses 16-20)

What day was it and where did they go for Jesus to do what?

Complete the following verse: *The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had _____, not as the teachers of the law.* (v. 22)

³ Strong's

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✂ What do you think it means that he taught "as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law"?

✂ Why do you think the evil spirit (also translated, demon) chose this moment to respond vehemently to Jesus' presence and authority?

What was the sign in this passage and what did it reveal about Jesus?

Capernaum was the hometown of the four disciples, Simon (Peter), Andrew, James and John. It was common practice for visiting teachers to be invited by the ruler of the synagogue to come teach on the Sabbath. Jesus taught on the basis of his own authority without citing respected scholars as the teachers of the law would have done. Jesus had no need to support his teaching with the scholarship of past illustrious rabbis. He was the supreme authority on the matter and it show through in his teaching. This is evidenced by the fact that those in attendance were "amazed" (– the Greek word *ekplesso*, meaning to strike with astonishment⁴) at what he taught. He hadn't even done a miracle to "prove" his authority. The audience recognized it in what they heard.

Jesus authority provoked an unexpected response. Through a man in the congregation, a demon shrieked out: *"What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God!"* (v. 24). The demon's words convey some interesting meaning, let's look at this response phrase by phrase. *"What do you want with us"* is significant in two parts. First, notice the plural "us". This does not mean that the demon is speaking of itself and the man it indwells, but of the *all* the demonic forces. Second, the whole phrase itself is of an idiomatic nature expressing incompatibility of opposing forces.⁵ This same phrase is used again in Mark 5:7 when Jesus confronts another evil spirit. Demonic forces cannot coexist in the same realm with Jesus and the Kingdom of God. In fact, one opinion of why there is little or no evidence of demonic possession today is that Jesus won a decisive, although not yet total, victory over it. ⁶

⁴ Strong's

⁵ BKC

⁶ NAC

The next phrase “*Have you come to destroy us?*” has the same plural “us”, again referring to demonic forces, not to the single evil spirit and the man it indwells. “Have you come” implies “come (enter, pass) into this world”. Destroy obviously meaning to “to ruin, annihilate, destruct, destroy fully”. Jesus was the ultimate threat to their power and activity.

Finally, the evil spirit claims to know exactly who Jesus is. He is “*the Holy One of God*”. The evil spirit knows something that mankind, including the disciples are slow to recognize. But being of the spiritual realm (demons being fallen angels) they know from where Jesus came and from where his power and authority derive. The evil spirit publicly attested to the identity of Jesus.

Jesus’ response, “Be quiet!” is a translation of a forceful Greek word meaning to “be muzzled or silenced”. The evil spirit had no alternative than to submit and depart as Jesus commanded. This incident is the first of many records of Jesus’ battle with Satan and the demonic forces in the Bible. It illustrates that his authority over evil spirits was evidence that God’s rule had come in Jesus.

The response of the people was that they were amazed. (There’s that word again!) They were amazed at his unique, authoritative and new teaching (“*The time has come...The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!*” Mark 1:15). They were astonished that with one word he could command demonic forces and they could only obey. It is not surprising that word of him soon spread over all of Galilee.

Jesus’ Ministry Grows

All this week we have been following Jesus around Galilee as he has not only demonstrated with wondrous signs where his power and authority comes; but have also witnessed his love and compassion that none should suffer whether it is emotional humiliation, physical pain and illness, or spiritual oppression. Jesus came to heal and restore all people. The gospels are full of wonderful stories of his healing and compassion and this week we touched only on a few. Today’s lesson we will see that Jesus healed many all over Galilee and beyond. These passages are a summary of what he did and where he went, but they contain important verses the significance of which can be easily missed. Today we will take a little time over these verses and see what treasures await! If you haven’t already, pray for a few minutes asking the Lord to bless you in your studying today, giving you insight and hunger to pursue His Word. God bless you for persevering in your studies! It surely pleases him greatly to see you with your nose tucked in His Word!

*"Who do you say I am?":
A Study of Jesus*



Our first reading for today will focus on Mark 1:35-39. To give a little more context to this passage I recommend starting back in verse 29. You will see that today's reading is a continuation of the passage we just studied previously in the synagogue at Capernaum. Context is always so important when studying the Bible, it supplies clues that lead to a deeper and fuller understanding of the scriptures.

What is the time frame of today's scripture reading (v35-39)?

What does verse 32 tell us that Jesus had been doing the night before? Do you think it may have been a long night?

What does Jesus do early that morning (v.35)?

Complete Jesus' words in verse 38: *"Let us go somewhere else--to the nearby villages--so I can preach there also. _____."*

What are the two things it says Jesus did in verse 39?

✂ Going back to verse 35 for a moment, what do you think is the significance of this verse in terms of what Jesus had been doing, and would be doing later that day? And, what lesson can you take from Jesus' example.



Next we will spend just a few minutes in the Gospel of Matthew looking at a few verses in Chapter 4. Read verses 23 through 25 and answer the following questions about where Jesus taught and healed.

Where did news about Jesus spread?

Verse 25 lists where crowds came from to follow him. List those places.

According to Easton's Illustrated Dictionary, the Decapolis refers to "a district on the east and south-east of the Sea of Galilee containing "ten cities," which were chiefly inhabited by Greeks. It included a portion of Bashan and Gilead, and is mentioned three times in the New Testament (Mat 4:25; Mark 5:20; Mark 7:31). These cities were Scythopolis, i.e., "city of the Scythians", (ancient Bethshean, the only one of the ten cities on the west of Jordan), Hippos, Gadara, Pella (to which the Christians fled just before the destruction of Jerusalem), Philadelphia (ancient Rabbath-ammon), Gerasa, Dion, Canatha, Raphana, and Damascus. When the Romans conquered Syria (B.C. 65) they rebuilt, and endowed with certain privileges, these "ten cities," and the province connected with them they called "Decapolis."

On the map, find as many of the cities of the Decapolis as you can, as well as the regions mentioned in Matthew 4:25 (that you listed above), Syria, Nazareth, Cana, and Capernaum. Take a moment or two to think about all the places it says Jesus traveled and the sheer number of people he would have come in contact with.

In the definition above, who chiefly inhabited the Decapolis and what does it signify?

Did you notice that it says the cities (of the Decapolis) "were chiefly inhabited by Greeks?" I find that very interesting. Certainly Jesus went to the synagogues to preach, but almost as certainly those who came to hear him were not all Jews. In the first century it was not uncommon for "God-fearers" to be associated with synagogues in various predominately Greek towns. "God-fearers" were Greeks who had come to follow Jewish traditions but had not made the full commitment of converting to Judaism. It should not then be surprising that we find mention of healings of non-Jews in the Gospels. (For example the story of the faithful Centurion comes to mind in Matthew 8:5-13) Jesus' message of forgiveness and the love of God was for all people willing to accept it, Jews and Gentiles both.

✂ Notice that where ever Jesus goes to teach about the kingdom of God being near, his teaching is accompanied by healings. As we studied all this week, what is the meaning of those signs?

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I hope you found this week's homework as fascinating as I did. It just amazes me that in such a brief period of time Jesus went so many places filled not only with the power and authority of God, but also the love and compassion of the Father. He truly is just as John described him: *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."* (John 1:14) I hope that as you read about our Lord's love and compassion that you know it is for you as well. He came because he dearly loves and values each one of us, and wants to restore each and every one of us back into a blessed relationship with the Father. It is too much for even one of us to perish. He came for all so that not even one be lost. God bless each one of you for persevering through yet another week of our study of Jesus. May your time in His Word bless you in ways you never expected and give you an unquenchable hunger for His Word!

Take a few minutes to reflect upon what you have learned this week. You have studied so hard and so well, surely the Lord has revealed something that has touched your heart. Write a few words in the space below reflecting what God has revealed to you this week, or write a prayer of thanksgiving.