

PCPC Sunday School – John 11.28-44

Introduction

What is the *purpose* of John's gospel?

John himself tells us in John 20.30-31:

'Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.'

This is particularly relevant for us in John 11 because, here, we're reading about the 7th of the seven signs John chooses to relate. If *all* the signs are here so that we might believe that Jesus is the Messiah and come, as a result, to have life in his name, this is particularly true of this final, summative sign.

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](#))

All of these incidents took place in public and are explicitly named as 'signs' by John.

Think back to see how these signs communicate this larger reality:

1. Turning Water into Wine ([John 2:1–11](#))

This is Jesus' first sign. The problem: drinking wine is an essential component of a Jewish marriage ceremony. No wine no wedding. The solution: Mary intuits it. And then we see an amazing confirmation of her confidence *in practice*. Raw creative power. Jesus *can do*

this because of who he is. But he also *chooses to do this* because of who he is. The Messiah brings new wine (Joel 2.19, 24; 3.18)).

But this is also part of the overture to John, which ends with the testimony of John the Baptist telling us that Jesus is not just a guest at an ordinary human wedding. He *is* the bridegroom for whom the world has waited. God's purpose is to sweep us up into a glorious wedding celebration. This story tells that God specialises in making a way for derailed weddings to happen, and 'on the third day' (John 2.1) is when he does it. Jesus provides the wine of his own blood to get the wedding God has planned between himself and his people back on track.

2. Cleansing the Temple ([John 2:12–17](#))

The Jews ask for a sign and he says, 'Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.' Again it's his death and resurrection that's put forward here as the proof that Jesus is the Messiah and that by believing in him we can have life in his name.

3. Healing the Nobleman's Son ([John 4:46–54](#))

Healing at a distance. This evokes the paradigmatic stories of God's action through Elijah and Elisha. Remember Elisha sending Naaman off to wash in the Jordan and him being healed while the prophet was physically absent? Notice also that the recipient is another foreign, military enemy – beginning to show the international extent of Messiah's saving project.

4. Healing the Lame Man ([John 5:1–15](#))

Jesus goes to the pool of Siloam – the place where the blind, the lame, and the paralysed congregate – and, on the Sabbath, he heals a man who had been unable to walk for 38 years.

What does this teach us? Jesus himself quotes the classic elements of the OT Messianic programme in Luke 4. When he comes, Messiah will:

- proclaim good news to the poor
- bind up the brokenhearted

- proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,
- proclaim the year of the Lord's favour

(Isa 61.1-2)

Or in Isa 35.5-6, when Messiah comes

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.

Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert.

Jesus is doing the deeds of Messiah. He's inaugurating the kingdom of Messiah.

5. Feeding the Multitude ([John 6:1-15](#))

Here the great lesson from the sign is captured in the reaction of the crowd: 'Surely this is *the prophet* who is to come into the world.' What do they mean '*the prophet*'? Deut 18. Moses told the people of Israel that one day God would send another prophet *like himself*. And you can't get much more like Moses than feeding a hungry crowd in the wilderness!

6. Healing the Blind Man ([John 9](#))

This one takes us back to the deeds of Messiah from Isa 35.

But it also cements Messiah as a voice speaking *against* the religious authorities of the day.

So what have we learned so far?

- Jesus is the wedding rescue specialist. How does he do it? – with the wine of his own blood
- Jesus has authority over the whole life of the church – he proves it by rising on the third day after the temple of his body is destroyed.
- Jesus is greater than the greatest prophets – and the scope of his mission is international.

- Jesus does the deeds of Messiah – even though they seem to good to be true.
- Jesus is the prophet like Moses
- Jesus does the deeds of Messiah – even when it outrages the religious establishment

If John is doing his job, then, *all this should be making us believe in Jesus*, drawing us to the unique place where spiritual death and spiritual life can exchange places.

The Raising of Lazarus

All these conclusions are expressed and brought to their climax in the raising of Lazarus.

7. Raising Lazarus (John 11)

[Read John 11.28-44]

You guys have already thought about the background to this story:

- v1-10: The shocking ‘so’ of John 11.6: ‘Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. *So* when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.’ Notice here Jesus’ incredibly countercultural message – that being loved by him *does not* mean being delivered from all ills. In this life he works through trials and sickness and even death to stimulate faith in us and accomplish his purposes in the world.
- v11-16: Jesus’ determination *to delay setting out* until after Lazarus has died. (But did you notice the connection to the *purpose* of the signs? John 11.14-15, ‘Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, *so that you may believe.*’)
- v17-27: Jesus’ conversation with Martha. (But did you notice the connection to the *purpose* of the signs? John 11.26, Jesus asks Martha exactly this question. He asks her ‘*do you believe this?*’ and she says ‘*I believe that you are the Messiah.*’)

And all of this tees up what is about to happen in 11.28-44

Notice especially *the pattern repeated* in 11.17-27 and 11.28-44

A – a statement of faith – ‘Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died’ (v 21)

B – which leads to...

C – a breakthrough moment – Martha says ‘I believe that *you are* the Messiah’

A – another statement of faith – ‘Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died’ (v 32)

B – which leads to...

C – another breakthrough moment – when we see in the clearest possible way that Jesus is the Messiah, the Lord of Life.

So can you see connection that John is making here? – Jesus’ raising of Lazarus from the dead is indissolubly connected to believing that he is the Messiah. If he can do this, he cannot be anyone else, and our world *is* now a place in which Messiah has come.

Theological Insight: This was actually what God’s people were expecting. The valley of the dry bones (Ezek 37) etc. Resurrection was *the* mark of the messianic age. This is what persuaded Saul that Jesus was really the Son of God – when he met him alive on the road to Damascus.

So this is *the* big take away. John’s purpose (20.30-31) is attained here. Resurrection shows us that Jesus is the Messiah.

Q. How do we see resurrection in our own experience and in the church today?

What else does this passage teach us about him?

Tenderness – Isa 42.1-3. Note Jesus’ determination to make extended time available to the sisters and to enter into their grief. Notice his tears. This too is Messiah.

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold,

my chosen one in whom I delight;
 I will put my Spirit on him,
 and he will bring justice to the nations.

² He will not shout or cry out,
 or raise his voice in the streets.

³ *A bruised reed he will not break,
 and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.*

Outrage – Isa 63.5 This too is Messiah.

I looked, but there was no one to help,
 I was appalled that no one gave support;
 so my own arm achieved salvation for me,
 and my own wrath sustained me.

The Bible consistently shows us God's powerful emotional reaction to the fruits of the fall and his determination, in response, to do something about it *himself* – in judgment and also in salvation.

Challenge

Accepting the challenge to belief leads further adventures of belief.

Notice that when Martha believes (John 20.30-31) the immediate consequence is that she is faced with a fresh challenge of belief. Jesus orders that the stone be taken away.

Q What new challenges of faith is our belief in Jesus as the Messiah leading to now?

The Creating Voice

Note also that *Jesus' voice* raises the dead. This is the characteristically divine mode of creation.

Questions: