

John's 7 Signs

The word gospel means “*good news*.” Although every one of the sixty-six books in the Bible contains good news, there are four books that we call gospels because they chronicle the life and ministry of Jesus. That’s why you’ve likely heard the phrase, “*The Gospel of Jesus Christ*.” These four books are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Two of these gospels are eyewitness accounts, Matthew, and John’s, while Mark and Luke are records by men who interviewed eye-witnesses. The gospels are written in narrative style, which means they are written as a matter of fact, detailing who, what, when, where, and why; the same way a newspaper reporter would write about an event. The gospels, like other narrative books in the Bible, record the good, the bad, and the ugly; true accounts of conversations, behaviors (regardless of how disturbing), and the consequences that follow.

Of the four gospels, John’s is unique in that he emphasizes “signs” of Jesus that serve to remove any doubt as to whether or not Jesus is God. Of course all of the gospels detail numerous miracles and teachings of Jesus, all with the aim of bringing the reader to the same conclusion; Jesus is God, and entrusting yourself to Jesus results in salvation. However, the first half of John’s gospel magnifies seven miracles/signs in particular.

Sometimes numbers in the Bible have a special significance. The number seven was important to John and to Jews as a whole. Seven symbolized perfection, completion, fulfillment, and wholeness. A reader of John’s gospel will see a “completeness” from all seven signs, providing a type of 360-degree panoramic view of Jesus’ authority over all elements of reality. This essay aims to highlight the seven signs from John’s gospel that reveal specific truths about Jesus’ divine identity.

Here are the seven signs in chronological order; 1. Water to Wine (John 2:1-11). 2. Healing the Royal Official’s Son (John 4:46-54). 3. Healing a Paralytic on the Sabbath (John 5:1-17). 4. Feeding the Five Thousand (John 6:1-15). 5. Walking on Water (John 6:16-21). 6. Healing the Man Born Blind (John 9:1-41). 7. Raising Lazarus from the Dead (John 11:1-47).

John’s gospel doesn’t pretend that these seven signs are Jesus’ only miracles, as John notes that Jesus did many other miracles within the same periods of time (John 3:2 and 4:45). In fact, John 21:25 says, “***And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.***” These seven signs are given particular attention, being more broadly detailed, and cover the spectrum of things that you would expect a divine being to be able to do. A couple of things to note about these signs is that each one is a miracle and each of them is done publicly. As the seven miracles build, eventually signaling Jesus’ power over death by raising Lazarus, people are brought to a more clear understanding of who Jesus is.

While these seven miracles are broadly agreed upon as the rightful seven signs in John’s gospel, some have suggested that a more accurate list of the seven signs would see us remove Jesus’ walking on water and replace it with Jesus’ cleansing of the temple. I don’t think that’s fitting though, as the cleansing of the temple (which happened twice) did not involve any miracle, and a miracle is one of the criteria when evaluating the signs in John’s gospel. The temple cleansing was a public act, but when members of the Sanhedrin confronted Jesus about His behavior, they asked Him for a sign in order to validate and justify what He was doing. Jesus answered them, “***Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.***” In saying this, Jesus was symbolically connecting the temple with His own body and prophesying about His own resurrection to come.

This leads us to ask, “*Why isn’t the resurrection of Jesus one of the signs, or the seventh sign?*” It’s important to understand that signs point us to something, and the resurrection is not a sign that points to something outside of itself. Instead, the resurrection is the destination that the other signs point to. Certainly Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is a stand-alone event and puts an exclamation mark on His ministry and identity. In short, the resurrection is not a means to an end, but it is the end; nothing more need to be said or done in Jesus’ earthly ministry.

Consider the conclusion of Nicodemus, who was a member of the Sanhedrin; the seventy-one-person governing body (Supreme Court) over Israel. In John 3:2, Nicodemus admitted to Jesus, “***Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.***” Keep in mind that only one of the seven signs had been accomplished by this point and Nicodemus wasn’t present for it. Nicodemus may have personally witnessed some of Jesus’ other miracles, but at the very least he acknowledges that he and his colleagues were aware of them, and thus the Sanhedrin already could identify Jesus as being sent by God. As you and I have the written account of all seven signs, and beyond, we can certainly conclude that Jesus is God!

Miracles had always been a type of validation that someone was acting on behalf of God. Moses was the mediator of the old covenant and therefore was able to wield signs/miracles as God operated through him. Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant (1 Timothy 2:5), but Christ is infinitely greater than Moses in that Jesus declared things about Himself that Moses could never boast. As each miracle heightens Jesus’ authority, John’s gospel acts as a type of legal argument in a courtroom; compiling one piece of evidence after another that removes any doubt as to who Jesus is. Let’s highlight these seven signs one at a time so that we can see how each one provides a unique glimpse at Jesus’ divine nature.

1. Water Turned to Wine – John 2:1-11

In summary, Jesus was attending a wedding and the wine supply had run out. Keep in mind that Jews celebrated a wedding with seven days of feasting. Jesus’ mother, Mary, who appears to hold the role of hostess, directs the wedding servants to Jesus for help about the wine. Jesus instructs the servants to fill six large stone pots with water, which they did. Then Jesus instructs one of servants to draw out some of the water and take it to the headwaiter. The headwaiter tasted the water, which had become wine before he sipped it. Only the servants and the disciples knew what happened, which resulted in the disciples believing.

This sign reveals Jesus’ transformational power, being able to create something new. Jews used water from these large pots for acts of purification; washing feet. Turning common “*foot water*” into wine displays the transformative nature of Jesus ministry; symbolizing changing from common to magnificent, from uninspiring to joyful, from inferior to abundant quality. Turning water into wine requires changing the essence of what the liquid was; a whole new creation had come forth. This wasn’t taking grape juice and bypassing the time it would take for it to ferment and become finely aged wine. No, this was something different. This was one element becoming something it wasn’t at all and had no way of becoming so if left on its own. This points to what happens in the life of a person when one entrusts Himself to Jesus, as 1 Corinthians 5:17 says, “***Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.***” This miracle also emphasizes the transition from the old covenant to the new covenant and the fulfillment of the prophecies that the Savior has come.

2. Healing the Royal Official's Son - John 4:46-54

In summary, Jesus is once again in Cana, a town in the region of Galilee. Most in Galilee didn't regard Jesus as anyone special, but some regarded Him as some kind of miracle worker. Jesus is approached by a man who was a "royal official," an officer in service of Herod Antipas who was the acting Roman governor over Galilee. Upon hearing that Jesus was in Cana, this royal official traveled about a day's journey from his hometown of Capernaum in hopes to implore Jesus to return with him back to Capernaum where his son was on his death bed. Obviously, the man had some inkling of faith in that he traveled to Cana to find Jesus. However, insisting that Jesus travel back to Capernaum as necessary to bring about the miracle, showed that the man didn't have the proper measure of faith in what Jesus could do. This is evidenced as Jesus groans that this man, like others, asks to see signs and wonders before they will believe. Testing the man's faith with the hopes of stretching it to a proper place, Jesus simply says to the royal official, "**Go, your son lives.**" In other words, Jesus basically says, *"I'm not going to travel back with you. You'll have to simply believe Me when I say that My Word is enough to heal your son."*

With that, the officer heads back to Capernaum. The next day, the officer's servants met him before he arrived home and they were excited to say that his son was healed! Astonished, the officer asks the servants at what hour of the day his son was healed, and they replied that it was yesterday, at 1pm. The officer knew that this was the time that Jesus had said, "**Go, your son lives.**" This caused the officer to believe, and to share his newfound faith with his whole household, who also believed.

This sign reveals that Jesus has authority, simply by the power of His Word, and that His power is not limited by distance. It validates that Jesus' promises are sound. This sign demonstrates that I can trust Jesus immediately even when I don't yet see the finished result. This sign highlights that while a Christian's faith is based on evidence, one's faith doesn't require constant empirical evidence (what I can see and experience) in order to keep pressing on. In other words, what I know about Jesus allows me to proceed with confidence. Faith in Jesus should transcend physical sight and requires stepping out in trust.

3. Healing a Paralytic on the Sabbath - John 5:1-17

This sign has a bit to unpack, as the story is multifaceted. In summary, Jesus is in Jerusalem at the temple grounds. On the north side of the temple is a large pool surrounded by five covered patios. A few times a year, the Holy Spirit would heal individuals in this pool. Anticipating one of these opportunities, people who were sick and lame would surround the pool waiting for the waters to be stirred by the Holy Spirit; whoever got in first after it stirred would be healed. The details of how the Holy Spirit healed through this pool aren't the focus of this story. Rather, Jesus' ministry is the focus. Jesus saw a man by the pool who was lame and Jesus knew he'd been infirmed for 38 years. Jesus asked him if he wished to be made well. The man replied that every time he tried to get into the pool to be healed, someone else stepped in front of him and that he had nobody to help him. Jesus said to him, "**Get up, pick up your pallet and walk.**" Immediately he was healed, but before he could respond to Jesus, Jesus had slipped away, unnoticed by the huge crowd that was there. The healed man picked up his pallet and left.

This healing echoes the healing in the second sign (the royal official's son) in that Jesus healed by simply speaking. Healing the lame man though is a unique sign due to the fact that Jesus heals the man on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a holy day for the Jewish people and it was a day of rest. Going further into the story shows why healing on the Sabbath is such a big deal. It's important to know that in John's gospel, "the Jews" refers to the religious leaders, the members of the Sanhedrin, those in authority over Israel. As it turns

out, the Jews stopped the healed man and questioned him due to his “working” on the Sabbath, since he was carrying his pallet. The healed man said that he was told to carry his pallet by the man who made him well. When the Jews asked him who it was that healed him and told him to work on the sabbath, the man didn’t know who’d done it. It’s true. The healed man didn’t know Jesus and didn’t recognize that it was Jesus who healed him. After Jesus had slipped away, the healed man was left wondering who to thank. The man’s ignorance is evidence that the man wasn’t healed due to any faith, but was healed simply due to Jesus’ compassion for him.

This begs the question, “*Why did Jesus slip away so quickly?*” This is likely due to the huge crowd of sick/lame people all around the pool. It would have been chaos if Jesus had stuck around as all would have pressed into Jesus for a cure. Sure, Jesus could have cured them all, but the point in healing just the one man was to show Jesus’ capabilities while also calling people to extend faith in God without needing a miracle to convince them. In short, Jesus did some miracles and healed some people, but if miracles were common place and everyone got one, we’d dismiss them as ordinary, and we’d feel entitled to be cured.

Jesus wasn’t just concerned about the paralyzed man’s body, but was concerned about the man’s soul. Jesus sought the man out, finding the man in the temple, a place the man wouldn’t have been able to enter previously due to his paralysis. Perhaps the man is in the temple to praise the Lord, believing that God must have sent the person who healed him. Now, face to face again with Jesus, Jesus reveals the man’s greatest problem, which was the man’s spiritual condition. Jesus sternly warns, “***Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.***” The central issue wasn’t the man’s health, but his holiness. Jesus’ words, “***do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you,***” implies that the man’s crippling condition was brought about due to sinful choices, and now that the man has been shown grace, he ought to use this grace to address his sin, or something worse will happen; going to hell! If the man would choose to simply relish in his bodily health and ignore his sinful condition, then he dies and spends eternity in hell. Exposing the man’s sin was a reason Jesus didn’t rebuke him publicly by the pool. Jesus’ rebuke here is further evidence that the man wasn’t healed previously due to any faith in the man’s heart. Jesus implores the man by saying, now that you’ve been healed, believe!

After this encounter with Jesus, the healed man returned to the Jews and told them it was Jesus who’d healed him. Now the Jews start persecuting Jesus, since Jesus had healed on the Sabbath and told the man to carry his pallet on the Sabbath. Jesus’ reply to the Jews is perfect, “***My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.***” In other words, Jesus is saying that God is His father, making Himself equal with God. Additionally, Jesus is saying that He is Lord over the Sabbath and not governed by the Sabbath. Just as the Father in heaven works seven days a week by bringing the rain, rising and setting the sun, and governing the universe, so also Jesus is busy working seven days a week, since He Himself is God! This sign and the conversations that followed resulted in the healed man contemplating his faith, and Jesus being persecuted for the blasphemy of declaring Himself equal with God.

This sign reveals Jesus’ authority over the Sabbath and His equality with the Father in heaven. This sign further reveals that grace and mercy are gifts from God, while showing how incapable we are of believing until God dispensing grace initially. This sign exposes man’s helplessness under the weight of sin and the Law. “***Get up, pick up your pallet and walk (on the Sabbath),***” highlights Jesus’ liberation from the Law and deeds, and “***do not sin anymore,***” highlights Jesus’ liberation from the oppression of sin. Jesus’ statements that accompany this sign reveal a divine knowledge; Jesus knew the man’s condition (38 years) without asking,

Jesus revealed that He knew the man's condition was brought about by sin, and Jesus revealed that he knew the man's future if the man didn't repent. In all this, this sign magnifies that our real problem is the condition of our heart, not our body.

4. Feeding the Five Thousand - John 6:1-15

In summary, Jesus had traveled with His disciples to the other side of the Sea of Galilee and huge crowds followed Him, having been amazed at His signs. On a mountainside, Jesus looked out over a crowd of about 5,000 men, perhaps 10-12,000 including women and kids. Jesus tests his disciple, Philip, by asking, "***Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?***" Philip was from this region and Jesus was curious how Philip would respond to such a request. Philip said that not even 200 days wages could buy enough to feed this crowd. Philip and the other disciples viewed the food dilemma through human eyes. A disciple named Andrew said there was a kid here that had a small meal; five small loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus gave thanks for the food, then miraculously multiplied the bread and fish until everyone in the crowd was fed, with plenty of leftovers too. The result was that many in the crowd concluded that Jesus truly is the Prophet which the Scriptures said would come.

This sign reveals that Jesus is the God of provision; the "*bread of life*." This sign shows me that I can entrust myself to Jesus, and I will never be without. This sign magnifies that Jesus sees and cares for my temporal needs, thus compelling me to trust Him for my spiritual needs. Long before, God, from a distance, provided bread to the Jews in the wilderness (Exodus 16), now this sign demonstrates that the kingdom of heaven is here, in the flesh, as God provides bread personally in the man, Jesus. This sign highlights that God uses His followers to multiply and pass out food, showing that He works through His church to provide for the world.

5. Walking on Water - John 6:16-21

In summary, after the feeding of the five-thousand, the people wanted to seize Jesus and make Him their king, in an effort to begin a revolution against Rome. This wasn't Jesus' intention, so He slipped away, spending some time alone in prayer. Jesus sent His disciples on ahead of Him in a boat to go across the Sea of Galilee. That night a strong wind arose up which made rowing very difficult. After rowing about three to four miles, the disciples saw a figure walking toward them on the water, and they were terrified, thinking it may be a ghost. It was Jesus, and as He got closer to the boat, Jesus spoke to them, giving assurance that it was Him. When they received Him into the boat, instantly the wind and waves became calm, without Jesus saying anything, and the boat was immediately at the destination on shore. The result is that those who were in the boat worshiped Jesus and acknowledging that He is certainly God's Son.

This sign reveals Jesus' power over the natural world, magnifying His divine nature in that He is unaffected by time, space, and matter. This sign demonstrates that Jesus is the solution for our fear, anxiety, and worry, reminding us that amidst life's chaos, we can trust in Jesus' sovereignty over our circumstances and that He is the one who brings peace and calmness.

6. Healing the Man Born Blind - John 9:1-41

In summary, Jesus and His disciples come across a man who was born blind. Jesus spit on the dust of the ground making mud with His saliva and rubbed the mud onto the man's eyes. Jesus told the blind man to wash of the mud at a certain pool called Siloam. Having done so, the man could see perfectly. This was also done on the Sabbath. Those who knew the man were astonished and brought the man to the Pharisees (the religious leaders of the day) to be examined. The Pharisees asked the man who was it that healed him and

where this healer was now. The healed man said Jesus healed him but he didn't know where Jesus had gone. The Pharisees concluded that since the healing was done on the Sabbath, that Jesus couldn't possibly be sent from God, as the Pharisees viewed the healing as breaking the Law. Others concluded that Jesus must be of God as there's no other explanation for the healing.

By this time, the Jews (members of the Sanhedrin and the body of the Pharisees) were already so full of hatred toward Jesus that they had become spiritually "blind." As such, the Jews threatened the citizens with excommunication from public worship if anyone dared say that Jesus is the Messiah sent by God. Repeatedly they questioned the healed man and his parents, urging them to declare Jesus a sinner. But all the man could say was that he had been blind, but now he could see. Over and over they kept pressing the man until the healed man eventually said, ***"Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing,"*** 9:32-33. When the prideful Jews heard this, they excommunicated the man for presuming to lecture them.

Jesus heard that the healed man was excommunicated and therefore sought him out. Jesus asked the man if he believed in the Savior. The healed man said that he didn't know who that was, but wanted to know so that he could believe in Him. Jesus said that He Himself was the Savior. At this revelation, the healed man said, ***"Lord, I believe,"*** 9:38. Jesus started teaching those around Him, saying, ***"I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind."*** Some Pharisees who were listening asked Jesus, ***"We are not blind too, are we?"*** Jesus basically said that if they had humility, they would see, but instead they are blinded by their own pride. All in all, the man made well came to faith in Jesus and those who were prideful remained enslaved to their sin.

This sign reveals Jesus as the author of truth, and the one who brings clarity. The sign highlights that the blind man's condition served as a metaphor for spiritual illumination; magnifying what spiritual blindness is and that light and sight come from Jesus. This sign demonstrates the kind of transformation we can experience by entrusting ourselves to Jesus; going from darkness to light, as Jesus is the light of the world.

7. Raising Lazarus from the Dead - John 11:1-47

In summary, a friend of Jesus, named Lazarus, was on his death bed from sickness. Word was sent to Jesus asking Him to travel to Bethany and heal Lazarus. Jesus was about a two-day journey from Bethany. Jesus had prophesied that Lazarus' sickness would not end in death, but in God being glorified. In other words, Lazarus would indeed die and from this very sickness, but this sickness wouldn't end in death, something else would happen following his death.

After receiving the message, Jesus intentionally stayed away an additional two days, enough time to allow for Lazarus to die, be ceremoniously shrouded in linen, and placed in a tomb. Jesus chose not to heal Lazarus' sickness so that a greater miracle could take place; raising Lazarus from the dead. Two days after Lazarus passed, Jesus told His disciples that it was time to go to Bethany because Lazarus was indeed dead but that Lazarus would be awakened. Upon reaching Bethany, two sisters of Lazarus, Mary and Martha, met Jesus and declared to Him that if He'd only been there sooner Lazarus would have lived. The sisters, along with everyone else, assumed it was too late. The Jews (some of the religious leaders) were also grieving at Mary and Martha's household. Again, Jesus declared that Lazarus would rise from the dead.

Soon after this, they all went to the tomb where Lazarus had been buried now four days. At Jesus' request, the stone over the mouth of the tomb was moved away. Jesus called forth inside the tomb, "***Lazarus, come forth.***" This was an effectual call, a call that creates what was said. In other words, Jesus decrees that Lazarus rise and come out, and that's exactly what came to pass. Lazarus, who was shrouded like a mummy, walked out. Jesus ordered that his linens be removed. The people unwrapped Lazarus and all were amazed as he was as healthy as anyone could be. At this, some of the Jews who had persecuted Jesus were not believing in Him.

This sign reveals that Jesus has power over death. Additionally, to have power over death means that Jesus has power over sin, since sin's consequence is death. This sign authenticates Jesus' claim that He is the resurrection and the life (11:25), magnifying His divine identity. This sign highlights Jesus' authority to give eternal life as the author of salvation.

Conclusion

The first sign reveals Jesus' transformative power, being able to create something new. The second sign reveals the power of Jesus' spoken word and that He is unaffected by distance. The third sign reveals Jesus' authority over the Sabbath and declares His equality with the Father in heaven. The fourth sign reveals Jesus' provision and ability to satisfy man's physical and spiritual needs. The fifth sign reveals Jesus' power over the natural world and all He has created. The sixth sign reveals Jesus' as the author of truth and the One able to declare what is spiritually right. The seventh sign reveals that Jesus has power over death and sin.

These miracles serve as signs of Jesus' true identity. He is God. He is Creator. He is the only One who can save you from sin and the eternal punishment that is enjoined to your sin. The evidence of Jesus as the Savior of the world is clarified in John's gospel. I hope that you see it as good news and entrust yourself to Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. If you're not sure who Jesus is, pray that God would give you spiritual discernment as you read His Word and discover the reality about Jesus Christ.