

4. John 5 - 6

Four Signs

Tom Wright, *John for Everyone*

D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*

1.1 - 1.18	1.19 - 12.50	13:1 - 20:21	21.1-21.25
Prologue	Book of Signs: Jesus' Ministry	Book of Passion : Cross and Resurrection	Epilogue

1. Outline/summary of major events and teaching

▪ Signs to establish the King and his Kingdom

In spite of the miraculous nature of each of the four signs studied here, it is clear that Jesus was not performing miracles to seek worldly attention. Without seeing them in the context of the claims Jesus was making, they appear isolated and clinical.

The followers of Jesus and the Jewish leaders in Galilee are an unreceptive and disbelieving audience. They had no underlying faith that Jesus could be anything more than a miracle worker. In meeting Jesus, they either had their sights set on a last resort solution to their problem or were pre-occupied with appointing him as a king to suit their preconceived notions of a Messiah. The signs were seen through the lens of their different agendas.

Taken together with the other signs in John, we see Jesus establishing his authority over the physical and spiritual world.

▪ Jesus and the Father, Jesus as the Source of Life

The discourses that punctuate the miracles show Jesus in a mood of uncompromising argument. By defining the nature of his relationship with the Father, he lays claim to his Godly nature. For the Jewish leaders and the many followers of Jesus, the claims were both disquieting and hard to comprehend. However, for believers they are empowering and underpin the centrality of Jesus as both mediator, and the source of eternal life:

- I can do nothing except what the Father is doing
- The Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son
- I am the bread of life

The claims were so extreme in the eyes of the religious establishment, that they triggered the chain of events that resulted eventually in Jesus' crucifixion.

▪ **Outline of this Section**

Verses	Description	Comments
4: 43 – 54	Jesus Heals the Official's Son	The second sign in John, enacted through a command.
5: 1- 15	The Healing at the pool of Bethesda	Jesus heals again through the power of his word
5:16 – 23	Jesus and the Father	Jesus explains his true status and relationship to the Father
5: 24 – 30	Life through the 'Son of Man'	
5: 31 – 47	Authenticating Jesus	Human testimony is too weak, but the audience is also blind to the testimony of Moses.
6: 1-15	Feeding of the 5000	A physical miracle, and also tied to v25ff.
6: 16 -24	Jesus Walks on Water	Another physical miracle
6: 25 - 59	Jesus as the Bread of life	'If you believe, you have eaten'
6: 60 – 70	Jesus loses many of his followers	The teaching of Jesus is just too painful for many

2. **The Discourses**

▪ **Jesus and the Father:** John 5:16-23

Jesus can do nothing by himself; he can only do what sees the Father doing (v19). If you unplug Jesus from the Father, then he is powerless since he has no agenda of his own. Even this is a miracle in itself; the obedience and willingness to seek the Father is an extreme discipline. The connection can only be established through love (v20).

However, because of this dependency, Jesus promises to do even greater things; even raising people from the dead.

In order that Jesus might have authority (and also so those who believe may not be condemned), The Father has passed all responsibility for judgment to Jesus (v22). He is both the judge and the redeemer of our punishment.

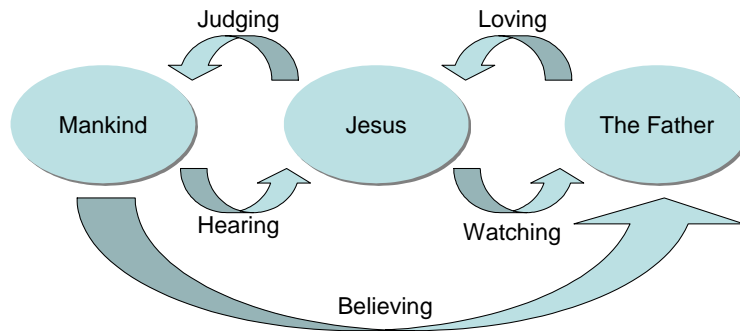
Jesus is also undeterred about 'work' on the Sabbath. The many classes of work defined in the Mishnah, post the establishment of the law, do not apply here. Jesus equates his work to being that of the Father, and the Father is always working (v17).

While Jesus was claiming equality with the Father, he was not claiming he was another God, or an equal who had a purpose independent from the Father. Unfortunately, in the eyes of the religious onlookers, this is exactly what they thought he was saying.

▪ **A New Kingdom through the 'Son of Man':** John 5:24-30

By taking the following construction in v24:
'...hears my word and believes him who sent me...'

and combining it with the claims of the previous section, we start to see an order through which a new kingdom is being established. See the diagram below.



Jesus has been entrusted with same kind of life that the Father has in himself. As the Son of Man (typically thought to refer to Daniel 7 v13), Jesus has also been given a kingdom that will never be destroyed.

▪ **Authenticating Jesus:** John 5:31-37

Jesus is keen to establish an authority structure for his claims, but finds it hard since human praise or testimony is not adequate for him – not even the testimony of John the Baptist.

Jesus cannot point to the Father for confirmation, since this audience has 'never heard his voice, nor seen his form' (v37). However, Moses is qualified on both counts so his testimony would have been sufficient. Unfortunately, those who diligently search the scriptures are missing the big picture (v47). They do not see Moses' references to Jesus, for example:

Genesis 49:10

The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.

Exodus 12:21

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth.

▪ **Jesus as the Bread of Life:** John 6:25-59

In making a comparison with Moses, Jesus is facing a harsh attack on his credibility. The crowd understand that it was Moses who supplied manna to their forefathers in the desert, so they challenge Jesus to match this.

Jesus replies that actually it was not Moses that supplied manna, but his Father. Now however, the same Father has supplied the true bread from heaven that will sustain life eternally. Jesus is this bread of Life(v35).

From v51, Jesus is more explicit: 'this bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world'. Echoing the argument among the Jews in v52, we might ask how can Jesus give us his flesh to actually eat?

Jesus pushes home the point even more strongly now, by inviting us to also drink his blood. We are familiar with the picture, since it appears in the words of the Last Supper. A few points are made by the commentators:

- Jesus is not somehow predicting the creation of the Eucharist, and implying that this is a pre-requisite for salvation!
- The focus instead is on FAITH appropriating the actions of eating and drinking, not the symbolic act of doing so through ritual. Tom Wright uses an illustration that as believers we 'profit' from his blood and flesh, and this is another way of thinking about 'eating' and 'drinking'
- For the Jews who would find drinking the blood of anything impossible (Leviticus 17:10-14), the notion that they should drink the blood of Jesus must have been extremely difficult for them to accept.

▪ **Jesus loses many of his followers:** John 6: 60 – 70

Although the miracles and signs that Jesus has performed appeal to fleshly side of the crowd and his followers in Galilee, his extremely direct and robust claims are just too much. As written by John, Jesus is not courting popularity or trying to win support.

He is echoing the reality of v65 'no-one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him'.

And although the disciples feel this may be an opportunity to reassure Jesus of their support (!), he firmly reminds them that it was actually he who chose them.

3. **Topical study: Signs**

▪ **Quality, Not Quantity**

Of all the gospels, John has the fewest references to signs. Eight in total, compared with an overall 35 listed in the gospels. They are also not dominated by examples of healing as they are in Mark. John is using these targeted examples to establish something else:

	Activity	Jesus' authority over
Turning water into wine (2.1 – 2.11)	Transformation	Matter
Healing the nobleman's son (4.46-54)	Healing	Sickness
Healing the lame man (5.1-18)	Healing	Sin
Feeding the 5,000 (6.1-15)	Transformation	Sustenance / Life
Walking on the water (6.16-21)	Supernatural Action	Physics
Healing the man born blind (9.1-42)	Healing	Genetics
Raising Lazarus from the dead (11.1-57)	Healing?	Death
The miraculous catch of fish (21.1-14)	Transformation	Life after Death

▪ **The Galilean Signs**

The four signs under consideration around Chapters 5 and 6, also take place in the home area of Capernaum and Galilee. They happen under pressure, and often in a hostile or disbelieving context. These were miracles performed under fire, and did not always result in faith.

For a comparison of these signs with others in the gospels, see the table below.

The Healing of the Official's Son.

'Jesus replied, "You may go, your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word...' (v50)

This official was a Jewish leader, and understandably looking for a solution to his son's desperate condition. However, he had no underlying faith in Jesus. Jesus was in a long line of prophets, who had probably also made claims about their healing powers (see 5v41 - 43). Jesus needed no patronage from the man, but used this opportunity to show his healing authority by using only his word.

And the official took it literally. Although he believed Jesus could make such a command, only later did he and his household believe. Jesus was still correct; without a miraculous sign, "you will never believe" (v48).

The Healing at the Pool of Bethesda. This pool, located in the old city of Jerusalem, was also a last resort for many. It was a healing lottery.

(v6) “Do you want to get well?” The challenge cannot be answered honestly, since it infers a cost. Later we see that Jesus links the man’s sickness with his own personal sin (v14). Again, Jesus uses a direct command to declare the man’s sickness has come to an end. In this case, the miracle not only demonstrates Jesus’ authority over sickness, but also the effects of sin itself.

Was the invalid happy that 38 years of disability had come to end? The answer is not part of John’s story.

This sign is a powerful testimony to the religious leaders of Jerusalem. Jesus is provoking them, without entering into a face to face argument just yet – a form of guerrilla healing (v13). Jesus slipped away anonymously. He was here to establish his authority through events, not debate.

The Feeding of the 5000. This is the only sign that is recorded in all 4 gospels (see the table below for a comparison). Even if John had read the accounts in the Synoptic gospels, he brings to the story his own emphasis.

The focus is not on the crowd, but the disciples and their reaction to the problem they face. In a tight spot, Jesus asks them what are *they* going to do (v5)? It is a test so John tells us, since Jesus has a solution. The solution involves the obedience of the disciples, and their willingness to put their faith in him.

It might be interesting to consider why such a small amount of food (v9) was even necessary. Why not just produce it from thin air?

John’s point here is about the transforming power of Jesus, rather than his creative power. And crucially when Jesus makes this transformation, he does this with room to spare. All the gospel accounts highlight that there was waste left over (v13). The sign is also a clear reference to the claim made by Jesus, that he is now the true bread from heaven.

Walking on Water The crowd’s curiosity about how Jesus managed to cross the lake (6:25) is not why Jesus performed this miracle. He didn’t need more of their misplaced hopes of a miracle working King (5v15). Instead, this sign is directed at the disciples and establishes Jesus as someone who has authority over the physical world.

The sight of Jesus approaching the boat causes the disciples to be terrified. Matthew says Jesus looked like a ghost (Matt 14v26). This has some interesting parallels with the way Jesus appeared to the disciples after he had risen from the dead, and before his ascension (Luke 24:37).

Jesus is making a clear statement: even though he has an earthly body, his nature is super-natural.

Bethesda Pool

Overflowed very infrequently with minerals dissolved in the water. By reputation, only the first person to enter could benefit from these.

Chronology

It is assumed that John was written later than the Synoptic gospels, although the healing at the Bethesda Pool confuses the timeline.

▪ **Miracles Compared across the Gospels**

	Feeding of the 5000	Walking on Water	The Official's Son	The Bethesda Healing
John	Account focuses on Philip and Andrew, and their response to Jesus' question. What is unique to John is his reference to Jesus needing to withdraw from the crowd quickly.	The description is much simpler than in the other gospels. There is no emphasis on Peter, and it feels as though Jesus was intending to meet them as they struggled to row across. Jesus was 'approaching them'.	Jesus' rebuke to the official seems harsh in response to the pleading – but here Jesus is attacking the Galilean world view. The official is only concerned about the result. Unlike other healing stories – the Word of Jesus was sufficient.	There is more to say about the pool and the invalid who was healed, but we see Jesus again using only a spoken word to cause the healing to take place. Equally, we see Jesus needing to withdraw quickly.
Matthew	14:13 The story is much simpler. The disciples actions or feelings are not mentioned, there is no boy and no urgency to collect the waste. BUT the miracle is repeated in Matthew 15 with the feeding of the 4000.	14:22 This is a much more colourful account, with the emphasis on Peter's faith as he decides to get out of the boat. However, it is clear that Jesus still 'went out to them'.	No reference, but plenty of parallels. The healing of the Roman centurion being the closest (Mat 8:5-13). However, the contrast in attitudes and responses is immediate. Jesus is astonished that the centurion knew his word would be enough.	No reference
Mark	6:30 Very similar to John, but with some new details such as the way the crowd were divided up. As with Matthew, the story also shows how Jesus 'gave thanks and broke the bread'. The feeding of the 4000 is also described in Mark 8.	6:45 Mark says it was Jesus who prompted the disciples to go on ahead. There are strong links between Mark and Matthew, except a) there is no mention of Peter and b) Jesus was actually over-taking the boat (!), before he decided to approach the struggling crew.	No immediate reference.	No reference
Luke	Main difference here is that it is the disciple's idea that food should be offered to the people. It also highlights the organisation of food distribution.	No reference	No reference, but see the same comments as for Matthew.	No reference
The Audience	Was it really the 5000 who witnessed the miracle, or just the disciples?	The disciples witnessed the miracle, the crowd only the result.	This sign did result in the official believing in Jesus. The audience however was confined to a small group.	The invalid only was affected, but it's unclear whether it result in belief in Jesus.

4. **Key Verses**

5:19 Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees the Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does".

5:22 Moreover, the Father judges no-one, but has entrusted all judgement to the Son.

5:24 I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

6:35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

6:46-48 No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life.